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GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN MUZARABANI DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

BY

JOSHUA GAMULA

B225199B

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SUPERVISOR: DR. H. MUSARANDEGA

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APPROVAL FORM

The undersigned certify that they have read this project and have approved its submission for making after confirming that it meets the departmental requirements.

Supervisor

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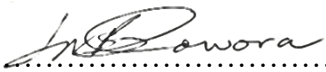
Signed……….. Date ……13/08/26…..

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DEDICATION

This achievement is a special dedication to the Almighty God who gave me strength, wisdom and perseverance though out this course of study. Without him and his guidance and protection, success completion of this dissertation would not be possible.

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I would like to thank my supervisor for the support, constructive criticism, and assistance throughout this dissertation. His academic expertise and encouragement greatly contributed to the completion of this study. I would also express my sincere gratitude to my family members for the moral support they have given me at every stage and in all aspects of my life. Special thanks is extended to lecturers, staff members and some of the students for giving their assistance through the process and the success of this work.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on women's empowerment in the rural district of Muzarabani in Zimbabwe, with particular focus on wards 8 and 15. This study was motivated by the increasing cases of GBV that are posing threats to the women's empowerment efforts in the district and have negative implications on women physical, psychological, and economic well-being. The research was guided by four major objectives: to identify forms and prevalence of GBV in the study area, assess levels of empowerment, examine the effects of GBV on women's social and economic empowerment, and propose strategies for enhancing women's empowerment and reducing GBV. The study adopted a mixed-methods research approach and utilised a descriptive survey design. Data was collected from 44 female respondents through a questionnaire survey, while 10 key informants drawn from government departments, the health sector, and non-governmental organisations participated in key informant interviews. Focus group discussions were also conducted to obtain deeper insights into women`s lived experiences in the district. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. While qualitative data was analysed thematically. The findings review that GBV is highly prevalent in Muzarabani, with 84.1% reporting having experienced at least one form of violence, with emotional or psychological being the most common ones among women, followed by financial deprivation, physical, and sexual being the last ones. The study concluded that GBV remains a barrier to women's empowerment and therefore recommends strengthening the enforcement of GBV legislation, expanding community-based response programmes, promoting women`s economic empowerment, improving access to education and support services, and enhancing collaboration among non-governmental organisations, community leaders, and governmental institutions.

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immune Virus
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
REPSSI	Regional Psychological Support Initiative
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children`s Fund
UN	Women United Nations Women
WHO	World Health Organisation
ZIMSTAT	Zimbabwe National Statistical Agency
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic

Table of Contents

APPROVAL FORM 2
DECLARATION FORM 3
DEDICATION 4
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 5
ABSTRACT 6
ACRONYMS 7
CHAPTER 1 11
INTRODUCTION 11
1.1 Chapter introduction 11
1.2 Background of the study 11
1.3 Problem statement 13
1.4 Research aim 14
1.5 Research objectives 14
1.6 Research questions 14
1.7 Justification of the study 15
1.8 Definition of terms 15
1.9 Organisation of the study 17
1.10 Chapter conclusion 18
CHAPTER 2 19
LITERATURE REVIEW 19
2.1 Introduction 19
2.2 Theoretical framework 19
2.2.1 Feminist theory 19
2.2.2 Ecological theory 20
2.2.4 Integration of theoretical frameworks 22
2.2.5 Explanation of the integrated framework 23
2.3 Conceptual framework 25
2.4 Empirical literature review 26
2.4.1 Definition and scope of gender 26
2.4.2 Conceptualising gender based violence (GBV) 27
2.4.3 Global perspective on gender-based violence and women's empowerment 29
2.4.4 Regional perspective: sub-Saharan Africa 30
2.4.5 Zimbabwe context 32
2.4.6 Link between gender-based violence and women's empowerment 33

2.5 Knowledge gaps.....35
2.6 Chapter conclusion.....36
CHAPTER 3.....37
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....37
3.1 Introduction.....37
3.2 Description of the study area.....37
3.3 Research design.....39
3.4 Data collection methods.....40
3.4.1 Questionnaire method.....40
3.4.2 Key informant interviews.....41
3.4.3 Focus group discussions.....42
3.5 Secondary data collection.....42
3.6 Target population, sample size, and sampling techniques.....43
3.6.1 Target population.....43
3.6.2 Sample size.....44
3.6.3 Quantitative sampling.....44
3.6.4 Qualitative sample.....46
3.7 Data analysis methods.....46
3.7.1 Quantitative data.....47
3.7.2 Qualitative data.....47
3.8 Reliability of the study.....48
3.9 Validity of the study.....49
3.10 Limitations of the study.....49
3.11 Chapter conclusion.....50
CHAPTER 4.....51
PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS.....51
4.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents.....51
4.3 Forms and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Muzarabani District.....53
4.3.1 Community perceptions on forms of Gender-Based Violence.....53
4.3.2 Personal experiences of Gender-Based Violence.....55
4.3.3 Barriers to reporting gender-based violence.....57
4.4 Level of women's empowerment in Muzarabani district.....58
4.4.1 Self-related empowerment levels.....58
4.4.2 Economic empowerment.....60
4.4.3 Social empowerment.....61

4.4.4 Decision-making power.....62
4.5 Impact of Gender-Based Violence on women`s economic and social empowerment 63
4.5.1 Impact on economic participation.....63
4.5.2 Impact on social participation and community engagement.....64
4.5.3 Impact on confidence, independence, and psychological well-being.....65
4.6 Coping mechanisms and access to support services.....66
4.7 Proposed options to scale down gender-based violence and enhance women`s empowerment.....68
4.7.1 Strengthening legal awareness and access to justice.....68
4.7.2 Economic empowerment programmes.....68
4.7.3 Community-based awareness and attitudinal change.....69
4.7.4. Expansion of social services.....70
4.8 Discussion of findings.....70
4.9 Chapter conclusion.....72
CHAPTER 5.....74
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....74
5.I: Introduction.....74
5.2 Summary of the study.....74
5.3 Summary of key findings.....75
5.4 Recommendations.....78
5.5 Conclusion.....79
References.....80
APPENDICES.....86
APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE (FOR WOMEN RESPONDENTS).....86
APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE (KEY INFORMANTS).....90
APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE.....91

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter introduction

This chapter introduces the study by examining the impact of gender-based violence on women's empowerment within Muzarabani District. It provides the background to the study, highlighting the global, regional, and national context of gender-based violence (GBV) and its implications for development. The chapter further presents the problem statement, which identifies the gap in understanding how GBV affects women's empowerment at the local level. It outlines the aim and objectives of the study, as well as the research questions guiding the investigation. In addition, the chapter justifies the significance of the study from empirical, theoretical, policy, and practical perspectives. Key terms relevant to the research are defined to ensure conceptual clarity, and the overall structure of the dissertation is presented. The chapter ultimately establishes the foundation for analysing how gender-based violence constrains women's empowerment and development outcomes in Muzarabani District.

1.2 Background of the study

Millions of women today have been impacted by GBV in a variety of socio-economic settings, resulting in it being the greatest pervasive violation of human rights (World Health Organisation, 2021). It comprises various forms of abuse, like economic, emotional, and sexual violence against women. The World Health Organization (2021) estimates that one in three women worldwide has experienced gender-based violence at some particular time in their daily existence. This widespread prevalence highlights the persistence of structural inequalities that undermine women's rights, dignity, and well-being. Beyond its immediate physical and psychological consequences, GBV has far-reaching implications for development because it prevents women from fully engaging in the economic, political, and societal realms.

The global development agenda has increasingly recognised the importance of addressing gender-based violence as a necessary condition for attaining sustainable development. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015 marked a significant milestone, with Goal 5 expressly demanding that all forms of violence against women and girls be eradicated (United Nations, 2015). This reflects a growing understanding that women's empowerment cannot be realised in environments where violence and discrimination persist. Empowerment, in this context, defines the way that gives women the capacity to obtain resources, take

thoughtful life decisions, and take an active role in decision-making (Kabeer, 1999). However, the persistence of GBV continues to undermine these processes, particularly in developing countries where institutional and socio-cultural barriers remain significant.

GBV has been a complicated and multidimensional issue existing within sub-Saharan Africa because it is intricately entwined with sociocultural and economic structures. Studies have shown that factors such as poverty, patriarchal norms, and limited access to education contribute to the prevalence of GBV in many African societies (Jewkes et al., 2015). Rural women are more at risk because they have less access to support services, weak legal enforcement mechanisms, and economic dependency on male counterparts. These conditions not only increase exposure to violence but also limit women's capacity to get assistance or flee harmful circumstances. As a result, GBV continues to perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality, undermining broader development efforts across the region.

In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence remains a significant social and developmental challenge even though foundations for laws and policies are in place to address it. The government has enacted legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act and has implemented national gender policies to advance the rights of women and protection. However, implementation issues like scarce resources, cultural resistance, and inadequate institutional competence frequently restrict these frameworks' efficacy. (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2022). According to reports, a significant percentage of women in Zimbabwe have been harmed by violence, particularly in isolated places where social assistance is scarce and the legal system is weak. This suggests that legal provisions alone are insufficient without addressing underlying socio-cultural and economic factors.

Within Muzarabani District, the challenges associated with gender-based violence are further intensified by its rural setting and socio-economic conditions. The district is distinguished by extreme poverty, limited economic opportunities, as well as the strong adherence to traditional norms that often reinforce gender inequalities. Women in the district are predominantly involved in informal economic pursuits and subsistence farming, which offer little financial independence. This economic dependency increases vulnerability to GBV and reduces the capacity of women to exert independence and make decisions. Furthermore, awareness of rights is hampered by limited access to education and information about available support mechanisms, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and disempowerment.

Despite these obstacles, the value of empowering women to advance sustainable development is becoming more widely acknowledged. Women's empowerment has been linked to improved household welfare, increased economic productivity, and enhanced community development outcomes (Sen, 1999). Women are more equipped to access resources, take part in decision-making processes, and make significant contributions to development projects when they are empowered. However, the presence of gender-based violence undermines these gains by restricting women's freedoms and reinforcing structural inequalities. In this context, understanding the between enhancing women's empowerment and GBV is critical for designing effective interventions that address both issues simultaneously.

But even though a lot of national and regional research has been conducted regarding the empowerment of women and GBV, there remains a lack of context-specific studies focusing on rural districts such as Muzarabani. Most existing studies tend to generalise findings, overlooking the distinct economic and sociocultural dynamics that shape experiences of GBV and empowerment at the local level. This divide makes it more difficult for development professionals and policymakers to create focused solutions that address the unique needs of communities. To close this gap, this explores how GBV affects women's empowerment within Muzarabani District.

1.3 Problem statement

Women's empowerment is still severely hampered by gender-based violence, especially in rural parts of developing nations. While global and national frameworks emphasise the significance of eliminating GBV by encouraging gender parity, the persistence of violence against women indicates that these efforts have not fully achieved their intended outcomes. In Zimbabwe, despite the existence of legal protections and policy interventions, many women continue to experience various forms of violence that limit their capacity to actively engage in political, social, and economic life (ZIMSTAT, 2022). This suggests a disconnect between policy commitments and lived realities, especially in rural districts.

In Muzarabani District, gender-based violence remains a persistent concern, with women reportedly experiencing different forms of abuse within both domestic and community settings. However, beyond general recognition of the problem, there is limited systematic evidence that clearly shows how gender-based violence manifests at the local level and how it ties to the

district's efforts to empower women. Specifically, it is not sufficiently clear how variations in experiences of gender-based violence impact various aspects of empowerment, including the ability to make decisions, access to resources, and participation in socio-economic activities.

Furthermore, existing studies tend to examine gender-based violence and women's empowerment as distinct problems, with limited focus on their direct interaction within specific rural contexts. Because of this, little is known about how gender-based violence outcomes in Muzarabani District affect women's empowerment. This gap makes it challenging to create focused interventions, supported by evidence that effectively address both community-level women's empowerment and gender-based violence. To close this gap, the investigation is aimed at exploring how gender-based violence interacts with women's empowerment in Muzarabani District.

1.4 Research aim

This study aims to examine the impact of gender-based violence on women's empowerment in Muzarabani District.

1.5 Research objectives

i) To examine the forms and prevalence of gender-based violence in Muzarabani District.
ii) To assess the level of women's empowerment in the district.
iii) To analyse the impact of gender-based violence on women's economic and social empowerment.
iv) To propose options to scale down gender based violence and strategies for enhancing women's empowerment.

1.6 Research questions

i) What forms of gender-based violence are prevalent in Muzarabani District?
ii) What is the level of women's empowerment in the district?
iii) How does gender-based violence affect women's economic and social empowerment?

iv) What options can be proposed to scale down gender based violence, and strategies that can be implemented to enhance women's empowerment?

1.7 Justification of the study

There are theoretical, empirical, policy, and practical justifications for this investigation. Empirically, it adds to the scant literature on women's empowerment and gender-based violence in rural areas like Muzarabani. By generating localised data, the study provides insights into how GBV impacts women's lives in a particular sociocultural setting. Theoretically, the research adds to the body of knowledge by analysing the connection between violence and empowerment, thereby enhancing understanding of how structural inequalities shape development outcomes. From a policy perspective, the study provides information that can direct the creation and implementation of initiatives aimed at reducing GBV and promoting women's empowerment. The results will be useful to policymakers, non-governmental organisations, and local leaders who are working to improve the well-being of rural women and fight gender inequality.

1.8 Definition of terms

Gender-based violence refers to negative behaviours, such as physical, sexual, emotional, and financial abuse, that are committed against someone because of their gender. It stems from the unequal power dynamics between men and women and frequently leads to social marginalisation, psychological suffering, and physical harm. (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2021).

Women's empowerment is defined as the process that gives women the capacity to acqure resources, make wise life decisions, and actively carry out life-affecting decision-making. It entails greater independence, self-assurance, and control over individual and group results. (Kabeer, 1999).

