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### **ABSTRACT**

The gender-based nature of sexual and physical violence in higher education institutions has resulted in women's disproportionate vulnerability compared to their male counterparts. The women here would include instructors, support staff and students. In such a context, women are denied equal opportunity to realize their full potential in spaces that are supposed to be inclusive and equal. To address this issue, this article proposes that empowerment interventions be implemented to provide women with knowledge and awareness about their human, socio-cultural agency and rights. This would allow women to emerge as strong leaders and combat the phenomenon of violence and discrimination. Drawing on extant literature on mitigation strategies for gender based violence (GBV) in higher education institutions, the study explores the efficacy of sport as a tool to increase women's capacity to prevent and respond to GBV. Sport participation is shown to deconstruct dynamics of male dominance in sport while also empowering women to have more ownership and control over their bodies which is critical to prevent and mitigate GBV. The study concludes by advocating for the use of sport as a mitigation strategy not only in higher education contexts, but also in communities at large, as they are not immune to this pervasive problem. Overall, the research fits wells within national development vision since it has a high level of political support in conscientizing the community at large about GBV which in most cases becomes discriminatory (236).

**Keywords:** gender-based violence; discrimination; higher education institutions; vulnerability; empowerment; socio-cultural agency; rights; mitigation strategies; sport participation; dominance.

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Gender Based Violence(GBV) according to(van Rosmalen-Nooijens, 2017) is a grave human rights violation that can cause long-term and life-threatening injury which could be physical, emotional and/or psychological and traumatic to some survivors. Djamba and Kimuna (2015) connote that the term GBV was well defined by "activists and advocates of gender equality fight to reduce discrimination and any harmful practices against women". Makhene (2022) explains GBV as the sexual or physical abuse of groups targeted because of their gender or gender roles, as well as their relegation to a lesser social standing or power. Women can be more prone to being exposed to GBV due to several issues discussed in this paper. Despite the fact that gender-based violence affects both men and women, there are indicators worldwide that violence against women is a systemic, frequent, and pervasive problem. Despite the tireless efforts of human rights campaigners who have explicitly stated that human rights are women's rights, GBV against women is a universal issue that affects every community. (Mutinta, 2022).

Djamba and Kimuna (2015) show that, whereas both genders are victims of GBV, the incidence of GBV is higher in women and girls. According to literature research, sports in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) play an important role for both individuals and the institution itself, and it is beneficial to everyone's health, both physical and morale, leading to a fulfilling existence. (Viet, and Hanh, 2021). Furthermore, Viet and Hanh (2021) state that universities provide adequate personnel, assets and infrastructure for students to enhance their level of physical activity, train best athletes, and serve the community. In light of the literature presented on the importance of sports in HEIs, one may comprehend the significance of sports as a tool to reduce GBV in HEIs. Sports, according to Doidge, Keech, and Sandri (2020), are a powerful instrument that draws people together and promotes an appreciation of unity. With this being the case, sports can be a tool practiced to mitigate GBV in HEIs.

Furthermore, studies in sports are well documented and it is acknowledged that sports can be a tool practiced to mitigate GBV in HEIs as a social construction of masculinities and femininities are deeply rooted in our societies and reflected in sports for development programs (Alsarve and Tjønndal, 2020). The gender of a child

can affect the opportunity to access the resources of sports programs (Newman, McCray, Lower-Hoppe, Rockhill, Ingram, Ohanian, and Simmons-Horton, 2022). The social skills of individuals are developed as a result of the team-based nature of sports activities and the need for teammate interaction. Individual sports also necessitate some collaboration with coaches or connection with competitors. Thus, participation in sports, in general, gives an opportunity and ways to enable people to interact with other individuals and helps them enhance their social skills. (ter Harmsel-Nieuwenhuis, Alarlan, van Hilvoorde, Koelen, Super and Verkooijen, 2022).

