

The Gaze of Survivors: Female Victim's Perceptions of Police Responses to Reported Domestic Violence at Harare Central Police Station, Harare

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Abstract: *This study sought to explore the perceptions of female victims of police responses to reported domestic violence at Harare Central Police Station, Harare. An interpretivist paradigm was used and a qualitative approach was utilized in the study. An interpretive phenomenological design was used to conduct the study with five female victims of domestic violence who reported their cases at Harare Central Police Station, Harare. The victims were selected using Purposive Sampling method. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyze the data. It emerged from the data that middle aged, married and unemployed women made reports of domestic violence to the Police. It also emerged that the most frequently reported domestic violence cases are physical abuse and economic abuse. The most preferred response to domestic violence by the Police is arrest. However, in some instances the Police took their time to effect the arrests. Most of the female victims were not satisfied with the manner in which the Police responded to their reports. The study revealed that female victims expect the Police to apply the law in the shortest possible time once they make reports and for them to be more sensitive and helpful.*

Keywords: Perception, Domestic violence, Police, Arrest, Response, Victim

Date of Submission: 04-10-2018

Date of acceptance: 16-10-2018

I. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a pervasive and complex problem throughout the world (Nova Scotia 2017). Grenshaw (2017) observed that domestic violence cuts across all boundaries of race, gender, ethnicity, income, education, religion and other spheres. Traditionally domestic violence was viewed as a private, family affair and the law was not involved in its management (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2011). However, there has been a paradigm shift in the management of domestic violence with the Police taking a leading role. Police Forum (2015) noted that Police response to domestic violence has undergone fundamental changes over the last twenty years and that Law Enforcement Agencies are continuing to develop new approaches to protecting victims and preventing abuse.

The United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted Resolution 48/104 that declared violence against women as an obstacle to the achievement of equality, development and peace, and recognized that violence against women is a historical manifestation of unequal power relations between men and women (UN 2016). The resolution also recognized that violence is one of the social mechanisms by which women are forced into subordinate roles. The World Health Assembly at its 67th World Health Assembly adopted a resolution that declared violence against women and children a public health priority World Health Organization (WHO) (2016).

In Zimbabwe, Domestic violence is defined by the Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 as any unlawful act, omission or behavior which results in death or the direct infliction of physical, sexual or mental injury to any victim and it includes inter alia physical, sexual, emotional, economic, verbal and psychological abuse, harassment, stalking, forced virginity testing, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage and forced wife inheritance. The definition also encompasses unreasonable disposal of property in which the victim has interest in and depriving the victim or hindering the victim from access to or reasonable share of the use of the facilities associated with the victim's place of residence.

Chhikara, Jakhar, Malik, Singla and Dhatarwal (2013) observed that worldwide 1 in 3 women will experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. According to the WHO (2016) one third (30 percent) of women who have been in a relationship report that they have experienced some form of physical

and/or sexual violence by their intimate partner in their lifetime. They also observed that 38 percent of murders of women are committed by male intimate partners.

In Europe, WHO (2016) observed that 25 percent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner. In a similar study it was observed that Africa and South East Asia had the highest prevalence rates of domestic violence where 37 percent of all those who had been in a relationship had experienced some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. In Botswana, Machisa and Van Dorp (2012) reported that 67 percent of women in that country had experienced some form of gender based violence in their lives. The violence was reported to have reached pandemic proportions. The Zimbabwe Demographic Health survey (2015) found out that 35 percent of women in Zimbabwe reported that they had experienced physical violence at some time in their lives and 54 percent reported that the violence was perpetrated by the victims' current or former husband (Zimstat, 2016).

Despite these gruesome statistics, traditionally Police have been blamed for assigning low priority to domestic violence except in cases of extreme injury or death and they rarely responded to these disputes. The staggering statistics uncovers how pertinent the issue of domestic violence is to the world in general and Zimbabwe in particular and would naturally call for the Police services the world over to be more responsive to the reports of domestic violence.

In the United Kingdom, a report by Her Majesty Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) (2014) exposed alarming and unacceptable weaknesses in the manner in which the Police responded to domestic violence (Laville, 2014). The report found out the Police officers lacked empathy in handling cases and in West Midlands Police officers were overheard calling a domestic violence victim with a "f..... slag". Victims were not taken seriously and the quality of response by the Police was left almost entirely to chance (Laville, 2014). In Australia a study revealed that only 1 in 13 women who went to the Police to report domestic violence reported a positive experience Hitch (2016). The Executive Director for Women's Centre for Health Matters in Australia Marcia Williams aptly summarized the problem by highlighting that the low levels of satisfaction among victims was likely due to a difference in expectations by women and the reality of what the Police can do (Hitch, 2016).