Patriarchy is a social structure that allows men to hold dominant authority over other members of society, particularly women, and to continue the inequalities between those sexes (Walby, 1990).

Economic empowerment refers to women's ability to access and control financial resources, engage in income-generating activities, and achieve economic independence, thereby strengthening their decision-making capacity (Malhotra et al., 2002).

Social empowerment is the process through which women gain the ability to participate fully in social life, access education and healthcare, and exercise their rights within the community (UN Women, 2015).

Physical violence is any act in which one person uses physical force against another person, leading to pain, injury, harm, or suffering (WHO, 2021).

Sexual violence - it refers to any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act without consent, including coercion, harassment and exploitation (UNICEF, 2020).

Emotional or psychological violence - refers to behaviours that cause mental distress, fear or loss of self-worth, including intimidation, threats and controlling behaviours (WHO, 2021).

Decision-making power - means the ability of women to make independent choices regarding personal, household, and community matters, including finances, health, and participation in social or political activities (Kabeer, 1999).

Access to resources - refers to the ability of individuals, particularly women, to obtain and utilise economic, social, and institutional assets such as land, income, education, and support services (World Bank, 2020).

1.9 Organisation of the study

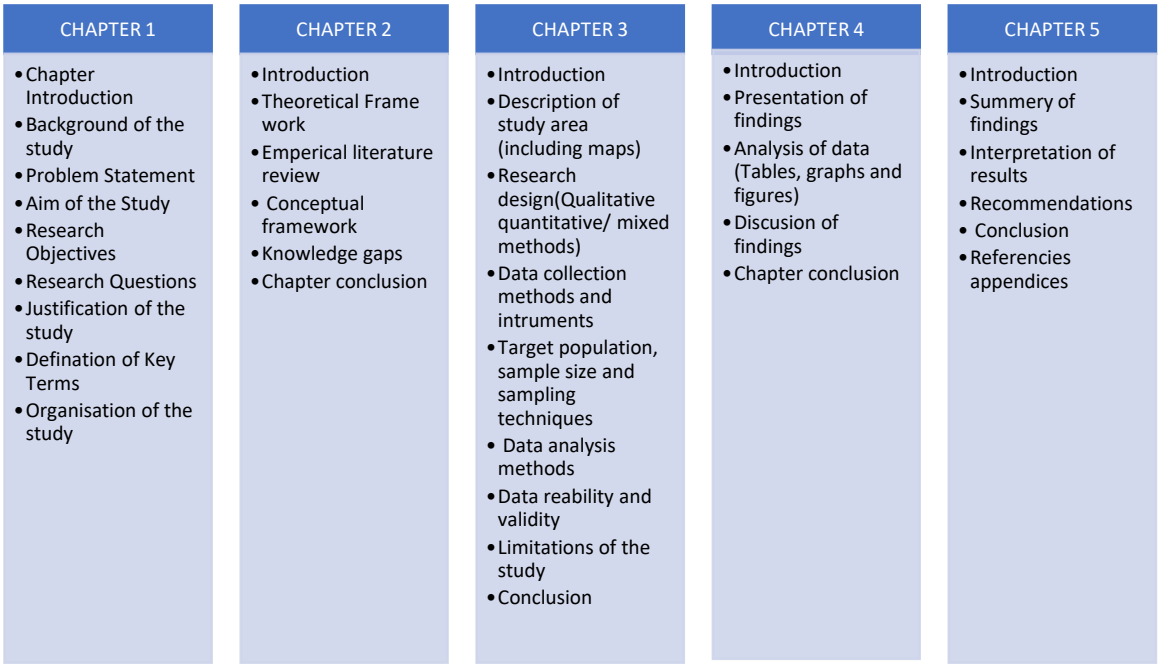

Figure 1.1 Organisation of the study

This dissertation is organised into five chapters, each addressing specific components of the research process logically and systematically.

Chapter one introduces the study by presenting the background to the research, the problem statement, research aim, objectives and research questions. It further outlines the justification of the study, provides definitions of key terms, and establishes the overall direction of the research.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature on gender-based violence and women's empowerment. The chapter critically examines theoretical perspectives and empirical studies from global, regional, and local contexts. It also identifies gaps in existing literature and provides the theoretical and conceptual framework that guides the study.

Chapter Three describes the study's research approach. The study area, research design and methodology, data collection tools and procedures, sampling strategies, and sample size are all described. Along with discussing the study's limitations, the chapter also outlines the procedures utilised for data analysis and the steps taken to guarantee validity and dependability.

Chapter Four presents and analyses the research findings. The data are organised according to the study objectives and are presented using appropriate tables, figures and descriptive explanations. The chapter further interprets the findings and compares them with existing literature to provide a deeper understanding of the results.

Chapter Five summarises the main findings, makes inferences from the study's findings, and makes suggestions for improving women's empowerment and combating gender-based violence. It also makes recommendations for future research topics.

1.10 Chapter conclusion

This chapter presents the study by exploring the context and significance of gender-based violence (GBV) and its effects on women's empowerment. It emphasises that, despite global and national initiatives to combat GBV, the issue remains widespread, especially in rural areas like Muzarabani District. The chapter also points out a gap in understanding how GBV influences women's empowerment at the local level, and it details the research aim, objectives, and questions. Additionally, it justifies the study's importance and clarifies key concepts for better understanding. Overall, this chapter lays the groundwork for the study and prepares for an in-depth review of the literature in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature about gender-based violence (GBV) and women's empowerment is thoroughly reviewed in this chapter, with particular focus on rural contexts in developing countries. The chapter examines existing theoretical perspectives, empirical studies, and conceptual linkages that explain the connection between women's empowerment and GBV. The study's theoretical underpinnings are first described, and then empirical literature from local, regional, and global contexts is analyzed. The chapter further develops a conceptual framework illustrating the interaction between GBV and empowerment. It concludes by identifying key knowledge gaps that justify the current study. Through this structured review, the chapter establishes a solid academic foundation for analysing how gender-based violence influences women's empowerment outcomes in Muzarabani District.

2.2 Theoretical framework

This study is directed through multipletheoretical perspectives which give a thorough explanation of gender-based violence (GBV) as well as its implications for women’s empowerment. The complexity of GBV necessitates a multi- theoretical approach because no single framework sufficiently explains its structural, relational, and individual dimensions. While some theories emphasise power relations and systemic inequality, others focus on individual agency and environmental influences. In this regard, feminist theory, ecological theory, and the capability approach are adopted as complementary frameworks. Each perspective offers distinct insights into the causes and consequences of GBV, and together they provide aholistic analytical lens for examining the situation in Muzarabani district.

2.2.1 Feminist theory

Feminist theory gives a foundational framework to comprehend violence against women by situating it within systems of patriarchy and gender inequity. According to Walby (1990),

patriarchy functions as a network within social systems that let men to control and take advantage of women in a variety of settings, including the home, the workplace, and the government. GBV is viewed in this perspective not as a singular act but rather as a structural mechanism that reinforces male dominance. This perspective is further strengthened by Dobash and Dobash (1979), who argue that violence against women is embedded in societal norms that legitimize male authority, particularly within intimate relationships. Such norms often normalize abuse and discourage resistance, thereby sustaining unequal gender relations. In many communities, these patterns are reproduced through everyday practices that reinforce male control over women's behaviour and choices. Connell (1987) expands this analysis through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which refers to dominant forms of masculinity that legitimize men's power over women. In rural contexts such as Muzarabani District, these ideals often manifest in expectations that men should control. Additional perspectives that account for multiple levels of influence are needed.

2.2.2 Ecological theory

Ecological theory offers a more comprehensive framework to comprehend gender-based violence by examining how multiple levels of influences interact to shape behaviour. Originally developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), the model was later adapted by Heise (1998) to explain violence against women as a product of interacting factors at the individual, relational, community, and societal levels. At the individual level, characteristics such as education, age, and economic status influence vulnerability to violence, with lower levels of education often associated with increased risk. Moving to the relational level, power imbalances within the households, particularly those linked to economic dependency, play a central role in shaping the dynamics of abuse according to Walby (1990). Heise (1998) emphasises that unequal decision-making power within relationshipsoften creates conditions that enable violencee. At the community level, social norms and peer causes normalisation of violence. For example, Jewkes et al. (2015) agree that there are some communities where violence may be viewed as a legitimate way of resolving conflict, which reduces the likelihood of intervention. These norms are reinforced at the societal level, where legal systems, cultural values, and economic structures either challenge or sustain gender inequalities. Ecological theory's strength is its role to convey the intricacy of GBV by recognising that no single factor can fully explain its occurrence. Heise et al. (2019) highlight that effective interventions must therefore operate across multiple levels, addressing not only individual behaviour but also broader social and

institutional factors. This aligns with findings from UN Women (2020), which show that weak legal enforcement and limited access to support services often perpetuate cycles of violence, particularly in rural areas. However, while ecological theory provides a comprehensive framework for identifyingcontributing factors, compared to feminist theory, it does not specifically address concerns of power and inequality. As a result, its ability to explain things is enhanced when paired with a perspective that focuses more directly on structural dynamics.

2.2.3 The capability approach

Sen (1999) established the capacity approach, which moves the emphasis from structural analysis to individual well-being and freedom. It defines development as the growth of the abilities of individuals, which refer to their real opportunities to achieve valued ways of living. In this framework, empowerment is closely linked to the ability to exercise choice and agency. Nussbaum (2000) builds on this perspective by identifying core human capabilities, including bodily integrity, control over one's environment, and freedom from violence. These capabilities are directly undermined by gender based violence, which restricts women's autonomy and limits their life choices. For example, women who experience violence may be prevented from participating in economic activities or engaging in community decision-making. The relationship between GBV and empowerment is further explained by Kabeer (1999), who conceptualises empowerment as a process involving access to resources, the ability to exercise agency, and the achievement of desired outcomes. Gender based violence disrupts all three dimensions by limiting access to resources, undermining confidence, and restricting participation in social and economic life. Sen (1999) also emphasises that the deprivation of capabilities has broader implications for development, as it reduces productivity and reinforces poverty. This is supported by evidence from the World Bank (2020), which demonstrates that abused females are prone to experience financial instability and have lower earning potential. In rural contexts such as Muzarabani, where resources are already limited, these effects are often more severe. Despite its strengths, the capability approach has been criticised for not fully addressing the structural causes of inequality. While it effectively highlights the consequences of GBV, it does not sufficiently explain why such inequalities persist. This restriction reinforces how crucial it is to incorporate it with other theoretical viewpoints.

2.2.4 Integration of theoretical frameworks

A Combination of feminist philosophy, ecological theory, and the capacity approach provides an understandable framework for examining women's empowerment and gender-based violence. Feminist theory explains the structural roots of inequality by highlighting how patriarchy and power relations sustain GBV. This is enhanced by ecological theory, which shows how a variety of interrelated factors at many levels contribute to the prevalence and persistence of violence. The capability approach adds a critical dimension by focusing on how GBV affects women's freedoms, choices, and overall well-being. By combining these perspectives, the study is able to move beyond a single-dimensional explanation and capture the complexity of GBV in its entirety. This integrated framework is particularly relevant for analysing the situation in Muzarabani District, where cultural norms, economic constraints, and institutional weaknesses intersect. Furthermore, the combined approach supports the development of actions at multiple levels that deal with both causes and consequences of GBV. It enables the study to connect individual outcomes with structural injustices, giving policy recommendations targeted at a more comprehensive basis for reducing gender-based violence and increasing women's empowerment.

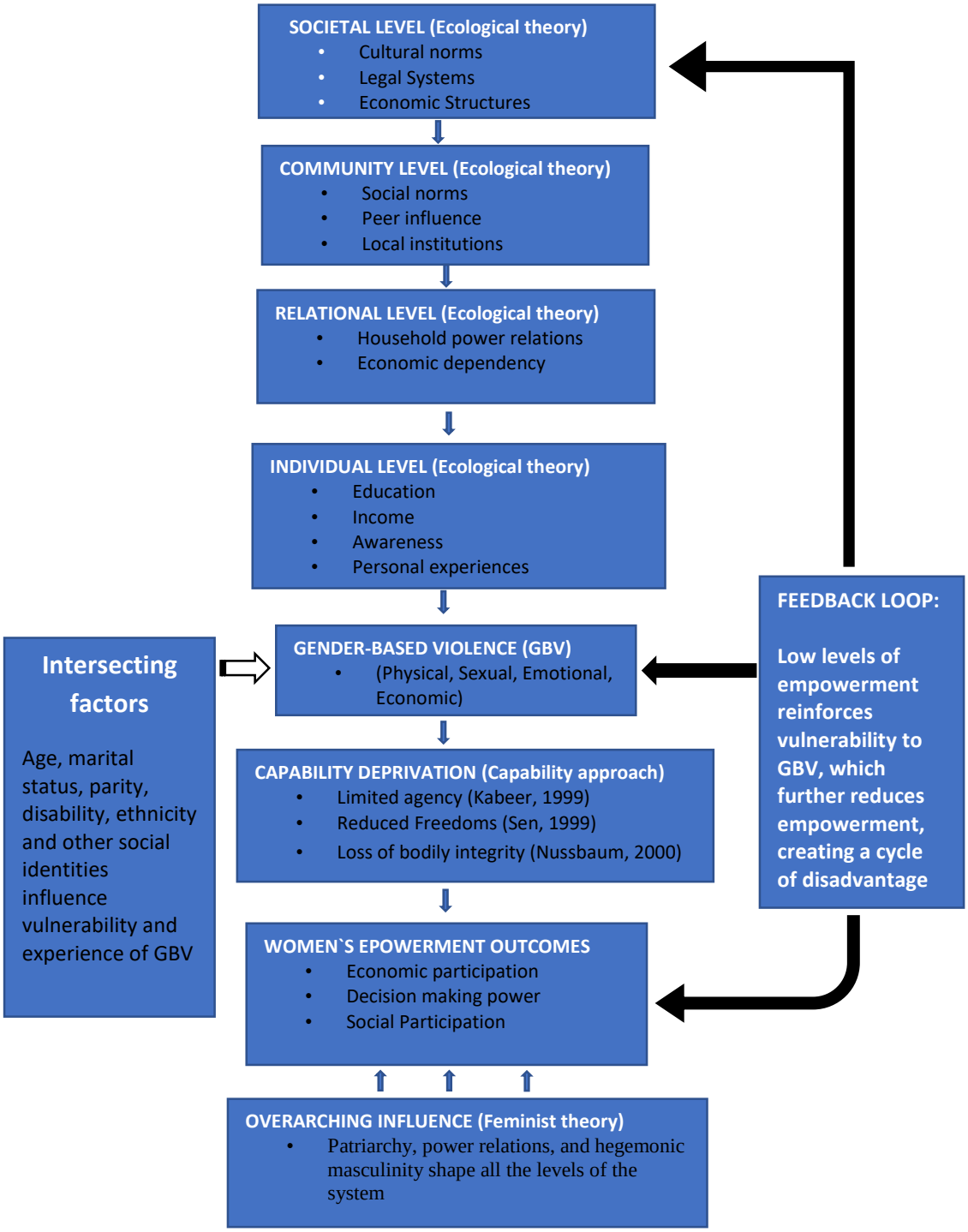

Figure 2.1 Integrated theoretical framework for analysing Gender-Based Violence on women empowerment

2.2.5 Explanation of the integrated framework

The integrated theoretical framework, which is in Figure 2.1, combines insights from feminist theory, ecological theory, and the capability approach to give a thorough grasp of gender-based violence and women's empowerment. The framework illustrates that GBV is not a one-dimensional entity, but rather the outcome of interconnected factors operating across multiple levels of society while also being rooted in broader systems of power and inequality.