The purpose of this research is to raise awareness about GBV and increase women's capacity to prevent and respond to GBV through sports as a tool for campaigning against GBV, confidence building, and skills development. The objectives of the study are as follows: To understand how sporting activities can be used to lessen the cases of violence, and discrimination, against women in higher education and increase their awareness of their human, social, cultural, and legal rights; To understand how sporting as a mitigation strategy can be used to ameliorate the effects of GBV and empower women through equipping them with knowledge, awareness, and skills.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study makes use of current data collections that contain solely non-identifiable information about people, for example, publicly access records, archives or publications (Scott, Kolstoe, Ploem, Hammatt, and Glasziou, 2020). The related literature and studies are reviewed and are emphasized intentionally to stress what needs stressing concerning the issue of GBV. In this research precise descriptions of what the related literature section does is to review literature which is identical with, but collateral to this area of study on GBV. The following issues are the heart of the discussion in this paper: vulnerability of women to (GBV), and tools of sports as a mitigation strategy to promote the rights of women.

### **Purpose of literature review in research methodology**

Methodology justifies method, which produces data and analyses then knowledge gets created from data and analyses (Flick, 2015). In this paper literature review has been chosen as a methodology for conducting research. The purpose of a literature review is to identify a need for additional research thus justifying a need (Robinson and Lowe, 2015; Cooper, Booth, Varley-Campbell, Britten and Garside, 2018). Researchers have written a lot about mitigation strategies for GBV in different institutions (Banke-Thomas and Yaya, 2021). However, since the COVID-19 pandemic, numbers of victims have grown so much but also the argument has been that even before that numbers have been soaring high for victims of GBV (Banke-Thomas and Yaya, 2021). Both men and women have been affected but the GBV effect has been more prevalent for women thus leading to a greater need to think of more strategies to control or prevent it (Dizdar, 2021). Hegde (2021) talks of a sharp rise in domestic violence. The purpose of this paper is to, therefore, review different mitigation strategies but dwelling more on sporting activities in order to discover how victims of GBV have been assisted and also come up with recommendations on how best sports can be utilised to reduce or combat GBV especially that which affects universities.

This paper addresses the gap that has been identified in literature about sports as a mitigation strategy for GBV that has been found to be very minimal and limited hence the need to fill the gap by situating sports as GBV mitigatory strategy (Miller, Jones, Ripper, Paglisotti, Mulbah and Abebe, 2020). This research is placed within the context of existing literature and making a case for why further study is needed in agreement to the notion above of limited research on sports received (Kavanagh, Litchfield and Osborne, 2019). There is limited attention in academic literature and commentaries surrounding sport and performances (Kavanagh, Litchfield and Osborne, 2019). The amount of sports literature pertaining to competitive sport and sport participation that has been collected has been deemed to be quite small and appears to exclude people who play sports. (Taha-Thomure, Milne, Kavanagh and Stirling, 2022). In agreement Hayhurst and del Socorro Cruz Centeno (2019) see more need for sport and physical cultural studies to be combined with literature, to relate with gender-based violence and the environment in sport. Following the arguments above the summarised literature of this paper has the intention of showing that there is a gap in the knowledge, which this paper will fill. This has been an incredible opportunity to pinpoint any gaps in the body of existing research and to explain how the proposed study might advance our understanding. The concluding sections of this paper's findings, conclusions, and recommendations gave authors an outstanding opportunity to close any gaps in the body of literature that we discovered as well as to explain how this study might advance our understanding of the subject. A literature review's collective conclusions and points of view drawn from a variety of empirical studies have the capacity to answer research problems in a way that no single study can. (Snyder, 2019).