Payne and Wemerling (2009) observed that women with history of domestic violence often feel that Police officers are unsympathetic or lack empathy and perceive that police do not view domestic violence as they would other crimes. The net effect of such police responses is lack of cooperation by victims, withdrawal of cases (Mutema, 2012), and reluctance to report abuses. Machisa and Van Dorp (2012) noted that only 1.2 percent of women in Botswana reported their cases to the Police and the prevalence of domestic violence in their survey was 24 times higher than reported to the Police. They concluded that women in Botswana had lost faith in the very system that should protect them and offer redress. In a similar survey in Zimbabwe, it was observed that 1 in 14 women who experienced or were physically abused reported to the police (Machisa and Chiramba, 2013). There is a huge under reporting of physical intimate partner violence to the Police despite the establishment of specialized Victim Friendly Units in the Zimbabwe Republic Police (Machisa and Chiramba, 2013)

The researcher has also observed that a number of studies in Zimbabwe have been carried out in an effort to determine the prevalence and effects of domestic violence (e.g. Zimstat, 2015, Machisa & Chiramba, 2013). Studies have also been done to evaluate the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 since its promulgation in 2006 (e.g. Chireshe, 2015). However, to the knowledge of the researcher, there is a relative dearth on studies which seeks to understand the perceptions of female victims on the Police responses to reported domestic violence in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study befittingly sought to close a glaring schism in literature on the management of violence against women and children in Zimbabwe.

The concept of domestic violence has many terms in various jurisdictions. Some authors call it spousal abuse whilst others call it intimate partner violence. The author made a conscious decision to use the term domestic violence in line with the laws in Zimbabwe. The author also found the term to encompassing both spousal abuse and intimate partner violence.

Definition

There are diverse definitions of domestic violence. According to Chhikara, et al. (2013) domestic violence can be defined as a pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. In Zimbabwe, domestic violence is an offence punishable at law. The Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 defines domestic violence as an unlawful act, omission or behaviour which results in death or the direct infliction of physical, sexual or mental injury to any complainant and includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic, verbal and psychological abuse, intimidation and stalking. The Act also included in its definition cultural or customary practices that discriminate or degrade women such as forced virginity testing, female genital mutilation, pledging of women for marriage or payment of avenging spirits and forced wife

inheritance. This definition is broad in its scope as it also includes any acts perpetrated against a woman by current or former partners.

The author decided to use the term victim to refer to women who have suffered domestic violence. Some authors use the term complainant whilst others use survivor. However, all these terms have been observed to refer to the same person who has experienced some form of domestic violence. This study focussed on domestic violence that is perpetrated by men on women although the researcher appreciates that domestic violence may also be committed by women on men

Forms of Domestic Violence

There are various forms of domestic violence. The Zimbabwe Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 identified forms of domestic violence as including amongst others physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, intimidation and harassment. The Act also include stalking, and customary or cultural practices that discriminate or degrade women such as forced virginity testing, forced wife inheritance, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. It also includes unlawful disposal of property in which the victim has an interest in.

WHO (2013) defined physical violence as being slapped or having something thrown at a victim that could hurt the victim, being pushed or shoved, being hit with a fist or something else that could hurt the victim. Their definitions also include kicking, dragging, beating up choking, pointing with a knife or firearm or any other weapon. WHO (2013) also defined sexual violence as being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when one did not want to, having sexual intercourse because one is afraid of what the partner would do to them and it also includes being forced to do something that the victim finds humiliating or degrading.

Emotional or psychological abuse is also a form of domestic violence. Chhikara et, al. (2013) indicated that psychological abuse can include humiliating a victim in public or in private, controlling what the victim can or cannot do, withholding information from the victim and deliberately doing something to make the victim diminished or embarrassed. It also includes isolating the victim.

Economic abuse involves one partner having control over the victim's access to economic resources (Chhikara et, al. 2013). Economic abuse includes withholding financial support towards the victim and her children. It may also include confiscating of victim's income or denying the victim and opportunity to earn a living through productive employment (Citizen Advice, 2017).

Causes of Domestic Violence

A plethora of theories have been put forward in effort to explain the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories, social theories and behavioural theories. Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics (Chhikara, et al. 2013). They observed that research suggests that 80 percent of men in domestic violence studies exhibited diagnosable psychopathology and typical personality disorders. They observed that many psychiatric disorders are risk factors for domestic violence including personality disorders. They indicated that all clusters of Borderline Personality Disorders and Paranoid Disorders as well as Bipolar Disorders, Schizophrenia and poor impulse control predispose perpetrators to committing domestic violence.

Behavioural theories seek to explain domestic violence as a learnt behavior. WHO (2014) observed that children who suffer rejection, neglect, harsh physical punishment and sexual abuse or witness violence at home or in the community are at greater risk of engaging in aggressive and anti-social behaviour at later stages in their development including violent behavior as adults. WHO (2016) highlighted that worldwide, men who were exposed to domestic violence as children are 3 to 4 times more likely to perpetrate domestic violence as adults than men who did not experience domestic violence as children.

Family interactions may also precipitate domestic violence especially poor interpersonal relationship. Chhikara et, al. (2013) argued that social stress may not always cause domestic violence but they conceded that it may be one way that some people respond to stress.

According to WHO (2017), the most widely used model for understanding violence is a result of factors operating at four levels: individual, relationship, community and society. At individual level they noted that the most consistent factors associated with a man's increased likelihood of committing domestic violence include being young, low level of education, witnessing or experiencing violence as a child and personality disorders. At relationship level, they pinpointed factors such as conflict or dissatisfaction in the relationship, male dominance in the family and economic stress. At community and societal level, WHO (2014) identified factors such as weak legal sanctions against domestic violence and broad social acceptance of violence as a way to resolve conflict.