Ecological theory provides the structural backbone of the framework by explaining how elements may interact at the individual, relationship, community, and societal levels to influence the occurrence of gender-based violence. At the societal level, there are factors like cultural norms, legal systems and also economic structures which tend to shape the broader environment within which gender relations are defined. These societal influences filter down to the community level, where social norms and institutional practises may either condone or challenge violence. At the relational level, household power dynamics, particularly those linked to economic dependency, are crucial in determining women's vulnerability to abuse within communities. Finally, at an individual level, there are factors such as education, income , as well as awareness which all influence both exposure to violence and the ability to respond to it. This multi-layered structure demonstrates that GBV is produced through the interplay of forces at various levels as opposed to a single cause.

Feminist theory cuts across all levels of the ecological framework by providing a critical understanding of the underlying power relations that sustain gender-based violence. Patriarchy, as conceptualised by Walby (1990), operates as an overarching system that shapes norms, institutions, and rrelationships in ways that provides men and subordinate women. This is further reinforced through hegemonic masculinity, as discussed by Connell (1987), which legitimises male control and dominance within both public and private spheres. By positioning patriarchy as a cross-cutting influence, the framework highlights that GBV is more than a result of situational factors but is firmly ingrained in structural inequalities that permeate all levels of society.

The capability approach is incorporated into the framework to explain the consequences of gender-based violence for women’s empowerment. Once GBV occurs, it directly leads to capability deprivation by limiting women’s freedoms and opportunities. As Sen (1999) argues, development is fundamentally about capabilities, yet violence restricts women`s ability to make choices, access resources, and participate in social and economic life. Nussbaum (2000) further emphasises that violence undermines core capabilities such as bodily integrity and

control over one's environment. In addition, Kabeer (1999) highlights that empowerment involves resources, agency, and achievements, all of which are disrupted by GBV. This results in reduced economic participation, limited decision-making power, and restricted social engagement.

The framework also highlights a reciprocal relationship between violence against women and the empowerment of women. Low levels of empowerment make women more vulnerable to violence, particularly when they lack autonomy and are economically dependent, which renders it more challenging for them to oppose or flee bad situations. At the same time, continued exposure to violence further diminishes empowerment, creating a cyclical relationship between GBV and disempowerment.

All things considered, the combination of these three theoretical stances offers this study a comprehensive analytical instrument. In addition to capturing the dynamic interconnections between structural determinants and individual outcomes, it enables the analysis of the underlying causes and effects of gender-based violence. This makes the framework particularly relevant for analysing the situation in Muzarabani District, where cultural norms, economic challenges, and institutional limitations intersect to shape women's experiences of violence and empowerment.

2.3 Conceptual framework

In Muzarabani district, the study's conceptual framework shows how gender-based violence (GBV) relates to women's empowerment. GBV is treated as the independent variable, while women's empowerment is the dependent variable, influenced by several intervening factors. Gender-based violence includes financial, emotional, sexual, and physical abuse. Women's well-being is directly impacted by these types of violence, which additionally restricts their capacity for autonomous decision-making. On the other hand, economic participation, social engagement, and decision-making power are used to gauge women's empowerment.

Additionally, the framework acknowledges the significance of intervening factors such as institutional support, cultural norms, education, and the ability to resources access. These variables affect how common GBV is as well as how empowered women are. For example, higher levels of education may reduce vulnerability to violence and strengthen women's

capacity to preserve their rights. Similarly, supportive organisational frameworks can provide protection and resources for victims of violence.

The relationship between GBV and empowerment is therefore not linear but influenced by multiple interacting factors. This conceptualisation provides a basis for analysing how different forms of violence affect various dimensions of empowerment within the study area.

2.4 Empirical literature review

2.4.1 Definition and scope of gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviour expectations, and identities that societies assign to individuals based on their sex (WHO, 2019). The World Health Organisation (2022) defines gender as the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed, including norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being female or male, as well as relationships with each other. In contrast to biological sex, which is based on anatomical and physiological traits, gender is influenced by institutional procedures, social interactions, and cultural standards, and therefore varies across time and context. Contemporary scholarship, such as work by Crespi and Scocco (2025), emphasises that gender is dynamic rather than fixed, continuously evolving in response to broader social, economic, and political transformations. Similarly, UN Women (2022) highlights that gender encompassess not only socially assigned roles but also the power relations that impact decision-making, opportunity, and resource accessibility. Recent critiques by Renström (2025) further suggest that these social categories function prescriptively to specify desired behaviours while limiting non-conforming identities.

Differentiating between gender and sex is way more important in the comprehension of inequality in the context of development. While gender refers to socially manufactured inequalities that frequently lead to unequal distributions of privilege and power, sex is defined as biological disparities between females and males. According to the World Bank (2023), gender norms embedded within institutions such as families, education systems, and labour markets shape individuals' opportunities and outcomes, often disadvantaging women and girls. These norms influence access to education, employment, and leadership positions, thereby reinforcing structural inequalities. In many developing contexts,including rural Zimbabwe, such inequalitiess are further compounded by limited economic opportunities and restricted

access to resources. Recent studies by Bhiri (2025) in Zimbabwean rural settings illustrate that "hidden curricula" in schools and homes , such as the heavy burden of domestic chores, systematically limit girls' academic success and reinforce patriarchal norms.

Gender is also perceived differently across societies, with rural contexts often characterised by more rigid and conventional gender norms. According to the expectations of some communities that exist are African, it is the duty of women to look after the home and provide care, while typically, men are viewed as the rulers of homes and the main decision-makers. These socially constructed roles not only shape daily activities but also engagement in public life and access to economic resources. Research by UNESCO (2023) indicates that such norms are reinforced through socialisation processes, cultural practices, and community institutions, making them deeply embedded and resistant to change without deliberate interventions. Furthermore, Rori and Shakil (2025) note that the monetisation of marriage through practises like lobola (bride price) continues to influence gender dynamics in rural Zimbabwe, often prioritising immediate cultural traditions over long-term formal education for girls.

Importantly, gender should be understood as a relational concept that reflects interactions among men and women and the allocation of influence within these alliances. As women are often the primary focus of gender studies due to their disproportionate exposure to inequality, recent literature increasingly highlights the role of masculinity norms in shaping behaviour, as discussed by Logoz et al. (2023).Expectations of male dominance, authority, and control can reinforce unequal power relations and contribute to harmful practices, including gender-based violence (GBV). Understanding gender as both relational and dynamic is therefore essential for analysing how inequalities are produced and sustained, as well as how they can be transformed to promote women’s empowerment.

2.4.2 Conceptualising gender based violence (GBV)

Destructive acts directed at individuals because of their gender, that are brought on by discriminatory social norms and unequal power relations, are referred to as gender-based violence (GBV). The United Nations (2021) describes GBV as any behavior, including intimidation, force, or unjust denial of liberty that causes or is likely to cause bodily, sexual, psychological, or financial harm or suffering, whether in public or private settings. This definition highlights the extensive range of GBV, which goes beyond physical violence to include various forms of abuse that threaten human dignity, well-being, and fundamental rights.

Such destructive acts are brought by discriminatory social norms and unequal power relations are referred to as gender-based violence (GBV). GBV is defined by the United Nations (2021) as any behaviour, whether in public or private settings, that results in or is likely to result in bodily, sexual, psychological, or financial injury or suffering, including intimidation, force, or unjust denial of liberty. This definition emphasises the wide variety of GBV, which extends beyond physical violence to cover many types of abuse that jeopardise fundamental rights, human dignity, and well-being. The World Health Organization (2021) also stresses that GBV is a significant public health and human rights challenge with profound social and economic impacts.

GBV manifests in various interconnected forms, such as economic, psychological, sexual, and physical aggression. According to UN Women (2022), these forms of violence often occur simultaneously, reinforcing each other and intensifying their overall impact on victims. This multidimensional nature makes GBV particularly complex and difficult to address through single interventions. In Southern African contexts, Naicker (2025) describes GBV as a "shadow pandemic" underpinned by structural issues and patriarchal socio-religious constructions that disenfranchise women across multiple spheres.

Although GBV can affect both men and women, contemporary evidence consistently shows that, because of ingrained gender inequality, there is an imbalanced effect on women and girls. The World Health Organisation (2021) reports that intimate partner violence is the most common form of GBV globally, with women constituting the majority of victims. This disproportionate impact reflects broader structural conditions in which power is unevenly distributed, enabling violence to be used as a mechanism of control and domination, a view supported by the recent findings of Leone et al (2025) regarding institutional gender gaps.

Societal perceptions of GBV have a significant impact on its reporting and incidence. In many communities, particularly in rural settings, as a component of cultural norms, some types of violence are accepted or excused, such as marital expectations. Research by the United Nations Population Fund (2022) indicates that such norms discourage reporting and reinforce silences among the victims due to fear of stigma, social exclusion, and retaliation. Furthermore, recent studies in the region by Logoz et al. (2023) emphasize that the normalisation of aggression is often passed down through generations via social learning, where rigid gender roles make interpersonal violence socially acceptable.

Furthermore, GBV should be understood as both an individual and structural phenomenon shaped by a confluence of institutional, legal, cultural, and economic elements. Contemporary studies, like those by Elefante et al. (2023), emphasise that focusing solely on individual behaviour is insufficient to address the problem effectively. Instead, comprehensive approaches are required that tackle underlying power relations, social norms, and systemic inequalities. This broader conceptualisation aligns with feminist and ecological perspectives, which highlight the roles of societal structures in sustaining violence, as well as with the capability approach, which draws attention to the ways that GBV limits people's liberties and chances in life.

2.4.3 Global perspective on gender-based violence and women's empowerment

Empirical evidence on an international scale consistently demonstrates that gender-based violence remains a pervasive challenge with far-reaching implications for women's empowerment. According to the World Health Organization (2021), nearly one in three women globally has experienced physical or sexual violence, most often at the hands of an intimate partner. This statistic shows that not only the scale of the problem but also its deeply rooted nature within social and institutional structures. Despite increased international commitments, including the adoption of Sustainable Development Goal 5, the persistence of GBV suggests that progress towards gender equality remains uneven and constrained by several barriers related to the existing structural systems.

Global studies demonstrate the complex effects of gender-based violence on women's welfare and empowerment, going beyond its prevalence. According to Heise et al. (2019), women who are victims of violence frequently suffer from serious physical and mental health issues, such as depression, anxiety, and chronic illness, which have an impact on their ability to work and engage in economic activities. Research from the World Bank (2020) shows that survivors of violence are more likely to have unstable jobs and lower incomes. These findings indicate that GBV not only affects individual health outcomes but also undermines women's economic empowerment and broader development processes.

In addition to having an impact on the economy, gender-based violence significantly restricts women's autonomy and capacity for decision-making. According to UN Women (2020), women who undergo abuse are less likely to become involved in political or community leadership roles because of stigma, fear, and limited mobility. This limitation on participation

reinforces gender inequalities by excluding women from spaces where decisions affecting their lives are made. Furthermore, the psychological effects of violence, such as reduced self-esteem and increased fear, further impair women's ability to stand up for their rights and decide on their own decisions.

Global research also emphasises the intergenerational consequences of gender-based violence. Studies by UNICEF (2021) indicate that children raised in violent households are more likely to normalise violence and reproduce similar behaviours in adulthood, either as victims or perpetrators. This cycle perpetuates gender inequality across generations, making GBV not only a present concern but also a long-term developmental challenge. The persistence of such patterns suggests that interventions must address both immediate and structural drivers of violence.

However, despite extensive global research, there remains debate on the effectiveness of existing interventions. Heise et al. (2019) contend that although awareness efforts and legislative reforms have boosted GBV reporting and recognition, the underlying societal norms that support violence have not been substantially altered. This emphasises a requirement for more all-encompassing approaches that successfully tackle the underlying causes of violence against women

2.4.4 Regional perspective: sub-Saharan Africa

A complex interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional variables plays a pivotal role in influencing GBV in Sub-Saharan Africa. Empirical research in the field indicates that cultural practices that legitimise male dominance and female subjection often reinforce patriarchal norms, which remain a major contributor to GBV. The African Development Bank (2018) claims that systemic inequities that restrict women's access to opportunities and resources for education and decision-making make them more vulnerable to violence in many African communities.