Snyder (2019) claims that knowledge production in the social and scientific research sectors has been appreciably accelerating while simultaneously staying fragmented. This makes it challenging to stay current with research, remain at the forefront of it, and evaluate the body of data in a particular field of business research. (Snyder, 2019). Because of this, conducting a literature review as a research strategy is more important

than ever. (Kavanagh, Litchfield and Osborne, 2019). Traditional literature reviews are often not as thorough and usually conducted as and when instead of following a specific methodology (Snyder, 2019). A literature review is a more or less structured method of compiling and analyzing earlier studies (Snyder, 2019). A well-executed review provides a solid foundation for knowledge expansion and the facilitation of theory formation as a research method. (Snyder, 2019). This paper used a narrative integrative review approach of reviewing literature (Wong, Greenhalgh, Westhorp, Buckingham, & Pawson, 2013 and Davis, Mengersen, Bennett, & Mazerolle, 2014). This kind of literature review is done to gauge how much is known about a certain subject. It can be used, for instance, to set research priorities, find research gaps, or just to talk about a specific topic.

There are various review procedures, including systematic, semi-systematic, and integrative ones. Depending on the objective and the level of implementation, each type of methodology can be quite successful, (Kavanagh, Litchfield, and Osborne, 2019). Systematic reviews are successful at synthesizing the findings of a number of studies on a particular issue and can offer evidence of impact that can guide policy and practice, despite the strict criteria for search strategy and article selection that must be met. (Kavanagh, Litchfield, and Osborne, 2019). Systematic reviews, meanwhile, are not always the best course of action. Instead, when trying to conduct a thorough systematic review on a larger subject that has been conceptualized differently and researched across many fields, this can be problematic. (Kavanagh, Litchfield, and Osborne, 2019). An effective way can instead be to map theoretical approaches or themes and identify knowledge gaps in the literature using a semi-systematic review approach. (Kavanagh, Litchfield, and Osborne, 2019; Snyder, 2019). An integrated review approach might be helpful when a research question calls for a more innovative approach to data collecting and the goal of the review is to mix viewpoints to develop new theoretical models rather than to cover every article that has ever been published on the subject. (Snyder, 2019).

Aiming to evaluate, critique, and synthesize the literature on a study issue so that new theoretical frameworks and perspectives can emerge, the holistic or critical review approach has a purpose. (Snyder, 2019). The literary reviews cover established or brand-new subjects. When it comes to mature issues, the goal of adopting an integrated review approach is to survey the body of knowledge, critically evaluate, possibly re-conceive, and build the theoretical underpinnings of the particular topic. (Snyder, 2019).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Vulnerability of women to GBV in universities**

Research initiated by the Female Students Network Trust (FSNT) in Zimbabwe in 2015 shows a clear picture of the nature and extent of GBV that students endure and make recommendations for protecting survivors and holding perpetrators and authorities accountable for the abuse (Sex Rights Kachaje, Dube, MacLachlan and Mji 2014. According to Mashiri (2013), GBV is a symptom of underlying gender inequalities and power imbalances that are global in scope and transcend geographic, racial, cultural, and religious boundaries. As a result, it affects every community throughout the world, but particularly Zimbabwe. Mashiri (2013) mentions the 2010 GBV forum in support of her argument that historically unequal power dynamics between men and women are the core cause of GBV. Mashiri (2013) argues that the fact is that there is a power disparity between men and women, which leads to violence against women and girls. The history of women being treated as property and having a gender role that requires them to be subordinate to men is linked to the history of violence against women (Mashiri, 2013).

Collins (2014:286) claims that "young men" are predominately the perpetrators of most violent crimes, and that the typical student age range (i.e., 18 to 23 years) is roughly in the middle of the peak offending period. For many young adults, this is their first time living independently of parental care and supervision. Students may be more susceptible to abuse in the unfamiliar social milieu since there are fewer restrictions and more opportunity for experimentation. Additionally, because of their youth and lack of experience, students may also be less adept at self-defense (Collins, 2014:286). Students Representative Council (SRC) represents students' welfare on State University campuses, therefore, both men and women are more likely to experience GBV depending on who has authority. For example, some SRC members who are ladies may take advantage of men when they want accommodation, ladies at times may pass on sexually assaulting language that may be abusive to men, or even go to the extent of requiring men to sleep with them for favors. Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) explain that research has shown that in general men tend to be involved more frequently in physical violence or bullying as victims and/or perpetrators. Women are also more likely to employ verbal or psychological abuse and to experience sexual assault (Alkan, Serçemeli, and Zmen, 2022).