The Challenges

The Police are usually blamed for inaction and /or taking inappropriate action when women report incidents of violence. Whilst domestic violence has been widely investigated in Zimbabwe, to the knowledge of the researcher there is a paucity of research on the perception of female victims on interventions adopted by the Police towards reported domestic violence cases. The manner in which the Police respond has serious ramifications in the provision of victim-sensitive and client-centered interventions. Such interventions will not only meet the needs of the victims but also ensure their safety, cooperation and psychological recovery.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an interpretivistic paradigm. This study was an exploratory and qualitative study with the intention of collecting in-depth, rich and detailed information on the phenomenon of domestic violence. In this study, the researcher chose a phenomenological research design. In order to gather data in this study, purposive sampling method was used. Five (5) participants were interviewed. The researcher used a type of purposive sampling called criterion sampling which involved choosing participants who met a particular criterion. Participants from which the data was collected were chosen amongst those who once experienced domestic violence and reported to the Police at Harare Central Police Station. In this case, being female, victim of domestic violence and having reported at Harare Central Police Station constituted the basic inclusion and selection criteria. Participants were further selected on the basis of how useful they are likely to be for the pursuit of the inquiry. Due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon under study, the participants were selected from those who were part of support groups that were being supported by Musasa Project a Civil Society Organization in Harare. This study was idiographic in nature, used small numbers of participants. The number of participants was determined by data saturation Dibley (2011) as cited by Fusch and Ness (2015).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Forms of domestic Violence experienced by the women

Form of Domestic Violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Assault	2	25
Economic Abuse	2	25
Unreasonable Disposal of Property	2	25
Malicious Damage to Property	1	12.5
Sexual Abuse	1	12.5

Table 1 shows that the Participants experienced different types of domestic violence which they reported to the Police. The forms of domestic violence were physical assaults, economic abuse, sexual abuse, unreasonable disposal of property in which the victim has an interest in as well as malicious damage to property. Participant one stated that she went to report to the Police after her husband had physically assaulted her. Participant 2 went to the Police on several occasions and for different reasons. On one incident her husband had physically assaulted her and damaged her clothes. She stated:

My husband came and assaulted me, he burnt my clothes and cut my clothes into pieces using a knife even the ones that I was wearing.

Participant 2 also indicated that she went to report to the Police after her husband had stolen her cell phone and memory card and unreasonably disposed them off. Participant 3 highlighted that she went to report to the Police following incidents of being economically abused by the husband. She chronicled that the husband would not provide for the family and she went to the Civil Court where she obtained a Court order that compelled the husband to buy food and pay school fees for their children. The husband defaulted in meeting his obligations and she went back to the court and obtained a warrant of arrest against the husband. Participant 3 then went to the Police such that the husband could be arrested for defaulting on his obligations.

Sexual abuse was experienced and reported to Police by Participant 4. She stated that she discovered that her husband was taking Anti-Retroviral (ARV) medication without her knowledge. She said:

I noticed some tablets which were in a Panadol container. I suspected that the tablets were not Panadol tablets. I took the tablets to a Doctor ... and the Doctor told me that the tablets were ARVs. I went back home and asked my husband why he was taking the tablets without telling me. At first he denied it..... I said let's go and be tested. He was found to be HIV Positive and I was Negative. We were told that we should not have unprotected sex..... He would not want to use condoms..... In December he forced me to have unprotected sexual intercourse without my consent.

Participant 5 indicated she reported to the Police after experiencing incidences of economic abuse and after her husband had unreasonably disposed of property in which she had an interest in. Participant 5's husband disposed of sewing machines which the participant had bought using her own savings and were being used by the family to earn a living.

Police Response to Reported Cases of Domestic Violence

Five sub-themes emerged. These were arrest, non-response, trivialization, mediation, listening and attending behavior. They are presented below.

Non-response

Most of the participants reported that the Police did very little in response to their reports. This finding is supported by the following statements:

I spent two weeks and the Police never called.... This is what happened and up to now I have not been assisted. (Participant 1) The Police officer told me that it's not an offence to take someone's cellphone and someone cannot be arrested for that. They told me to go away. They always dilly-dally and the case would die a natural death. They told me to go home and sort out our differences.... They would tell us to go to some prophets. I am waiting to hear from them but to say the truth, the Police never assisted me. (Participant 2)

I never got any feedback from the Police Officer for the rest of last year...I went to Harare Central and they told me that they do not deal with maintenance issues... They did absolutely nothing to help me. (Participant 3)

Trivialization of Domestic violence

Some of the participants claimed that the Police trivialized domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following responses:

We expect that if we report our cases the Police will quickly arrest the perpetrator and take him so that if its mediation then it's done. In cases of domestic violence one should be assisted promptly. But the Police Officers are dismissive and regard the cases as valueless. They ask you why you wanted him to be arrested. They promise to help but when you report, they take one and half months without assisting you. (Participant 1)