Economic dependency is widely identified as a key factor linking gender-based violence to women in surrounding areas. Research by Duflo (2012), although slightly older but still foundational and demonstrates that women’s lack of access to economic resources reduces their bargaining power within households, making it difficult for them to resist or leave abusive relationships. More recent studies, such as those by Owoo and Lambon-Quayefio (2021),

further show that, additionally, it makes people more vulnerable to violence, and economic weakness also limits women's ability to recover from its effects. This creates a reinforcing cycle in which poverty and violence sustain each other.

Cultural norms also hold a big influence on how individuals in sub-Saharan Africa perceive gender-based violence. Jewkes et al. (2015) argue that in many communities, violence is often normalised as a form of discipline or conflict resolution within intimate relationships. This normalisation is further reinforced by social expectations that discourage women from reporting abuse, often because of a fear of social rejection or shame. As a result, GBV remains significantly underreported, which complicates efforts to measure its prevalence and design effective interventions.

Additionally, there is mounting proof that education and awareness can aid in decreasing gender-based violence while simultaneously enhancing women's empowerment. Bhalotra et al. (2021) find that increased access to education is associated with greater awareness of rights and reduced tolerance for violence among women. Similarly, community-based initiatives which involve men and women in conversations about gender equality have demonstrated promising results in changing attitudes and behaviours. However, the impact of such interventions varies across contexts, as deeply entrenched cultural norms may limit their effectiveness.

Institutional factors also affect continuation and response to gender-based violence in the region. Inadequate support services, weak legal enforcement, and restricted access to justice frequently impede attempts to deal with GBV effectively. As noted by UN Women (2020), even where legal frameworks exist, implementation gaps and resource constraints limit their impact, particularly in rural areas. This highlights the importance of strengthening institutional capacity alongside community-level interventions.

The need for context-specific strategies to address the sociocultural and economic causes of gender-based violence is generally highlighted by empirical data from sub-Saharan Africa. Even if there has been progress in increasing awareness and advancing gender equality, enduring structural hurdles still restrict women's empowerment and maintain the prevalence of GBV.

2.4.5 Zimbabwe context

In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence remains a significant social and developmental challenge despite the presence of legislative and regulatory structures designed to safeguard women. The Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2022) reports that a substantial proportion of women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence, with higher prevalence rates observed in rural areas. This suggests that while legislative measures such as the Domestic Violence Act provide a formal framework for protection, their effectiveness is often constrained by contextual factors at the community level.

Empirical studies in Zimbabwe indicate that socio-economic conditions have a substantial effect on women's vulnerability to gender-based violence. Research by Dumba and Chirisa (2020) shows that poverty and unemployment significantly increase women's reliance on men, thereby limiting their possibilities to flee toxic relationships. Limited access to work and educational possibilities, especially in rural areas, exacerbates this economic dependency. Because there aren't many good options, women can continue to be caught in violent cycles.

In the Zimbabwean community, societal norms and traditional acts are factors that results in gender-based violence and vulnerability of women. Studies have shown that patriarchal values continue to influence gender relations, often reinforcing male dominance and restricting women's autonomy. As noted by Mudege et al. (2017), societal expectations that prioritise male authority can discourage women from challenging abusive behaviour or seeking external support. It is commonly evidenced in rural areas, where community structures and social networks are responsible for making individual behaviour.

The impact of gender-based violence on women's empowerment in Zimbabwe is evident across multiple dimensions. Women who experience violence often face limitations in decision-making, reduced engagement in social and economic activities, and limited access to resources. Chireshe (2015) highlights that fear of violence and social stigma can prevent women from engaging in community leadership or pursuing economic opportunities. This restricts more general development outcomes not only having an impact on personal wellbeing.

Furthermore, barriers to reporting and accessing support services remain a significant challenge. According to UNFPA (2021), many women in Zimbabwe are reluctant to report

cases of violence due to fear of stigma, lack of awareness, and limited trust in legal institutions. In rural areas such as Muzarabani, these challenges are exacerbated by geographical isolation and limited availability of support services. This further reinforces cycles of violence and disempowerment.

While existing studies provide important information about the frequency and contributing factors of gender-based violence throughout Zimbabwe, they often focus on national trends or urban settings. There is limited empirical research that examines how GBV specifically affects women's empowerment within rural districts like Muzarabani. This indicates the need for localised research to capture all the unique socio-cultural and economic dynamics influencing both violence and empowerment at the community level.

2.4.6 Link between gender-based violence and women's empowerment

Empirical research indicates a substantial and complex relationship between women's empowerment and GBV, with data demonstrating that violence both reflects and maintains current gender disparities. Rather than being an isolated social issue, GBV is increasingly understood as a structural constraint that directly restricts women's capacity to use resources, exercise agency, and actively engage in development processes. Contemporary studies emphasise that violence as causes and an influencing factor of disempowerment, thereby creating a cyclical relationship which is difficult to destroy without targeted interventions.

At the economic level, empirical research indicates that GBV significantly undermines women's productivity, labour force participation, and income-generating capacity. Studies by the International Labour Organization (2022) and UN Women (2021) demonstrate that women who experience violence are more likely to face employment disruptions, absenteeism and reduced earnings. In many cases, abusive partners actively restrict women's involvement in economic activities as a means of control, limiting their financial independence and reinforcing dependency. This economic disempowerment not only affects individual women but also has broader implications for household welfare and national development, as it reduces overall economic productivity and deepens poverty levels.

Women`s involvement in societal life and carrying out leadership roles is limited by GBV. Empirical evidence suggests that fear of violence, social stigma, and cultural expectations often discourage women from engaging in leadership roles or public activities. Research by the

United Nations Development Programme (2023) has noted that women who are victims of violence are less likely to participate in local governance structures or community organisations, thereby limiting their influence over decisions that affect their lives. This exclusion perpetuates gender inequalities by maintaining male dominance in public and private spheres, further constraining women's empowerment.

In addition, GBV has profound psychological effects that undermine women's confidence, self-esteem and capacity for agency. Studies in public health and development research show that survivors of violence often experience trauma, depression, and anxiety, which can significantly reduce their ability to make independent decisions or pursue opportunities. This psychological dimension of disempowerment is particularly critical, as it affects not only immediate wellbeing but also long-term life outcomes. As highlighted in recent World Health Organization reports (2021), the mental health consequences of GBV can persist over time, limiting women's ability to rebuild their lives and achieve empowerment even after the violence has ceased.

However, empirical literature also reveals that the linkage between women`s empowerment and GBV is intricate and occasionally paradoxical. While increased empowerment, particularly economic empowerment, can reduce vulnerability to violence in the long term, some studies suggest that it may initially trigger resistance from male partners, leading to a temporary increase in violence. Research by Bhalotra et al. (2020) and Peterman et al. (2022) indicates that shifts in traditional gender roles can challenge established power dynamics, resulting in backlash effects. This highlights that empowerment alone is insufficient to end GBV unless it is combined with more significant adjustments to institutional structures, societal norms, and attitudes.

Furthermore, recent empirical studies emphasise the importance of integrated approaches that address both GBV and women's empowerment simultaneously. Interventions that combine economic support, legal protection, and community-based awareness programmes have been shown to be more effective in reducing violence and enhancing empowerment outcomes (Hossain et al., 2014). Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa suggests that programmes promoting gender equality, male engagement, and women's economic inclusion can lead to significant reductions in GBV while improving women's decision-making power and social status (Hossain et al.,2014). This reinforces the argument that addressing GBV requires a holistic approach that targets structural, cultural, and individual factors.

In general, there is a direct and reciprocal factual relationship between women's empowerment and gender-based violence (Sanni et al.,2025). While a lack of empowerment makes women more vulnerable to violence, GBV undermines empowerment by restricting women's access to resources, agency, and involvement (UNFPA, 2024). The necessity for context-specific research that looks at how these processes function in certain settings is highlighted by this interdependence (Jewkes et al 2014). Designing interventions that effectively address gender-based violence and women's empowerment in rural areas like Muzarabani necessitates an understanding of this relationship in an integrated and long-lasting way.

2.5 Knowledge gaps

Despite extensive research on gender-based violence and women's empowerment, there are numerous deficiencies throughout the literature. The dearth of context-specific research concentrating on rural areas like Muzarabani is one significant gap. The majority of current research tends to generalise findings across geographical areas, ignoring the distinct socio-cultural and economic factors that influence GBV and empowerment experiences locally.

Another gap relates to the limited integration of GBV and empowerment in empirical studies. Many studies examine these issues separately, without adequately exploring their interrelationship. This limits understanding of how different forms of violence influence specific dimensions of empowerment, like the ability to make decisions or be financially independent.

Additionally, there isn't enough in-depth research on how variations in events of GBV affect women differently within the same community. Factors such as age, education, and economic status may influence exposure to violence and access to empowerment opportunities, yet these variations are sometimes underexplored.

Furthermore, existing studies provide limited evidence on the efficiency of interventions programmed for solving both GBV and women’s empowerment issues simultaneously. This makes it difficult for policymakers and practitioners to design targeted strategies that respond to local needs. The current study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between gender-based violence and women's empowerment in Muzarabani District by filling up these gaps.

2.6 Chapter conclusion

Using both theoretical and empirical viewpoints, this chapter has reviewed pertinent material on gender-based violence and women's empowerment. GBV has been demonstrated to be a widespread problem with strong roots in systemic injustices, with significant implications for women`s empowerment and development. Theoretical frameworks like feminist theory, the capability approach, and the ecological theory offer insightful information about the intricate dynamics of GBV. The pervasiveness of violence and its detrimental impacts on women's economic, social, and political engagement have been demonstrated by empirical research. The chapter has also developed a conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between GBV and women's empowerment, taking into account intervening factors such as education, cultural norms, and institutional support. Finally, it recognized significant deficiencies in the corpus of existing research, such as the lack of context-specific studies and the weak integration of GBV and empowerment. These observations function as a solid basis for the following chapter, which describes the study approach utilized to look at the way women's empowerment in Muzarabani District is impacted by gender-based violence.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The research technique used to examine how gender-based violence (GBV) affects women's empowerment in Muzarabani District is described in this chapter. The study area, research design and approach, data collection tools and procedures, target population, sampling strategies, and sample size are all thoroughly described. The chapter further outlines the techniques utilised for data analysis, as well as steps taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. Lastly, it explores the obstacles that arose throughout the research process. The methodological decisions made in this study are in line with the goals of the investigation and are meant to produce reliable and context-specific data.

3.2 Description of the study area

The research was carried out on wards 15 and 8, known as Gatu and Muringazuva in Muzarabani district. It is located in the northern part of Zimbabwe within Mashonaland Central Province. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (2020), the district is located in Agro-ecological areas IV and V, which are distinguished by frequent drought conditions, high temperatures, and irregular and low rainfall. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (2020), these regions are generally unsuitable for reliable rain-fed agriculture, which has severe implications for rural livelihoods. Additionally, parts of Muzarabani are prone to seasonal flooding due to their proximity to the Zambezi River, further increasing environmental vulnerability and disrupting agriculturel activities.

The majority of the local economy has its foundation on subsistence farming, where households raise small-scale livestock in addition to growing crops including cotton, sorghum, and maize. However, agricultural productivity remains low due to climatic uncertainties, limited access to farming inputs, and inadequate irrigation systems. As noted by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2022), rural households in districts such as Muzarabani often supplement their livelihoods through informal economic activities, including petty trading and seasonal labour migration. These economic constraints contribute to persistent poverty, which in turn shapes women’s vulnerability to gender-based violence and limits opportunities for economic empowerment.

In terms of population characteristics, Muzarabani District is marked by dispersed rural settlements and limited access to essential social services. Access to healthcare facilities is often constrained by distance and inadequate resources, while educational attainment levels, particularly among women, remain relatively low. UN Women (2021) highlights that such structural inequalities in rural areas reduce women's access to information, economic opportunities, and support systems, thereby reinforcing gender disparities. These conditions not only limit women's empowerment but also affect their ability to respond effectively to experiences of violence.

Infrastructure development within the district remains underdeveloped, with poor road networks, inadequate availability of sanitary facilities and clean water, and weak communication systems. These infrastructural challenges have broader implications beyond economic development as they also affect justice and assistance for victims of gender-based violence. For example, long distances to police stations or health centres may discourage women from reporting abuse or seeking assistance, thereby perpetuating cycles of violence and silence.

Culturally, Muzarabani District is influenced by deeply rooted traditional norms and patriarchal systems that shape gender roles and power relations within households and communities. As argued by Mudege et al. (2017), such norms in rural Zimbabwe often position men as primary decision-makers while women are expected to occupy subordinate roles. These gendered expectations can contribute to the normalisation of gender-based violence and restrict women's autonomy in areas such as decision-making, resource control, and participation in community affairs. In some cases, cultural practices such as early marriages and male-dominated inheritance systems further reinforce these inequalities.

Moreover, women's vulnerability is increased by their lack of knowledge about their legal rights and available support systems. Many women may be hesitant to disclose violent incidents because of concern about stigma, social exclusion, or lack of trust in formal institutions. This situation reflects a broader interaction between socio-economic conditions, cultural norms, and institutional weaknesses, all of which shape the prevalence of gender-based violence and the extent of women's empowerment in the district.

The selection of Muzarabani District as the study area is therefore justified by its relevance to the research problem. The district provides a context in which environmental challenges,

economic constraints, cultural practices, and institutional limitations intersect, making it an appropriate setting for examining how gender-based violence affects women's empowerment. By concentrating on this particular area, the study is able to generate context-specific insights that help ensure a more thorough and advanced comprehension of the connection between GBV and women's empowerment in rural Zimbabwe.