### **Prevention of GBV**

It takes political commitment, the adoption of legislation that advance gender equality, financial support for women's organizations, and a focus on the various forms of discrimination women experience on a daily basis to prevent violence from happening in the first place. (Orchowski, Edwards, Hollander, Banyard, Senn and Gidycz, 2020). According to Majumdar, Purkayastha, and Goswami (2022), the best way to prevent GBV is to improve interpersonal abilities by giving young girls and boys the critical soft skills they need to form healthy



relationships and avoid GBV, such as effective communication and self-assurance. Fostering healthy family ties is important because families play a vital role in the upbringing of children and should be sanctuaries for learning, development, and growth. (Bashford-Squires, Nyashanu, and Gibson, 2022). Children's first line of defence might be their parents and caregivers, who can also make it easier for them to obtain vital resources. However, there are a number of circumstances that can make homes into abusive or traumatizing environments. The parenting classes offered in various areas educate parents and caregivers about GBV and equip them with the abilities to form wholesome bonds with children. (Mackay, 2021).

Additionally, prevention aims to make it easier for people to seek post-GBV care services in connected communities where overreporting of most offenders who are connected to survivors and family members is prioritized. (Pertek, 2022). By combining GBV prevention and post-GBV care services, as well as training community caregivers, and social workers to serve as a GBV response team that provides connections to crucial resources, such as the police, social welfare offices, and health and legal services, to facilitate access to GBV care and support, awareness is encouraged and survivors are empowered to break the silence. (Muhingi and Machani, 2022). Service providers also require specialized abilities to reduce the effects of GBV. The risks of re-victimization, stigmatization, victim-blaming, and confidentiality breaches can be disastrous for survivors in the absence of survivor-centered training. (Pertek, 2022). Survivors are frequently forced to repeatedly describe their abuse, which retraumatizes them and deters them from getting help in the future. (Diedhiou, Roberts, and Raino, 2020).

### **GBV Committees, Associations and Programmes**

UNFPA collaborates with the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development, sister UN agencies, and members of the civil society in an effort to minimize GBV by enhancing the accessibility and use of GBV services by survivors and lowering community tolerance for GBV. (Gender Based Violence, 2021; Hong, 2021). The program's main goals are to raise awareness of laws and services that are gender-responsive, to provide survivors of GBV with medical care, psychosocial support, and legal assistance, to inspire men and young people to support gender equality, to prevent GBV through community mobilization, and to support GBV referral and coordination mechanisms at the district and local level. The Government of Zimbabwe receives high-level technical assistance from UNFPA Zimbabwe, the country's lead organization for GBV emergency response, during slow-onset and sudden-onset humanitarian crises such as those brought on by disease outbreaks, cyclones, and droughts brought on by climate change, as well as crises involving economic hardship. (Gender Based Violence, 2021). In the context of Zimbabwe's multi-hazard humanitarian catastrophe, where violence and discrimination associated to the crisis have also contributed to pre-existing, persistent gender and social disparities as well as traditional detrimental socio-cultural practices, the vulnerability of women and girls to GBV is increased. (Gender Based Violence, 2021). The negative repercussions of climate change and economic distress especially affect women and girls. Women and girls in drought-affected communities must go great distances to obtain water, contending with a higher chance of sexual violence (Gender Based Violence, 2021; Hong, 2021).

In Zimbabwe, one-third of girls have endured sexual violence and nearly half have experienced physical abuse. GBV has had a huge impact on Zimbabwe's social and economic growth in addition to its effects on young girls. Communities and Zimbabwe's Department of Child Welfare and Probation Services have collaborated closely to develop and implement significant programming initiatives to address these concerns. Local Zimbabwean organizations and government representatives are helped to prevent and address GBV against adolescent girls through Zimbabwe's Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Program. (Hong, 2021).