They told me to go away..... They told me to go home and sort our differences. At some point I reported that he struck me with a stone. I was told to see Sergeant... Who? I went and I saw him and he said go home and sort each other out. The way the Police operate is not good. If a person says I was assaulted, truly speaking they do not take it seriously; they do not handle us properly as women... In fact, they make fun out of you as if you are crazy or something..... (Participant 2)

When I reported for the second time, the Police told me that..... some of the male Police Officers insulted me questioning why I wanted my husband arrested. I told them there is a docket for deliberate transmission of HIV and they said who knows whether it's true or false. No one is going to be arrested..... I told them that I had all the papers, all the evidence..... They said I will produce that in court. (Participant 4)

Arrest

Two of the participants reported that the Police arrested the perpetrators of domestic violence after they had made their reports. This finding is supported by the following statements

My husband had a warrant of arrest after he had defaulted. I went to the Police and we went home with the Police and they arrested him. (Participant 3)

When I reported for the first time the Police came to the house and arrested the accused person. (Participant 4)

Mediation

One of the participants reported that the Police referred her to the Community Relations and Liaison offices for mediation. This finding is supported by the following statement.

When I went to the Police they told me to go to the Public Relations Office to talk over the issue. (Participant 2)

Listening and Attending behavior

One participant reported that the Police received her very well and listened to her as she narrated her story. This finding is based on the following statement

I decided to go to Harare Central. When I got there I explained my story as it is..... and they gave me a reference number... IR number and said just in case you may meet him ask any Police Officer to arrest him. At Central they received me very well (Participant 5)

Female Victims' Perceptions of Police Response to Reported Cases of Domestic Violence

Six sub-themes emerged. These were satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, trivialization of domestic violence, corrupt tendencies amongst the Police, incompetence, and selective application of the law

Satisfaction

Some of the participants expressed satisfaction with the manner in which the Police responded to their reports. This finding is supported by the following statements.

At Harare Central, they were very good..... upon arrival I explained my problem and she gave me a referral letter and told me to go Market Square..... I think she handled me very well... (Participant 1)

By arresting the accused. The Police did very well.... (Participant 4)

At Harare Central, they received me very well and they phoned Matapi Police Station and told them that there is a woman who is coming there now..... (Participant 5)

Dissatisfaction

Most of the participants claimed dissatisfaction with the manner in which the Police responded to the reports. Some of the participants who expressed satisfaction with some aspects of the Police responses and expressed dissatisfaction with others. This is supported by the following statements.

They made fun out of me.... The Police Officers at Market Square Base especially the one who was handling my case treated me badly...In cases of domestic violence one should be assisted promptly. But the Police officers are dismissive and regard the cases as valueless... they ask you why you want him arrested. They make promise to help but when you report, they take one and half months without assisting you... they do not take domestic violence cases seriously like they do other cases. (Participant 1)

I do not know why the Police do not take these cases seriously. When we attend meetings with organizations such as Musasa, WILSA and others we are encouraged to go first to the Police but they do not give us any help. They did not sit down with me to find out how the problem started. I will be the problem and they cross-examined me as if I am in court. The manner in which the Police operate is not good. If a person says I was assaulted, truly speaking they do not take the reports seriously, they do not handle us properly as women.... in fact they make fun out of you as if you are crazy. It makes me think deeply and at times I consider committing suicide because the Police where we (I) would have gone for assistance do not give you any assistance. They do not sit down with me to find out how the problem started. (Participant 2)

... wrote a letter which I took to Harare Central and they told me that they do not deal with maintenance issues...To say the truth, the Police are not helping in any way. I was not happy with the way the Police handled my case. I am not happy. It shows they are not concerned. At Harare Central, they were not helpful.... (Participant 3)

I think the Police should take the case and deal with it on its merit not what they did on my case. I do not know how I can explain what happened on my case but I am hurt. I really do not know what was happening but I was not satisfied with what happened..... (Participant 4)

Trivialization of Domestic Violence

Some of the participants claimed that the Police trivialized their reports of domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements.

They do not take domestic violence seriously as they do other cases. They ask you why you want him arrested. It's like, they make fun out of you and they do not give any form of assistance. (Participant 1)

They told me to go home... They told me to go home and sought our differences. When I went to the Public relations they told us that our issues require a simple solution. They would tell us to go to some prophets..... They told me that property such as a cell phone battery, memory card and line do not warrant any one to be arrested... he told me to go home. I do not understand why the police do not take these cases seriously. (Participant 2)

When I reported for the second time... some of the male police Officers insulted me (asking) why I wanted him arrested. I told them that there was a docket for deliberate transmission of HIV and they asked me who knows whether it was true or false. No one is going to be arrested. I told them that I had all the papers, (and) all the evidence. They said I will produce that at court. (Participant 4)

Corruption

Most of the participants felt that the Police officers were corrupt. This finding is supported by the following statements. *The one who was dealing with my case I want to believe he was bribed because she did not assist me in any way since the time I reported... They do not take domestic violence cases seriously like they do other cases. Maybe if you bribe them they may do something... (Participant 1)*