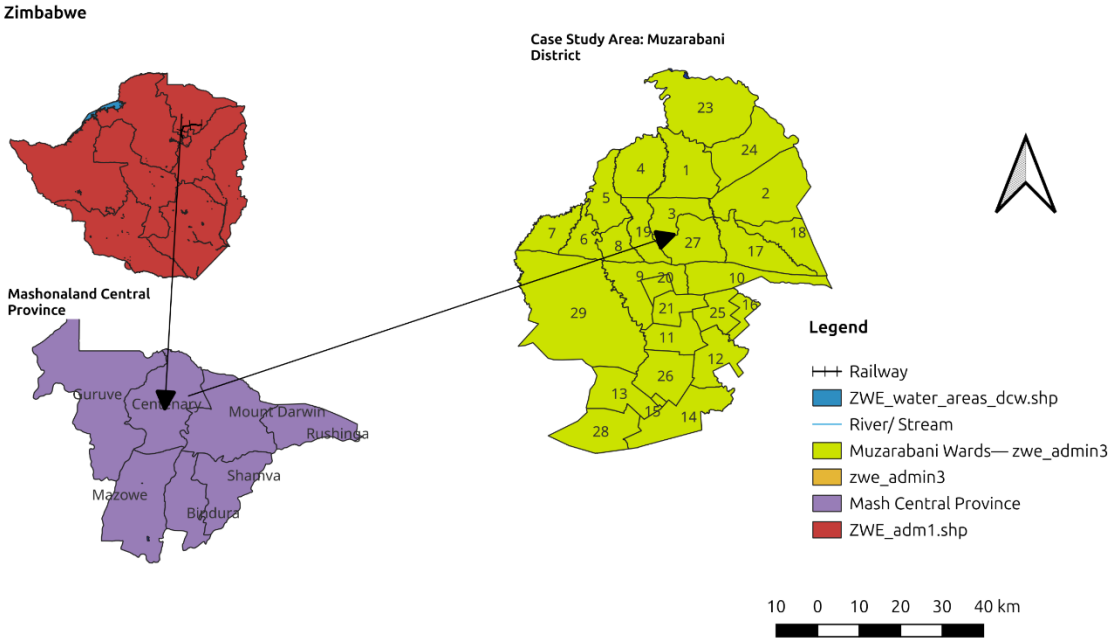

Figure 3.1: Study area map showing Zimbabwe, Mashonaland Central province, Muzarabani District and its wards; [source: author]

3.3 Research design

A mixed-methods research design was employed in this study, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. By integrating quantitative data with in-depth contextual insights, a mixed-methods approach enables a more thorough comprehension of the study problem. The frequency and types of gender-based violence, as well as the degree of women's empowerment in the district, were assessed using a quantitative method. The researcher was able to spot trends and connections between variables as a result. In contrast, the qualitative method was used to

investigate participants' attitudes, views, and experiences with GBV and empowerment. An enhanced comprehension of the social and cultural factors impacting the event under investigation was thus made possible. By enabling data triangulation, the combination of these two methods improves the validity of the results.

3.4 Data collection methods

In this investigation, the researcher has made use of both primary and secondary data collection methods, which were expected to provide significant information about how gender-based violence affects women`s empowerment in Muzarabani District in Zimbabwe. The integration of multiple approaches has helped the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. This enhanced the depth and validity of the findings. Having more than one data collection method is good for triangulation and helps the researcher gain a fuller picture of complex social phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used primary data collected directly from participants through the use of questionnaires, key informant interviews, and focus groups, and secondary data was obtained through document review.

3.4.1 Questionnaire method

A total of 44 questionnaires were administered to women from wards 15 and 8 (Gatu and Muringazuva). The respondents were selected using random sampling, ensuring that each eligible woman had a chance of being included in the study. The questionnaires consisted of both closed-ended and a few open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to create quantitative data on the prevalence, forms, and frequency of gender-based violence, while open-ended questions allowed respondents to review their real-life experiences as well as their views pertaining to GBV. The choice of women as respondents was deliberate, as they are the primary victims of gender-based violence and are central to the study of women`s empowerment. This method was appropriate since it made it possible to gather uniform information from a relatively large sample, thereby enhancing comparability and statistical analysis.

3.4.2 Key informant interviews

A total of ten key informants were interviewed in this study. These interviewees were chosen because of their knowledge, experience, and their direct involvement in issues of gender-based violence in the district. Representatives from the government, community-based organisations, non-governmental organisations, and also their active beneficiaries were also included as key informants because of the roles they have undertaken in several events aimed at addressing gender-based violence and promoting women's empowerment. Key informants were from several institutions and organisations like the Regional Psychosocial Support Initiative (REPSSI), Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Muzarabani Rural District Council, Open Heart Disability Care Trust, Childline, Musasa, as well as the Ministry of Women`s Affairs, Community Small and Medium Enterprises. Their valuable contributions provided insights into the effectiveness of existing interventions and challenges faced by beneficiaries. The inclusion of such individuals was also very important since they tend to possess knowledge on cultural practises and social norms an impact on the efforts being implemented by some initiatives.

Health workers like nurses were also included as key informants because they regularly interact with victims of gender-based violence through the provision of medical, referral, and counselling services. Their experiences have helped in explaining the physical, emotional, and psychological effects of gender-based violence on the victims within the study area. They have also been noticed cooperating with both Non-governmental organisations and governmental organisations in fighting gender-based violence by being actively involved in awareness campaigns, advocacy programs, and support services. Their contributions provided more valuable insights into intervention strategies, community responses, and institutional challenges faced in combating gender-based violence in Muzarabani district.

The informants in the study comprised 6 males and 4 females, and this gender distribution was done purposively since mostly males are primarily in decision-making posts within their communities. Female experts also offered crucial insights and gender-sensitive perspectives on gender-based violence. This inclusion of both genders fostered a comprehensive understanding of the research issue. The research utilized semi-structured interviews for data collection, a method that provided flexibility and allowed the researcher to examine participant replies in greater detail. This approach was effective for gathering rich and detailed qualitative data

regarding the causes, effects, and interventions relevant to gender-based violence and women's empowerment.

3.4.3 Focus group discussions

There were two focus group talks, each with five to seven members. Convenience sampling was used to choose volunteers depending on their openness and readiness to participate in the activity. According to Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion, and Keith Morrison (2018), focus groups are useful for research on society because they provide participants a chance to communicate and exchange views on shared experiences. Focus group discussions consisted entirely of women, as the study focuses mainly on women`s experiences of gender-based violence. The use of only women`s group was intentional in order to establish a secure and comfortable setting allowing participants to freely discuss experiences without fear, intimidation from their spouses, and judgment. Focus group discussions were also very important for capturing shared experiences, community norms, and collective perceptions regarding gender-based violence among women. They also helped in investigating how social, cultural, and religious elements contribute to women's empowerment.

The focus group discussion participants' age range was 18 to 60 years, and the use of such members has been important for capturing community norms, shared experiences, and collective perceptions regarding gender-based violence. Through verbal interaction, participants were able to show common problems affecting women within their communities and discuss how these issues affect women`s empowerment. According to David L. Morgan (2019), focus group discussions generate data through participant interaction, making them highly effective for understanding social attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. The discussion further led to the exploration of the cultural, religious, and social systems' contribution to gender-based violence. In addition, the interactive nature of the discussion has enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions and ask for clarification on important issues that they raised.

3.5 Secondary data collection

Secondary data came from previously published works such as scholarly journals, government papers, policy documents, and publications from international organisations. Sources such as

reports from the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency and global organisations provided background information and supported the analysis of findings. The document review focused only on materials that were published from 2020 to 2025. This period was deliberately selected to ensure that the study is enriched with more recent and up-to-date information, since the nature of gender-based violence tends to change over time because of legal frameworks, policies that governments impose, and also because of the influence of women`s empowerment initiatives. The inclusion criteria of documents was based on their relevance to the research topic, credibility of the source and their applicability to Zimbabwe or similar rural context.

The selection of documents followed a purposive sampling approach where only materials that has information related to gender-based violence and women empowerment were used. Documents were identified through academic databases such as Google scholar, institutional repositories, and official websites of organisations. According to Michael Quinn Patton (2015), purposive sampling involves selecting information from rich sources that provide valuable insights into the research problem. The researcher carefully reviewed the selected in order to choose relevant information regarding gender-based violence causes, effects, prevalence, and interventions. Academic journals were very useful in providing empirical evidence and theoretical evidence on women`s empowerment. Government and policy documents also provided essential information regarding legal frameworks and national strategies to address GBV in Zimbabwe. International reports further enabled the researcher to compare local findings with regional and global trends.

3.6 Target population, sample size, and sampling techniques

3.6.1 Target population

Women living in Muzarabani District, especially those in wards 15 and 8, as well as other important stakeholders interested in gender-related issues, made up the study's target group. These included representatives from non-governmental organisations that focus on social welfare and gender issues, local government representatives, health professionals, and their beneficiaries. According to Earl Babbie (2020), a target population refers to the entire group of individuals relevant to a particular study and from which data are collected. The inclusion of both women and other key stakeholders was important since this allowed the researcher to obtain much information pertaining to gender-based violence and women's empowerment. The

study population sample was considered relevant as it portrayed the social and cultural realities in the research area and also enabled the researcher to conduct an in-depth investigation within the selected wards.

3.6.2 Sample size

The sample size of 64 respondents was selected for the study from wards 8 and 15 in Muzarabani district. The sample was made up of 44 women who participated in the questionnaire survey, and 10 women who took part in the focus group discussion, and 10 key informants who were interviewed. Key informants included Health workers, local authority officials from Muzarabani RDC, governmental organisations, and non-governmental organisations representatives, together with their active beneficiaries who may be acting in leadership roles in relation to GBV. The selected sample size was considered adequate to provide both quantitative and qualitative data necessary for addressing the objectives of the study. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the adequacy of a sample size in mixed-methods research is determined by the ability of the sample to provide sufficient information for meaningful analysis rather than by size alone. The combination of these respondent groups has increased the study`s trustworthiness, comprehensiveness, and depth.

3.6.3 Quantitative sampling

The quantitative component of the study employed probability sampling techniques to ensure representativeness and enhance the outcome of the findings. According to Etikan and Ilker (2016), probability sampling allows each member of the population a known and equal chance of selection, thereby reducing sampling bias. In this research, simple random sampling was used to select women respondents who have taken part in the questionnaire survey. This method ensured that every eligible individual within wards 8 and 15 in Muzarabani district had an equal probability of being included in the sample. Simple random sampling was considered to be appropriate since it reduces personal judgment during the selection of participants. The technique also increases fairness and openness throughout the sampling process. Additionally, the use of random selection enhanced the possibility that a sample would fairly represent the traits of the broader population being investigated. This means that the use of probability sampling increases objectivity, credibility, and dependability of quantitative findings acquired through the research process.

The sampling frame was based on the female population in the selected study area, with wards 8 and 15 in Muzarabani. The researcher used Yamane`s (1967) formula to determine the appropriate sample size. Muringazuva has a female population of 4374, and Gatu has 1863 female population, making the total number of 6247 as reported by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (2022). The formula is written as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n represents the sample size, N represents the target population, and e represents the margin of error. Using a margin of error of 15% (0.15), the sample size was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{6237}{1 + 6237(0.15)^2} = 44.1$$

The researcher calculated the sample size for questionnaire respondents using Yamane`s (1967) formula, and the overall target population was 6247, which later resulted in the calculated sample size of 44 respondents. The researcher has managed to distribute questionnaires to all 44 female respondents, and this figure was deemed manageable and sufficient for producing quantitative data in the context of the investigation. According to Tarherdoost (2016), simple random sampling increases statistical validity by reducing researcher bias and improving representativeness of the sample. The use of the Yamane formula enabled the researcher to scientifically justify the sample while guaranteeing that it was representative of the larger study population. As a result, simple random sampling enabled the researcher to collect solid quantitative data on patterns and linkages connected to GBV and Women`s empowerment in the study area.

3.6.4 Qualitative sample

The qualitative component of the study used a non-probability sampling technique to obtain in-depth and context-specific insights. Non-probability sampling, as explained by Vehova et al. (2016), does not rely very much on random selection, but instead focuses on selecting participants based on specific characteristics that may be linked to the research objectives. In this study, purposive sampling was used in the selection process of key informants for the interviews, which included the rural district council official, health workers, government and non-governmental organisations representatives, as well as their active beneficiaries who participate in some leadership roles. These individuals were specifically selected due to the specialised skills and knowledge they possess and direct experience with issues of gender-based violence and women`s empowerment. These positions that they do occupy within their communities and institutions enable them to provide informed perspectives on the causes, impacts, and interventions associated with gender based violence. Purposive sampling is widely regarded as appropriate in qualitative research because it facilitates the collection of much richer, detailed, and meaningful data from individuals with expert knowledge. Palinkas et al. (2015) emphasise that the technique is suitable for studies that require in-depth insights and a nuanced understanding of complex social issues.

Convenience sampling was employed in addition to purposive selection to choose focus group participants based on their willingness to participate and availability. Women participated in the focus groups because they are crucial to the research of women's empowerment and are the ones who are most impacted by gender-based violence. The study was able to collect data that offered deeper insights into participants' life experiences and perspectives by combining convenience sampling and purposive sampling.. This approach ensured that the research captured both the expert knowledge and community-level perspectives regarding gender-based violence and women`s empowerment.

3.7 Data analysis methods

To gain a thorough comprehension of the research issue, this study employed the use of quantitative as well as qualitative data analysis methods. Using mixed methods allowed the

researcher to combine numerical data with participants' lived experiences, improving the depth and validity of the results. Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) note that integrating these approaches provides a more comprehensive view of complex social phenomena.

3.7.1 Quantitative data

Data that was gathered through the use of questionnaires was analysed using statistical methods. Data was first coded and systematically organised before being entered into Microsoft Excel for analysis. The study employed descriptive statistical techniques, specifically frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations, which were presented using tables and charts. Frequencies were used to show the number of respondents experiencing different forms of gender-based violence, while percentages were used to express the data in proportional terms, making it easier to compare responses. Cross-tabulations were used to examine relationships between variables, such as the association between experiences of gender-based violence and levels of women's empowerment.