## **FINDINGS**

### **Deconstructing dynamics of male dominance**

Previous studies have shown that participating in collegiate sports greatly increases the risk of sexual coercion. (see Muchena and Mapfumo 2012, Muchena 2015, Sarpong 2015). According to reports, officials, male coaches, fellow athletes, and fans sexually harass university sports women. Sarpong (2015, p. 124) noted that university sports are generally distinguished by intense physical contact, which raises the risk of GBV. They frequently have a male predominance, unbalanced gender ratios, and unquestionable authority figures, which places women in susceptible GBV situations. Such circumstances are fertile ground for GBV against female students because of power relations. However, this impairs women's ability to participate in and perform well in sporting events.

Mergaert, Arnaut, Vertommen, and Lang (2016), on the other hand, suggest that there are characteristics of sport that are in line with the fundamental requirements of addressing GBV. Sports have historically been used to establish and reinforce male power, thus the participation of women in sports is a sign of a shift in gender relations. According to Matthews and Channon (2019), athletics supported inflexible status hierarchies, normalized women's marginalization, and symbolic idealizations of male authority. The aforementioned examples of gendered inequality in sporting culture serve as a challenge to forms of masculine hegemony.

Women participating in sport also challenges these forms of hegemony. In order to bring about change in this area, it is necessary to address the core reasons of GBV, which are primarily the gender power gap and historic undervaluation of girls and women (True, 2010; Smith, and Sinkford, 2022).

### **Physical health and wellness**

Sport can be used to combat gender-based violence in a practical way that goes beyond the societal challenge. (Heise, et al., 2019). Physical strength can also help in preventing experiences on GBV as women are able resist through physical force. The study by Mukwidigwi and Naidu (2022) revealed how female students enacted forms of resistance to sexual coercion, a form of GBV, through physically resisting victimization. This included slapping, pushing and fighting perpetrators. Physical health and wellness that can be facilitated through sport can therefore serve to prevent experiencing GBV. Furthermore, sporting activities can serve to ameliorate the mental effects of GBV such as a depression and mental instability.

### **Support structure**

Additionally, groups for women's rights and sports organizations worldwide are developing sports programs with the goal of addressing GBV. (Hong, 2021). These programs provide girls with a place to learn about their rights thanks to well-trained coaches and active community partnerships, so that in the event that a girl is violated, her coach or teammates can serve as a support system by providing her with options for reporting the violation and gaining access to the legal, emotional, and medical services she will need. (Wilson, 2019). According to Hozhabri, Sobry, and Ramzaninejad (2022), not only can sport increase awareness of GBV, but it can also aid in the delivery of remedies through thoughtfully created policies and programs across a variety of industries, including sport itself. Sport does, however, encourage ethical principles of fair play, and it is crucial for local communities to be aware of the GBV Committees, Associations, and Programs in their area. (Hong, 2021).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In conclusion it is evident that literature has built a lot of the GBV against women information in universities. What is important now is finding means of how to curb the GBV so that perpetration goes down. If nothing is done for female students and for the women communities in universities, the situation can blow out of proportion. It may seem to be a norm for perpetrators to continue with GBV since culture also seems to promote it. There is a dire need for someone to conscientise the women that it is not right to conform to any presentations of GBV which women think is part of respecting their culture. A number of cases of GBV get unreported or underreported as Jones (2010) observed. In other cases the vulnerable women that boldly report the cases, they can get silenced or threatened then cases do not get dealt with accordingly. The research contributes towards what other writers have written about before to conscientize the communities so that they know and understand what GBV is and be able to know what to do and where to go to when such cases arise.

### **A concluding remark**

Therefore, universities and communities are encouraged to continue to embark on campaigns to conscientize people on GBV, to make university students in particular be aware of what is GBV entails, especially that they get bogged down with semester marriages because of accomodation issues. A suggestion box can be set up so that individuals to those institutions that do not have the boxes that in order to report their cases and this can be done without anyone being victimised. GBV policies should continuously be put into place at university, country and government offices.

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