The following day we went to the Police station and the Police officer asked me if I had airtime and I said I had none. He told me to top-up his airtime such that he could call my husband... The Police Officer told me that he was hungry and that he wanted some money from me to buy (food) Sadza. I had two dollars. I gave it to my uncle and told him to go and buy some (food) Sadza for the Police Officer. You end up thinking that the Police are getting bribes because for one person they handle the case properly but when I came myself the poor one they do not respect me. I have got a feeling that corruption is taking place amongst the Police (Participant two)

If you do not have money nothing will be done. At one time I went there and they said that I should buy airtime such that they could call him... They will tell you to buy airtime to top up the Police Officer's phone. The Police will talk to the person for ten seconds... and the rest of the airtime is his. (Participant 3)

I could see them buying him food and all sorts of things. You could see other accused persons sitting on the floor but he will be sitting on a chair. The chair meant for the Police Officers. That made me think may be something may be taking place. May be he gave them money or did something I did not understand. (Participant 4)

Selective Application of the Law

Two of the participants felt that the police were selectively applying the law. This finding is supported by the following statements.

If I report, I never hear that he was arrested but if he reports I always get written notes inviting me to the station. I cannot remember how many times I have reported that he had damaged my clothing and nothing was done. (Participant 2)

After I had reported, it is the same officers who would buy him food and I do not know why it is always like that. At times I will be asked to come back and I would find them chatting with him, sharing jokes but the other accused would be sitting on the floor. He will be sitting on a chair; I do not know what would be happening. (Participant 4)

Incompetence

Two of the participants felt that the Police were incompetent to deal with domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements.

I think we should have people who stand for women at the Police Station especially in cases of domestic violence. (Participant 2)

I think that at every Police Station there should be somebody for domestic violence clients. May be that way, the Police would help... not own their own, nothing.... nothing will come out ... they are ignorant (Participant 3)

Figure 1 Shows a summary of thoughts and feelings of participants on Police Responses.



Strategies to Curb Domestic Violence

Six sub-themes emerged in this study. These are arrest of perpetrators, mediation, and provision of information, multi-disciplinary approach and sensitive services.

Arrest of Perpetrators.

All the participants expressed their views on how they felt the police should respond to their reports. There was a general consensus that the Police should expedite in arresting perpetrators of domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements.

I wanted to use the law. I expected that by using the law he would be arrested. (Participant 1)

If I report a case to the Police, I expect the Police to arrest him and teach him a lesson that it is wrong to assault your wife. (Participant 2)

When I reported my case I expected that the Police will arrest the perpetrator and do what is lawful. (Participant 3)

When I reported for the first time, the Police came to the house and arrested the accused. By arresting the perpetrator, the Police did very well. (Participant 4)

I expected them to make a follow-up and arrest him, to go to the scene but this never happened. He has never been arrested. (Participant 5)

Mediation

Two of the participants expressed their preference for mediation as a response to domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements:

We expect that if we report our cases the Police will quickly arrest the perpetrator and take him such that mediation can be done. (Participant 1)

When I went to the Police they would refer me to the Public relations Office to talk over the case (Participant 2)

Provision of Information

Most of the Participants expected the Police to provide them with information regarding the position of their reported cases and where else they could get assistance. This finding is supported by the following statements.

If a woman makes a report, we expect the Police to deal with the case as it is, apply the law and give me (us) advice on the proper actions to take. (Participant 2)

I never got any feedback from the Police Officer for the rest of last year. (Participant 3)

They should give you information maybe you will be wrong. (Participant 5)

Multi-Disciplinary Co-ordination

Participant 2 expected the Police to work hand-in glove with other organizations. This finding is supported by the following statement:

They do not give you advice to go to Musasa Project or other organizations. You will have to hear about these organizations from the television. At least if they cannot deal with the matter they should refer you to other organizations. (Participant 2)

Specialized Units:

Some Participants felt that there should be specialized officers at every Police station who are responsible solely for domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements.

I think we should have people who stand for women at the Police stations especially in cases of domestic violence. (Participant 2)

I think at the Police station there should be somebody for domestic violence; maybe that way the Police would help.... on their own, nothing... nothing will come out. (Participant 3)

Sensitive Services

Some of the participants felt that the Police should be more sensitive and empathetic to victims of domestic violence. This finding is supported by the following statements.

They make bad comments. Some of them if you tell them they will tell you that women are a problem. They blame you for the assault alleging that you had a bad attitude that's why you are assaulted (Participant 1)

The way the police operate is not good. If a person says I was assaulted, truly speaking they do not take it seriously. They do not handle us properly as women... In fact, they make fun out of you as if you are crazy (Participant 2)

When I reported for the second time, some male Police officer insulted me why I wanted my husband arrested. (Participant 4)

Women Who Reported Domestic Violence to The Police.