Microsoft Excel was chosen as the analytical tool due to its accessibility, ease of use, and effectiveness in handling descriptive statistical analysis. The software provides functions for organising data and generating summary statistics. Creation of tables and graphical representations such as bar charts and pie charts is also another key task that it performs. These features has made it suitable for analysing survey data clearly and in a structured manner. Descriptive statistics are widely used in quantitative research because they simplify large volumes of data and present findings in an easily interpretable format (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019). The use of these techniques therefore enhanced the clarity, organisation, and interpretation of the quantitative findings.

3.7.2 Qualitative data

The use of thematic analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of participants` perspectives, experiences, and social realities, thereby providing rich contextual insights that could not be captured through quantitative methods alone (Nowell et al., 2017). This strengthened the interpretive depth of the investigation by allowing the investigator to understand the meanings,

emotions, and experiences associated with gender-based violence among women who live in the study area. Additionally, the method has allowed an investigator to identify the similarities and differences in participants` responses and relate them to the study`s objectives. Through thematic analysis, the researcher was able to generate a detailed explanation regarding GBV on women`s empowerment and everyday lives. The method further improved the organisation and interpretation of qualitative data collected through utilising interviews and focus group discussions. Additionally, thematic analysis has enabled the researcher to classify findings into broader themes and sub-themes as reflected by participants' views and experiences in GBV. This process also assisted in identifying recurring patterns and social issues that were common among participants within the study area. Therefore, the use of thematic analysis contributed to a deeper understanding of the research problem and strengthened the overall quality of the qualitative findings.

The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods has also enabled triangulation of findings, allowing for comparison between statistical results and participants' lived experiences. Triangulation enhances the credibility and validity of research by cross verification of data from multiple sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This combination provided a more comprehensive knowledge of GBV and its implications for women's empowerment. The use of both methods also enabled the researcher to compare numerical findings with participants' explanations and experiences, thereby improving the reliability of the conclusions drawn from the study. In addition, the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enhanced the overall comprehensiveness of the research by combining statistical evidence with detailed contextual explanations. This approach also reduced weaknesses that could have resulted from relying on a single research method only. Furthermore, triangulation enabled the researcher to confirm and validate information obtained from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions. Thus, the total research findings' accuracy, consistency, and validity were enhanced by the integration of both approaches.

3.8 Reliability of the study

Reliability means the consistency and dependability of the research instruments and findings over time. In this research, several strategies were used to promote consistent and reliable results. Structured and standardised questionnaires were used to make sure that respondents were asked the same questions under similar conditions. According to Louis Cohen et al.

(2018), standardised instruments help in improving consistency and reducing variations that may arise during the data collection process. To test the efficacy, a pilot study was carried out prior to the primary data collection procedure. The researcher has been able to detect unclear and confusing questions before administering questionnaires to participants. In addition, simple and clear language was used to minimise misunderstanding among the respondents since they have different education levels. The researcher also maintained consistency in focus group discussions as well as interviews by following the same discussion guides for all participants. Proper record keeping and careful coding further enhanced the dependability of the research findings. Therefore, measures implemented during the study have helped in reliability and improved the consistency of the research.

3.9 Validity of the study

Research instrument validity refers to how accurately they measure what they are intended to. This study improved validity by ensuring all tools aligned with the objectives and research questions. Questionnaires, interview guides, and focus group protocols were specifically tailored to address gender-based violence and women`s empowerment. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, validity is strengthened when research tools are directly connected to research goals. The study also used multiple data collection methods, such as surveys, interviews, focus groups, and document reviews, to employ triangulation, increasing validity by allowing cross-checking of results. Questions were carefully crafted to be relevant, clear, and unbiased. For sensitive topics, indirect and interrogative questioning techniques encouraged honest responses. Expert feedback from the research supervisor further enhanced the tools' quality and relevance. Incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data improved the depth and credibility of the findings. Overall, these methods contributed to the accuracy and validity of the study's outcomes.

3.10 Limitations of the study

This study had a number of limitations despite meticulous design. The delicate nature of gender-based violence as a research topic was one of the main constraints. This topic involves personal and emotional issues, which may have caused some respondents not to disclose some

information freely and openly. As a result, some participants may not have been able to disclose some information due to fear, trauma, shame, and confidentiality concerns. This might have affected the completeness and accuracy of data during the collection phase. Another major limitation was that the investigating area was reduced to wards 8 and 15 in the Muzarabani district. Although it has made it possible for the researcher to thoroughly understand the local environment, the results may not be applied to the other districts within Zimbabwe because of different social, economic, and cultural conditions. Language barriers and varying literacy levels among some respondents have also acted as a major constraint because when administering questionnaires, some key concepts needed translation and proper explanation for them to understand. Furthermore, cultural norms, fear of stigma, and community perceptions surrounding gender-based violence may have influenced some participants to provide socially acceptable responses rather than honest answers, especially during focus group discussions. Consequently, these limitations may have affected the reliability and the breadth of some data collected throughout the investigation.

3.11 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has saved in explaining all the research strategies that were utilized in the research. Additionally, it has explained the study area, research plan, data methods for collecting data, and the instruments. Sampling procedures that were used in the selection of participants were well explained. The chapter also explained the methods used for data analysis, plus the steps done to guarantee reliability and validity. Although some limitations exist, the methodological approach applied in this study can be seen as a good and appropriate choice considering the research aims. The next chapter examines and provides the research results derived from the gathered data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter carries the presentation, discussion, and some analysis of data collected from primary and secondary sources. Data was collected through questionnaire surveys that were administered to 44 respondents in ward 8 and 15 (Muringazuva and Gatu) in Muzarabani district, 10 key informant interviews with representatives from institutions such as Regional Psychological Initiative (REPSSI), Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), Muzarabani Rural District Council, Open Heart Disability Care Trust, Childline, Musasa, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community Small and Medium Enterprises, health workers, as well as two focus group discussions, each comprising of 5-7 participants that were held. The chapter is organized in alignment with the four research objectives of the study.

The presentation follows a structured format beginning with the presentation of findings, followed by the presentation of findings using tables, graphs, and figures, and then the discussion of findings in relation to the reviewed literature. The findings are organized thematically around key areas such as: the forms and prevalence of gender-based violence in Muzarabani district; the level of women`s empowerment in the district; the impact of gender based violence on women`s social and economic empowerment; and proposed options to scale down the occurrence of gender-based violence and strategies to enhance women's empowerment. The chapter ends with a succinct synopsis that connects the results to the goals.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents

Before presenting findings, it is important to establish a demographic profile of 44 survey respondents since background characteristics such as age, marital status, and education and occupation do shape women's vulnerability to GBV and their levels of empowerment. The demographic characteristics of respondents are demonstrated in the table below:

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of survey respondents (n=44)

Variable	Category	Frequency(n=44)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-25	12	27.3
	26-35	18	40.9
	36-45	10	22.7
	46 and above	4	9.1
Marital Status	Single	8	18.2
	Married	26	59.1
	Divorced	6	13.6
	Widowed	4	9.1
Education Level	No formal education	2	4.5
	Primary	6	13.6
	Secondary	26	59.2
	Tertiary	10	22.7
Occupation	Famer	28	63.6
	Trader	8	18.2
	Employed	4	9.1
	Unemployed	4	9.1

Table 4.1 shows that the many the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 (40.9%), followed by those between the ages of 18 and 25 (27.3%). Women aged 36 to 45 accounted for 22.7%, while only 9.1% were aged 46 and above. This distribution shows that the study has captured a largely middle-aged female population. This age group is of productive and economically active women in rural areas. Key informants noted that too much economic dependency among younger women on their male partners reduces their negotiating power and leaves them open to gender-based violence within relationships. With respect to marital status, the majority of respondents (59.1%) were married, while 18.2% were single. 13.6% of the respondents were divorced, and 9.1% were widowed. The high proportion of married women

was relevant to the study since domestic violence mostly occurs among women within intimate relationships WHO (2021). Focus group discussions further reviewed that marriage in the district frequently exposes women in the district to controlling behavior and emotional abuse, particularly in the context where men are regarded as the sole household decision makers.

In terms of educational attainment, the findings show that the largest group (59.2%) has attained secondary education, followed by (13.6%) those with only primary. A notable 4.5% had no formal education at all, and 22.7% have reached tertiary education. This kind of educational profile is consistent with the broader pattern of limited access to education in Zimbabwe as reported by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2022). According to Bhalotra et al. (2021), such kind of educational levels are significant because education is widely recognized as a critical enabler of women`s empowerment and a protective factor against gender-based violence.

Regarding occupation, the findings show that farming is a dominant activity among the participants. The number of respondents who were identified as farmers was 63%, and traders accounted for 18.2%. The percentage of those who were unemployed was 9.1%. The predominance of subsistence farming reflects the agrarian nature of the district`s economy. Key informants from CAMFED and the Ministry of Women Affairs, Community Small and Medium Enterprises, as well highlighted that economic dependence on subsistence farming limits women`s financial independence and reduces their ability to exit abusive situations, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence and disempowerment.

4.3 Forms and Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence in Muzarabani District

The initial goal of the study was to investigate the forms and prevalence of gender based violence in Muzarabani district. Various strategies, such as the use of questionnaire surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions implemented in order to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights to this objective.

4.3.1 Community perceptions on forms of Gender-Based Violence

Respondents were asked to identify mistreatment or violence against women that exists in their community. The following table 4.2 presents the frequency and percentage distribution of reported forms of gender-based violence.

Table 4.2: Forms of Gender-Based Violence reported as common in the community (n=44)

Form of GBV	Reported as common	Frequency (n=44)	Percentage (%)
Physical Violence	Yes	36	81.8
Emotional/Psychological abuse	Yes	38	86.4
Sexual violence	Yes	24	54.5
Economic deprivation	Yes	32	72.7

As presented in Table 4.2, the findings show that emotional or psychological abuse is the most common form of gender-based violence, with 86.4% (n=38) of respondents identifying it as prevalent in their community. Physical violence was ranked second at 81.8% (n=36). The third was economic deprivation at 72.7%, and sexual violence was the last at 54.5% (n=24). These findings show that multiple forms of gender-based violence do co-exist within the district, with emotional abuse being the most common one and normally unreported despite being less visible than physical forms of violence.

The high prevalence of emotional abuse does align with qualitative data from focus group discussions, where participants have described verbal humiliation, threats, and intimidation as everyday occurrences. One of the participants has noted that being consistently told, `You are nothing without me,` was a common experience, which destroyed women`s confidence over time. Key informants from Musasa and Childline have also confirmed that emotional abuse is the most under-reported form of abuse in the district, precisely because it is normalised within most communities in Muzarabani.

The significant prevalence of physical violence at 81% is also consistent with the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (ZIMSTAT, 2022) findings, which recorded high rates of physical intimate partner violence within the rural provinces. A key informant from the Ministry of Women's Affairs observed that physical violence in Muzarabani is often triggered over household resources, with men resorting to violence to maintain control. Several

participants in the focus group discussion recounted experiences of being beaten and encountering aggressive behaviour from their partners after questioning financial decisions made by their spouses.

As reported by 72.7% of the respondents, economic deprivation has been reviewed as a significant factor but often overlooked form of gender- based violence. This form involves restricting women`s access to money, land, and other productive economic resources. A health worker key informant highlighted how women seek medical attention after episodes of violence, after failing to access their own money for transport or medication because their husbands or male partners controlled all the household finances. This form of economic control was confirmed by focus group discussion participants who noted that some men in the community do sell agricultural produce like tobacco without consulting their wives and spend all the money secretly.

Although sexual violence was reported at a lower rate of 54.5%, some key informants from the Ministry of Women Affairs have cautioned that this figure is more likely to underestimate the actual prevalence due to stigma and fear of social exclusion. Representatives from REPSSI and Musasa have noted that many women in the rural areas do not conceptualise marital rape as a form of violence. They also highlighted the role of indigenous churches like Marange in shaping violence against women as well as girl child rights through early marriages, leading to low academic attainment and exposing them to sexually transmitted infections, reflecting broader gaps in legal literacy and awareness of rights.

4.3.2 Personal experiences of Gender-Based Violence

To complement community perceptions, respondents were also asked about their personal experiences of gender-based violence. Table 4.3 below presents a summary of findings.

Table4.3: Personal experiences of Gender-Based Violence among respondents (n=44)

GBV experience	Response	Frequency (n=44)	Percentage (%)
Experienced any form of GBV	Yes	34	77.3

	No	10	22.7
Type of GBV experienced (multiple response)	Physical	14	31.8
	Emotional	30	68.2
	Sexual	2	4.5
	Economic	24	54.5
Frequency of occurrence	Rarely	8	18.2
	Sometimes	14	31.8
	Often	12	27.3

Table 4.3 shows that 77.3% (n=34) of respondents have personally experienced at least one form of gender based violence, while 22.7% (n=10) indicated that they have not. This high personal prevalence rate reflects the systematic nature of GBV within the district and is broadly consistent with WHO (2021) estimates, which indicate that approximately one in three women globally experience intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Among those who reportedly reviewed to have personally experienced GBV, emotional violence was the most common one at 68.2% (n=30), followed by economic deprivation, which sits at 54.5%. Physical violence is at 31.8%, and then lastly, sexual violence is at 4.5%. It is important to note that respondents were able to select multiple types of GBV in order to reflect the frequent co-occurrence of abuse within their relationships.