The demographic characteristics of the female victims of domestic violence who made reports to the Police were analyzed. The key emergent theme from the analysis is that the female victims who report domestic violence to the Police are middle aged (24-37yrs), were married to the perpetrators and were unemployed. The victims were thus economically dependent on the perpetrators. This observation is consistent with the patriarchy theory of domestic violence which asserts that the power of men by virtue of their privileged status in society is the means by which women are controlled and subjugated (Kindschi, 2005). Economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to maintain a patriarchal social order. Being unemployed therefore made women more vulnerable to abuse. The researcher drew conclusions from two research findings in the literature review that seems to give credence to the findings of this study. Grech and Burgess (2011) as cited by Women NSW (2017) noted that older women and who are married are less likely to report domestic violence to the Police. On the other hand, National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2009) observed that younger women, those in dating relationships and those with little prior contact with the justice system are less likely to call the Police. Given the findings in these two studies, the findings in this study that the victims who report domestic violence were middle aged and married appears to be plausible and persuasive.

Forms of Domestic Violence Reported by Female Victims to The Police.

Domestic violence comprises of a myriad of forms and descriptions. The researcher sought to find out the most commonly reported forms of domestic violence. An important theme to emerge from the participants'

accounts was that physical abuse, economic abuse and unlawful disposal of property were the most frequently reported forms of domestic violence. Sexual abuse was the least reported form of domestic violence.

Literature review seems to confirm the findings of this study that physical abuse is the most reported form of domestic violence. Buzawa and Buzawa (1999) as cited by NIJ (2009) observed that in the United States of America almost two thirds to three quarters of domestic violence cited in Police reports are for assaults. Women NSW (2017) also made a similar observation. In Canada, Lanthier (2008) noted that assault was the most frequently reported form of domestic violence.

Economic abuse per se is not recognized as a criminal offence in Zimbabwe in terms of the Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16. However, these cases are reported to the Police after the victims would have obtained protection orders or maintenance orders when the husbands would have withheld support Chhikara et al (2013). The Police are then required to enforce the protection orders or maintenance orders where the husband would have defaulted. As observed in this study, one of the victims went to the Police such that the Police could enforce a warrant of arrest. In other instances, the perpetrators of domestic violence damaged the victims' property or disposed off their property thereby denying them an opportunity to earn a living Citizen Advice (2017).

The findings in this study that sexual violence was the least reported form of domestic violence is consistent with the findings in a study by McFarlane and Malecha (2005) as cited by National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV) (2015) that only thirty-six percent of rape victims ever report the crime to the Police and the percentage of married women who report spousal rape to the Police is even lower. They concluded that marital rape is the most under reported form of sexual assault. Indeed, in this study sexual abuse was reported by only twenty percent of the participants and it was the least reported abuse.

Two of the five participants indicated that they experienced and reported to the Police more than one form of domestic violence. This is consistent to findings by Black et al (2011) that more than 1 in 3 women in the United States of America who experienced domestic violence experienced multiple forms of domestic violence.

Police Response to Reported Cases Of Domestic Violence.

A plethora of themes were identified on how the Police responded to reported domestic violence. Arrest emerged as the most preferred response to domestic violence. In two of the cases reported to the Police, arrests were made and in the other two cases energy and effort was expended towards arresting the perpetrators of domestic violence. As observed by Houston (2004) feminists propose the use of arrest as a response to domestic violence and as a way of protection, Therefore, Police interventions in this study seem to adopt the letter and spirit of the feminist or patriarchy theory of domestic violence. The Police responses were consistent with the dictates of UNODC (2010) who exhorted UN member states to ensure that the applicable provisions of the law are enforced and criminal acts of violence against women are responded to by the criminal justice system. Rae Stout (2013) also observed that arrest is an option of choice for the Police when responding to domestic violence.

Non-response by the Police when a report was made by the participants emerged as a key theme in the study. Most of the participants gave harrowing and sensational accounts in which the Police failed to take any action when they reported domestic violence. This behaviour by the Police was also observed by UNODC (2010) who noted that the Police at times take no action at all to reports of domestic violence reported by women. Leisenring (2012) also observed that Police officers have historically been criticized for ignoring the seriousness of domestic violence and for dismissing women's reports.

One of the ways in which the Police responded to domestic violence was through mediation. This is the same with the observation that was made way back by Women in Law in Southern Africa (WILSA) (1999) that in the Zimbabwe Republic Police there are Community Relations and Liaison Officers whose role is to mediate between victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. In the international arena, mediation was seen to be an alternative response to domestic violence (e.g. Landrum, 2011 & Ringrose Law, 2014)

According to the participants' accounts, the manner which the Police responded to domestic violence reports was also characterized by inappropriate and improper referral mechanisms. For instance, one of the participants indicated that she was advised to consult a prophet. Such reckless referrals seem to confirm the view that the Police treat victims of domestic violence unfairly (Stewart, et, al.2013), respond to domestic violence in a manner that worsen the victims' situation (Wallpe, 2010), lacked empathy (HMIC, 2014) and that victims were not taken seriously (Laville, 2014).

One of the positive responses that were chronicled by the participants was that the Police had time to listen to them as they narrated their stories and provided them with appropriate information. Lanthier (2008) earlier on noted that in some cases the Police are empathetic, exhibit good attending behaviour and provide victims with accurate information.

Female Victims' Perception Of Police Response To Reported Cases Of Domestic Violence.

The participants' perceptions of Police responses to reported domestic violence were diverse. As highlighted earlier in this study, some participants expressed satisfaction with some responses or part of the response mechanism whilst others expressed dissatisfaction.