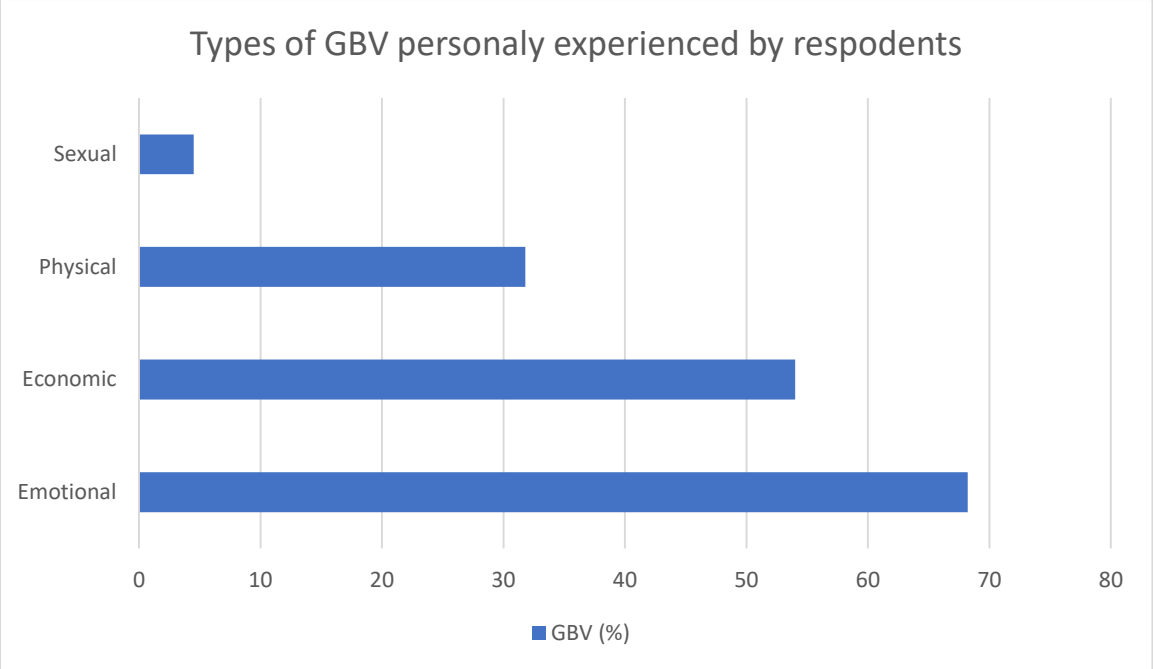

Figure 4.1: Types of Gender-Based Violence personally experienced by respondents (n=44). Source: Primary data

With respect to frequency, the data shows that 31.8% of the respondents reported that violence occurred sometime, while 7.3 % mentioned that it occurs often. Only 18.2% reported that it occurred rarely. This pattern of occurring violence is significant because repeated exposure to abuse has an impact on women`s psychological well-being, economic participation, and social engagement. In focus group discussions, women have also shared that violence tends to escalate over time and follows a cyclical pattern. Participants described how periods of calm would be followed by tension and then violent episodes, which Heise (1999) described as the circle of violence. This cyclical nature of abuse and violence makes it difficult for most women who are victims to plan exits or even access help, particularly in rural areas where institutional support is limited.

4.3.3 Barriers to reporting gender-based violence

Respondents were asked to indicate why some women who have been the victims of violence failed to report their experiences of gender-based violence. Thematic analysis of respondents has identified four dominant barriers that are the fear of retaliation from the perpetrator, social stigma and shame, lack of trust in the formal sectors, and economic dependency on the perpetrator. These barriers were consistently corroborated by key informants from Childline,

Musasa, and Health workers who noted that women who reported violence were sometimes further ostracised by their communities or pressured by family members to return to their abusive relationships to preserve family unity. Another key issue that was noted by a key informant from Musasa that makes matters worse is disability among women, which normally affects the economic independence of women and access to supportive institutions.

4.4 Level of women's empowerment in Muzarabani district

The second research objective was to assess the level of women's empowerment in the district of Muzarabani. The level of empowerment was assessed across three dimensions that are economic participation, social engagement as well as the decision making power. Data from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions are presented below.

4.4.1 Self-related empowerment levels

Respondents were asked to rate their own levels of empowerment on a three-point scale rating from low to high. Table 4.4 and Figure 4.2 present the distribution of self-rated levels of empowerment.

Table 4.4: Self-rated empowerment levels of respondents (n=44)

Empowerment dimension	Affected (yes) n / %	Not affected (No) n / %	Total (n=44)
GBV affected decision-making capacity	36 (81.8%)	8 (18.2%)	44
GBV affected economic activities	38 (86.4%)	6 (13.6%)	44
GBV affected confidence and independence	40(90.9%)	4 (9.1%)	44

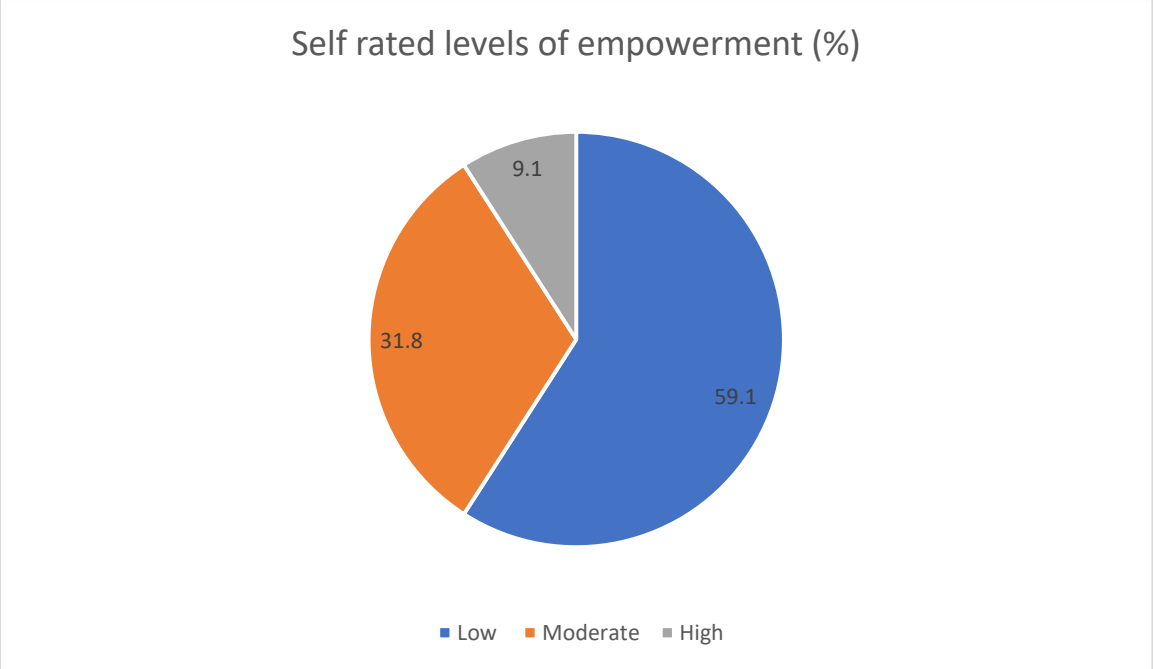

Figure 4.2 Self-rated Empowerment levels (Pie Chart); Source: Primary data

The pie chart, as displayed in Figure 4.2, shows that most of the respondents considered their level of empowerment as low at 59.1% (n=21), while 31.8%(14) of them considered it as moderate, and the last 9.1% (4) have rated it as high. The degree of disempowerment is clearly shown in the study area. The high proportion of women who have identified themselves as having low empowerment shows the persistent socio-economic and cultural barriers that exist within Muzarabani District. Such kind of barriers include low access opportunities to education, unemployment, poverty, restricted ownership and control of productive resources, as well as inadequate access to support services for survivors of gender-based violence. Such findings suggest that many women continue to experience marginalisation in both household and community decision-making processes, thereby limiting their ability to exercise autonomy and improve their livelihoods.

Table 4.5: Self-rated empowerment levels–frequency distribution

Empowerment level	Frequency (n=44)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Low	26	59.1	59.1
Moderate	14	31.8	90.9
High	4	9.1	100.0
Total	44	100.0	----------

The table reviews that the majority of respondents (59.1%, n=26) rated their level of empowerment as low, while 31.8% (n=14) rated it as moderate. Only 9.1% (n=4) of the respondents rated it as high. This distribution gives a clear picture of the level of disempowerment among women in the study area. The proportion of women who identified themselves as having low empowerment is consistent with the documented structural constraints in the Muzarabani district, including limited access to education, economic opportunities, and support services.

Focus group discussions also helped to provide rich contextual explanations for these empowerment ratings. Participants expressed a shared sense of powerlessness, describing their lack of power to make financial-related decisions within their households or their own children`s education without approval from their husbands. One participant further stated that even if you start a small business or earn your money from your garden, you can be asked what you need it for. This reflects a deeply entrenched patriarchal structure that exists within the communities, which then acts as a major constraint to women`s empowerment. This is supported by Walby`s (1990) theorisation of patriarchy as a system of societal structure that subordinates women.

4.4.2 Economic empowerment

According to the findings, they show that the majority of women are into subsistence farming but have limited control over the money that is made. While 63.3% of the respondents identified as farmers, qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions reveal that only a few women have access to and control over the outputs of their labour. Key

informants from CAMFED have observed that cultural norms in the district indicate that men manage all the household resources, including agricultural equipment and other economically related resources, thereby leaving women financially dependent and unable to invest in their own development.

Among the respondents who report having been affected by GBV, 86.4% indicated that violence had directly affected their economic activities. This included being prevented from going to market, having income confiscated by an abusive partner, and being too physically or emotionally distressed to work. A key informant from Disability Care Trust reviewed that some women have abandoned their own income-generating activities altogether due to intimidation, thereby reflecting a direct suppression of economic agency through violence. This shows how GBV is acting against all the empowerment efforts that are being put in place by several sectors that are active within the district.

Access to land and productive resources was another critical dimension of economic empowerment examined in the study. Key informants from Muzarabani Rural District Council confirmed that the inheritance and land allocation systems in the district are predominantly male-controlled, with women rarely allocated land in their own right. This limits women`s ability to accumulate assets, access credit, and be independent financially. These research findings do resonate with broader literature from the World Bank (2020), which demonstrates that women`s limited property rights are associated with increased vulnerability to intimate partner violence.

4.4.3 Social empowerment

Social empowerment was assessed by examining women in the research area's access to essential services like health, education, participating in community decision-making processes as well as membership in social networks or groups. The findings indicate that social empowerment is severely limited for the majority of women in the study area. Low educational attainment has been noted in section 4.2, which in turn may restrict women`s awareness of their legal rights and available support services. Key informants from REPPSI and Musasa highlighted that many women in wards 8 and 15 are unaware of the provisions of the domestic violence act or how to access formal support channels.

Participation in the decision-making process has emerged as an area of concern according to the findings. Respondents who participated in focus group discussions have noted that community meetings and local governance structures are male-dominated, with women's views often dismissed or overlooked. They reviewed that a few women who attempted to speak in village meetings were ridiculed or silenced, which discouraged their future participation. This aligns with findings by Mudege et al. (2017), who observed that patriarchal norms in Zimbabwe do systematically exclude women from leadership roles and decision-making spaces.

On a more important note, key informants from Musasa and CAMFED have noted that women who participated in community groups and programmes run by non-governmental organisations have shown higher levels of confidence and social engagement. Some other key community informants who have been active in leadership roles in some programs being implemented by NGOs have also noted that many women within the study areas do possess leadership qualities that surpass those of most men. This suggests that collective mobilisation and targeted social support can make a meaningful difference in enhancing social empowerment even within constraining environments.

4.4.4 Decision-making power

Decision-making power was examined through having the capacity to decide things that concern reproductive health, children`s education, and financial matters. Results have shown that most women have limited autonomous powers in decision-making. Questionnaire survey data show that 81.8% (n=36) of respondents report that GBV has affected their ability to make decisions in their households. This is a critically high proportion, indicating that violence really does suppress women`s ability to make decisions independently without the partner`s involvement.

Focus group participants have identified several strategies that intimate male partners use to undermine decision making that includes controlling access to information, threatening violence if decisions are made without his consent, and also undermining women`s confidence through repeated verbal abuse. Key informants from Musasa noted that women who had experienced prolonged abuse often internalise their feelings of worthlessness and end up believing themselves to be incapable of making good decisions independently. As described by WHO (2021), this reflects the long-term psychological consequences.

4.5 Impact of Gender-Based Violence on women`s economic and social empowerment

The third research objective examined how gender-based violence affects women`s economic and social empowerment in Muzarabani district. Table 4.6 summarises the quantitative findings on the impact of GBV across key empowerment dimensions.

Table 4.6: Impact of GBV on key empowerment dimensions (n=44)

Empowerment dimension	Affected (Yes) n / %	Not affected (No) n/%	Total (n=44)
GBV affected decision-making capacity	36 (81.8%)	8 (18.2%)	44
GBV affected economic activities	38 (86.4%)	6 (13.6%)	44
GBV affected confidence and independence	40 (90.9%)	4(9.1%)	44

4.5.1 Impact on economic participation

The findings reveal that 86.4% (N=38) of respondents reported that gender-based violence had negatively affected their economic activities. This is the highest reported impact rate that has been recorded across all the empowerment dimensions measured in this study. The economic consequences of GBV operate in multiple ways. The first one is physical violence that often results in limiting women's ability to engage in agricultural labor, which is the primary livelihood activity in the district. Key informants from health facilities have described some events of treating women with fractured and bruised injuries that prevented women with injuries from working for extended periods of time.

The second one is economic deprivation, which is a common form of GBV that exists in the district, which restricts women's access to income and financial resources. A key informant from the Ministry of Women`s Affairs, husbands who exercise economic control over their wives effectively prevent them from building their own income-generating sources, which later results in financial dependence. This continuous cycle traps most women in poverty and dependency, which nearly makes it impossible for them to exit abusive relationships without external support from the institutions that deal with GBV issues.

Third, there were the psychological consequences of GBV that were found to be contributing factors that reduce productivity and motivation among the victims. Focus group participants have described that GBV victims are more likely to experience persistent anxiety, depression, and loss of confidence after the occurrence of several episodes of abuse, which later makes economic engagement difficult. This finding is consistent with research by Peterman et al. (2022), who demonstrate that intimate partner abuse and violence significantly reduce women`s labour force participation and earning potential in low-income contexts.