Some of the participants expressed satisfaction mainly because the Police's response met their expectations. For instance, where participants expected the Police to arrest the perpetrator and the perpetrator was indeed arrested. Literature review has shown that victims of domestic violence get satisfaction when the perpetrator of domestic violence is promptly arrested Ahuja (1998). Where the Police delayed in arresting the perpetrator, victims expressed dismay and despair on the Police responses. Trujillo and Ross (2008) cited several studies (e.g. Avakame & Fyfe, 2001, Buzawa, Austin & Buzawa, Fyfe, Klinger & Flavin, 1997) that show that there is a lower probability of arrest when the partner is an intimate partner of the victim. Literature review also shows that the Police are usually in a quandary as they try to balance the needs of the victims and the rights of the perpetrators. Ahuja (1998) described this as the conflict between the need to control crime and due process. She indicated that the crime control model expects immediate arrest of perpetrator and in this study the most expected response whereas the due process model expects the Police to respect the dignity and autonomy of the perpetrator resulting in delays. For the Police, trying to balance the two models becomes a delicate act.

The participants also expressed satisfaction with Police responses where they felt that the Police listened to them and showed compassion. This view was also observed by Stephens and Sinden (2000) as cited by Lanthier (2008) as a key determinant of victim satisfaction. They noted that women described Police experience as positive if they felt that the Police held their moral character in high esteem, were listened to and the police empathized with them.

Some of the participants felt that the Police were judgmental, dismissive and minimized their reports. Such perceptions left them dissatisfied with the manner in which the Police responded to domestic violence. One of the participants reported that the Police told her to go away. The other participant indicated that the Police blamed them for the domestic violence. These responses are consistent with the findings by HMIC (2014) who noted that in their study victims felt that the Police were judgmental and their incidents of domestic violence were not taken seriously. In an earlier study Trujillo and Ross (2008) noted that Police officers can be judgmental in the manner they respond to women's reports of domestic violence. Lanthier (2008) observed that women who described their overall Police experience as negative believed that the Police minimized the abuse and did not make an effective referral. Lanthier (2008) observed that women who described their overall impression of Police as negative believed that the Police took long to respond to calls, were cold or minimized the abuse and did not make a referral. The findings in this study seem to confirm such observations. The participants who expressed dissatisfaction with the Police responses claimed that the Police took long to respond to their reports and in some cases they did not respond at all and in some cases minimized their reports. The participants reported that the Police also blamed them for the domestic violence. These findings are consistent with literature review (Stewart, et al. 2013) where victims report discouraging remarks or attitudes such as blaming.

Perceptions of and allegations of corruption was a common thread where the victims felt that the Police did not respond in the manner they expected. Most of the victims felt that if they had money, the Police could have acted differently and more so in their favour. The participants' perceptions of corruption were exacerbated by a perceived selective application of the law. One of the participants reported that when she made a report, the Police took no action but when her husband made albeit a frivolous allegation against her the Police were quick to arrest her. One participant bemoaned the preferential treatment that her husband got in the hands of the Police. Such incidents where the Police privileged male accounts at the expense of the victims were also observed by Stewart, et al. (2013). Research participants felt that the Police were ineffective in the manner they responded to domestic violence. One participant indicated the perpetrator was released before going to court under very dubious and suspicious circumstances. Wallpe (2010) made a similar observation that some victims complain that the police did not arrest the perpetrators of domestic violence or if they do the perpetrators are released prematurely and too quickly. The majority of the perpetrators in this study were not arrested by the Police.

Strategies Used to Curb Domestic Violence.

The study elicited views from the participants on strategies that the Police may use in responding to reported cases of domestic violence. A number of suggestions were made by the victims in response to this question.

Generally, the victims were of the view that the Police should apply the law without fear or favour. They indicated that the Police should apply the law and arrest the perpetrators of domestic violence. This view is consistent with the patriarchy (feminist) theory of domestic violence Kindschi (2005). As a response to the

selective application of the law, most policing jurisdictions have introduced mandatory arrest policies as a way of ensuring that the Police arrest perpetrators of domestic violence without resorting to the use of discretion. A mandatory arrest policy makes it an obligation for the Police to arrest perpetrators of domestic violence. In countries such as Canada and the United States of America where mandatory arrest has been introduced, there has been a significant increase in the number of arrests of domestic violence offenders Pozzulo, Benell and Forth (2009) as cited by Lockwood and Prohaska (2015). Some the victims indicated that they wanted the perpetrators of domestic violence to arrested and to be taught a lesson. A similar observation was made by Barnish (2004) who noted studies were women revealed that by reporting to the Police, they wanted the offender to be arrested and to be taught a lesson.

Research participants felt that the Police should partner other organizations in coming up with appropriate interventions to domestic violence. They reported that these organizations may have better skills to manage domestic violence hence may compliment Police efforts. This view is also shared with Pop center (2016) who indicated that comprehensive and collaborative approaches are more likely to impact domestic violence positively than piecemeal approaches. Pop Center cautioned that the Police should not limit themselves to what they can do but should consider sharing responsibility. Chhikara et, al., (2013) postulated that managing domestic violence requires combined effort of law enforcement, social welfare and health care services. HMIC (2014) noted the Police should partner statutory and voluntary organizations to address the complex needs of victims of domestic violence. UNODC (2010) observed that Canada has model comprehensive, coordinated and specialized strategy that was done in consultation with non-governmental organizations. It is therefore clear that the aspirations of the research participants are not far-fetched, if anything they are in synch with the best practices in the world. Queensland Government (2017) summarized the significance of coordinated responses by stating that coordinated community responses to domestic violence are increasingly recognized as the most effective way of providing services to victims of domestic violence as the coordinated community responses represent a holistic approach to addressing the needs of women.

Mediation is one of the strategies that were suggested by the participants as a way of responding to domestic violence. The participants felt that through mediation, the Police can help them resolve their differences and in some cases cause the perpetrators to act responsibly. WILSA (1999) and Ringrose Law (2014) strongly support the use of mediation in the management of domestic violence. However, UN (2010) and Landrum (2011) vehemently argues against the use of mediation in domestic violence. UN (2010) made a recommendation to the effect that member states should have laws that explicitly prohibit mediation in domestic violence. Their major argument being the power imbalance between parties and the assumption in mediation that both parties are equally to blame for the domestic violence.

Information provision was cited by the participants as a key strategy to fight domestic violence. As the adage goes 'Knowledge is Power', victims of domestic violence felt that the Police should provide them with as much information as possible such that they will be able to make informed decisions. Queensland Government (2017) identified the significance of information provision in the development of its minimum standards for professionals working with domestic violence victims. They highlighted that the woman should be provided with information about her rights and intervention strategies available and should be treated with respect. The International Association of Police Chiefs (IAPC) 2009 also pointed out that effective communication with victims is an essential skill for establishing a positive and a professional relationship with a victim.

The participants also felt that the Police are ill-equipped to deal with domestic violence and they called for the establishment of a specialized unit whose sole mandate will be to deal with domestic violence. This view is also shared with Olding and Ralston (2014) who noted that campaigners have asked for trained victims advocates to be installed at every Police station to attend to domestic violence incidents.

The Police also need to be sensitive, empathetic and more cooperative when dealing with victims of domestic violence. IAPC (2009) implored Police officers to balance professional investigatory conduct with an honest effort to empathize with the victim. They exhorted Police Officers to take time to listen to the victim, to understand the victim's feelings and react in a supportive manner that can build rapport and trust. The same view is shared by Mulherin (2016) who indicated that professionals helping victims of domestic violence should give a sensitive, empathetic and knowledgeable response to victims and families seeking help. Queensland Government (2017) highlighted in their minimums standards that workers should accept what the victim say without being judgmental and should never blame the woman for the violence. Adopting such a professional stance will go a long way in improving the perception of the Police amongst their clientele.

IV. LIMITATION

This study was limited to one station in Harare Province. More information could have been gleaned if the study was extended to cover more stations in the Province. The study did not explore the gender of Police

Officers who responded to the participants' reports. It may be interesting to find out how Police officers of different gender respond to domestic violence reported by female victims at their stations. A qualitative design was employed in this study and a result a small sample size was used. The use of both qualitative and quantitative designs where a representative sample may be used could generate more information. The interviews were conducted in vernacular (Shona) and then translated into English. During the process of translation, the meanings of certain words and phrases were lost.

V. CONCLUSION

The research findings of this study emerged as themes. Victims who report domestic violence to the Police are predominantly middle aged, married and unemployed. This is consistent with observations by Grench and Burgess (2011) as cited by Women NSW (2017) and NIJ (2009). Physical abuse and economic abuse are the most frequently reported form of domestic violence. A similar observation was made by Buzawa and Buzawa (1999) as cited by NIJ (2009) and Women NSW (2017). In Zimbabwe, economic abuse is not a criminal offence in terms of the Domestic Violence Act Chapter 5:16 however, variant forms of economic abuse such as unlawful disposal of victim's property are. Victims report some forms of economic abuse through the civil courts where they obtain protection and maintenance orders (Chhikara, et, al. 2013) which the Police are mandated to enforce. Sexual abuse was the least reported form of domestic violence. This is also consistent with findings by NCADV (2015).

The dominant theme on how the Police respond to domestic violence is through arrest. Feminists (Patriarchy theory) share this view Houston (2004). The effectiveness of arrest as a response to domestic violence was identified by Pozzulo, Benell and Forth (2009) as cited by Lockwood and Prohaska (2015). However, its effectiveness was curtailed by delays in executing the arrest.

The perceptions of female victims to Police responses were varied and depended on the response of the Police. Where the Police expeditiously arrested the perpetrator, listened to the victim (HMIC 2014), and provided information, victims expressed satisfaction. However, where the Police were adjudged to be judgmental (Trujillo and Ross 2008), partial, blaming (Laville, 2014), uncompassionate (HMIC 2014) and failed to give information victims expressed dissatisfaction with the responses.

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Mutema Francis. " The Gaze of Survivors: Female Victim's Perceptions of Police Responses to Reported Domestic Violence at Harare Central Police Station, Harare. "IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS). vol. 23 no. 10, 2018, pp. 21-34.