Key informants from CAMFED have also noted that most of the women who had access to economic empowerment programs showed much greater resilience to gender-based violence and gave real-life practical examples from their list of beneficiaries as supportive evidence. They also highlighted that their chances of seeking help if violence occurs to them are high since they are economically independent. This suggests that economic empowerment and GBV are mutually reinforcing objectives and also aligns with Duflo`s (2012) findings in the wider literature.

4.5.2 Impact on social participation and community engagement

The impact of women`s social empowerment is manifested through restricted mobility, reduced participation in social activities, and diminished access to health, as well as other support services. Respondents reported that most perpetrators frequently used controlling strategies like monitoring movements, prohibiting interactions with friends and some of the family members, and monitoring of cell phones or online activities as a mechanism of social isolation. This isolation further entrenches dependency and reduces women`s ability to access support networks or information about available services.

Focus group participants have also highlighted that social exclusion compounded the effects of GBV by removing the informal support structures that women traditionally rely on. Several participants have noted that some of the victims had been prevented from attending church groups or market days by their partners, thereby effectively cutting them off from spaces that have the potential to provide opportunities for empowerment or access to important information. A key informant from REPSSI described that perpetrators systematically dismantle women`s social capital as a technique to maitain dominance and power.

The impact of GBV on health-seeking behavior was also notable. Health worker key informants reportedly said that women experienced violence are less likely to attend antenatal and postnatal care services due to controlling partners and also because of the physical and emotional consequences of abuse. This also has broader implications for the maternal health outcome within the district. This also reinforces the findings by UN Women (2021) that GBV during and after pregnancy significantly increases maternal and infant mortality risks.

4.5.3 Impact on confidence, independence, and psychological well-being

The highest reported impact of GBV was on women`s confidence and independence, with 90.9% (n=40) of respondents who were confirming that violence had negatively affected these dimensions. Open-ended responses from questionnaires and focus group discussions described a range of psychological consequences, including the loss of self-worth, fear, depression, anxiety, and trauma. Women described a gradual erosion of confidence, which may leave them incapable of functioning independently in their daily livelihood activities or asserting themselves in any context.

Key informants from the health sector have also noted that women who have experienced violence that maybe seeking medical attention tend to portray symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, like sleeping disorders, fear, and social withdrawal. Such psychological impacts may undermine women`s ability to engage in economic as well as social activities, creating a long-term effect that deepens disempowerment over time. As argued by Nussbaum (2000), violence fundamentally undermines core human capabilities, including bodily integrity and the ability to control one`s environment, thereby restricting the fulfilment of human potential.

The capability approach advanced by Sen (1999) provides a useful lens for understanding these findings. GBV really does strip women of their opportunities and freedoms necessary to enjoy life. The consistent pattern of restricted movement, suppressed economic participation, diminished social engagement, and eroded psychological well-being observed in this study illustrates how GBV operates at multiple dimensions and causes disempowerment among women. Women who experience GBV often struggle to access things like education, health care, and economic activities, as demonstrated by the study.

4.6 Coping mechanisms and access to support services

Understanding how women respond to gender-based violence is very important in the design of effective interventions. This section presents women`s coping mechanisms as well as their access to support services. Table 4.7 presents coping mechanisms that were adopted by respondents.

Table 4.7: Coping mechanisms adopted by respondents (n=44)

Coping mechanism	Frequency (n=44)	Percentage (%)
Remain silent	18	40.9
Seek family support	12	27.3
Report to authorities	8	18.2
Seek cancelling	4	9.1
Other	2	4.5
Total	44	100.0

The findings in Table 4.7 show that silence is the most common response among the victims of violence, adopted by 40.9% (n=18) of respondents. The second group of respondents who consider seeking family support is at 27.3% (n=12), followed by reporting to authorities at 18.2% (n=8), seeking cancellation at 9.1% (n=4), and the last group is other responses at 4.5% (n=2). The dominance of silence as a coping mechanism reflects deeply entrenched barriers to

seeking help documented in section 4.3.3, including fear of retaliation, stigma, and lack of trust in the formal sectors.

Low rate of reporting to the authorities (18.2%) as confirmed by key informants from Musasa and Childline, who noted that reporting of gender-based violence in the district formerly appears to be significantly hindered by institutional factors. These include the distance to the nearest police stations, perceptions that police officers do not take GBV seriously, and also the cultural expectation that marital disputes should be solved within the family, not through formal channels. They also reviewed that due to resource constraints, they fail to reach some remote areas and also fail to launch adverts for some programmes that address GBV in ways that they would reach wider community members. This results in some people just passing by their offices without even knowing the purpose they serve.

Table 4.8: Access to support services (n=44)

Access to support services	Frequency (n=44)	Percentage (%)
Yes (Accessible)	14	31.8%
No (Not accessible)	30	68.2%
Total	44	100.0

Table 4.8 above reviews a significant gap in accessing support services. With 68.2 % (n=30) of respondents revealed that support services are not accessible to them. Only 31.8% (n=14) reported having access to services. Key informants from REPSSI, Musasa, and Open Heart Disability Care Trust confirmed that the reach of support services is constrained by infrastructure, limited funding, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Geographically remote areas under wards 8 and 15 are particularly underserved. This means that women who reside in such areas face the greatest barriers in accessing help.

Focus group participants indicated some concern for more accessible community-based support services and noted that few women who had benefited from NGO programs such as those run by CAMFED and REPSSI had experienced meaningful improvements in their confidence and ability to navigate difficult situations. This suggests that proximity and

community integration of services are crucial design principles for GBV interventions in the context.

4.7 Proposed options to scale down gender-based violence and enhance women`s empowerment

The fourth research objective sought to identify proposed options and strategies for scaling down gender based violence and enhancing women`s empowerment in Muzarabani district. Responses were gathered from all three data collection instruments that were used in the research and are organised thematically below.

4.7.1 Strengthening legal awareness and access to justice

Respondents and key informants have consistently identified the need for greater community-level awareness of women`s legal rights and protection. Many women in the study were unaware of the Domestic Violence Act, despite its existence since 2007. Key informants from Musasa and the Ministry of Women Affairs recommended sustained legal literacy campaigns that use community champions, local radio, and village meetings to communicate rights information in accessible vernacular language. They further recommended the deployment of community-based paralegals who can assist women in navigating the formal justice system without burdening themselves by travelling to urban centres.

The importance of strengthening the responsive institutions was also emphasized. Key informant from Childline noted that the police and judiciary officers require gender sensitive training to ensure that GBV cases are handled appropriately with seriousness, compassion, and confidentiality. With these institutional transformations, even legally empowered women may face hindrances in accessing formal justice mechanisms.

4.7.2 Economic empowerment programmes

All key informants and the majority of the focus group participants identified economic empowerment as a crucial strategy for the reduction of GBV. Recommendations included

expanding access to village savings and loan associations, providing training in entrepreneurship and income-generating activities, and facilitating women`s access to micro-finance. Key informants from CAMFED highlighted that girls who completed secondary education and accessed vocational training were significantly more likely to enter marriages and assert their rights within relationships.

Participants also recommended that economic programs must be accompanied by financial literacy training to ensure that women can manage their income and asserts effectively. Key informants from the Ministry of Women Affairs emphasized the importance of linking economic empowerment with land as well as property rights, noting that secured property rights provide women with meaningful materials for independence and reduce their vulnerability to GBV.

4.7.3 Community-based awareness and attitudinal change

A strong consensus emerged across all data sources that addressing deep-rooted patriarchal norms and attitudes that normalize GBV is essential for sustainable change. Key informants from REPPSI and Musasa recommended community-based behavioural change communication programmes that engage both men and women in conversations about gender equality, healthy relationships, and shared household decision-making. Such programs target men and women specifically as potential allies and agents of change rather than solely as perpetrators.

Traditional and religious leaders were identified as important entry points for norm change, given their significant influence on community values and behavior. Key informants recommended that community development organisations should engage traditional leaders and walk within the existing structures to promote gender equitable norms rather than imposing externally designed models that may be rejected as culturally inappropriate.

Focus group participants also emphasised the importance of involving women survivors of GBV as peer educators and advocates. Several women noted that they were more likely to take action when they heard stories from other women in their community who successfully navigated abusive situations, suggesting that lived experiences and social proof are powerful motivators for change.

4.7.4. Expansion of social services

Given that 68.2% of the respondents reported that support services were inaccessible, key informants and focus group participants identified the expansion of GBV support services as a priority intervention. Specific recommendations included the establishment of community-based safe spaces or one-stop centres that offer medical legal, and psychosocial support at the ward level. Health worker key informant recommended integrating GBV screening and support into routine primary health care service to ensure that women who present at health facilities with injuries receive appropriate referrals and psychosocial support.

Key informants from Childline and REPSSI further recommended the use of mobile outreach teams to reach women in most geographically isolated areas in the district. These teams could provide information, counseling, and referral services on a rotational basis, ensuring that no community is entirely without access to support. Representatives from the Muzarabani rural district council acknowledged the importance of improving road infrastructure to facilitate access to services more broadly, linking physical infrastructure development to GBV response as part of an integrated development approach.

4.8 Discussion of findings

The findings of this study confirm that gender-based violence is both prevalent and multifaceted in Muzarabani District, with 77.3% of respondents reporting personal experience of at least one form of GBV. The prevalence rate documented in this study is notably higher than the national average reported by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT, 2022). This high prevalence can be due to threatening factors coming together within the district, including poverty, low educational attainment, weak institutional support systems, and deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, which Heise's (1998) ecological theory identifies as interacting contributors to gender-based violence. The co-occurrence of emotional, physical, economic, and sexual violence within relationships reflects what literature describes as poly-victimisation, where survivors experience multiple forms of abuse simultaneously. Such patterns intensify the severity of harm and increase the barriers preventing women from leaving abusive relationships. The high prevalence of emotional and psychological abuse relative to physical violence is particularly significant because it challenges the tendency to focus GBV interventions mainly on physical violence, despite the equally detrimental long-term effects of emotional abuse on women's mental health, confidence, and empowerment.

The findings further revealed generally low levels of women's empowerment in the study area, a pattern that is consistent with broader evidence on women's marginalisation in rural Zimbabwe (ZIMSTAT, 2022; UN Women, 2021). However, this study provides important contextual understanding by demonstrating the direct relationship between GBV, economic dependency, and social exclusion. The conceptual framework developed in Chapter Two conceptualised GBV as a driver of capability deprivation, and the findings strongly support this relationship. Feminist theory, as articulated by Walby (1990), provides a useful explanation for the observed patterns of disempowerment. Patriarchal household structures characterised by male control over resources, decision-making, and social authority systematically subordinate women and limit their opportunities for empowerment. The capability approach advanced by Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (2000) further explains how violence restricts women's substantive freedoms, including their ability to make choices, participate in development processes and exercise agency over their lives. The findings therefore suggest that GBV in Muzarabani District is not only a personal or household problem but also a structural issue rooted in unequal gender relations and social systems that perpetuate women's dependency and exclusion.

The study also established that GBV functions as a mechanism of economic exclusion and poverty perpetuation. The finding that 86.4% of respondents reported that GBV negatively affected their economic activities highlights the significant economic dimensions of violence that are often overlooked in GBV discourse. Beyond direct economic deprivation, the study demonstrates that violence suppresses women's economic empowerment through physical injuries, emotional trauma, reduced productivity, and deliberate restrictions on women's participation in markets and income-generating activities. These findings resonate with research by Peterman et al. (2022) and Duflo (2012), who demonstrated the close relationship between intimate partner violence and women's economic empowerment outcomes. The findings further extend this literature by providing context-specific evidence from a rural district in Zimbabwe where economic dependency simultaneously acts as both a consequence and driver of GBV, thereby creating a cyclical relationship between poverty and violence, as described within Heise's (1998) ecological framework.

Another important theme emerging from the findings is the use of social isolation and institutional weaknesses as mechanisms that sustain women's vulnerability to violence. Despite Zimbabwe's legal and policy commitments towards addressing GBV, including the Domestic Violence Act and national gender policies, the majority of women in the study area were unaware of their legal rights, and only 18.2% had ever formally reported violence to authorities. This reflects a significant gap between policy formulation and practical implementation at the community level, a challenge also identified by ZIMSTAT (2022). Key informants attributed this policy-practice gap to inadequate resourcing of GBV response mechanisms, cultural resistance to external intervention in family matters, and weaknesses within the formal justice system. The findings therefore reinforce the argument that legal reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by sustained investment in infrastructure, awareness campaigns, decentralised support services, and institutional capacity-building. Overall, the study demonstrates that GBV in Muzarabani District is deeply embedded within broader socio-economic and cultural structures, requiring integrated and multi-sectoral interventions that address both the immediate protection needs of survivors and the underlying structural causes of women's disempowerment.

4.9 Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented, analysed, and also discussed the findings from 44 questionnaire respondents from the study, which are the 10 key informant interviews and two focus group discussions conducted in wards 8 and 15 of Muzarabani District. Findings do demonstrate that gender-based violence is both highly prevalent and multifaceted in the study area, with emotional abuse, physical violence, economic deprivation, and sexual violence all reported at a significant rate. The majority of the women who were surveyed (77.3%) had reported having personal experience of at least one form of GBV, while 59.1% rated their overall empowerment level as low. The analysis does reveal a deeply interconnected relationship between GBV and women's disempowerment across economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Gender-based violence limits women's economic participation, restricts their social engagement, suppresses their decision-making power, and erodes their confidence and independence. These findings are explained through the integrated theoretical framework combining feminist theory, ecological theory, and the capability approach, and are also broadly consistent with and extend existing empirical literature on GBV and women's empowerment. The chapter has also

identified the significant gaps in access to support services and formal reporting mechanisms, reflecting a persistent disconnect between national policy commitments and also the local implementation realities. Proposed interventions drawn from respondents and key informants include strengthening legal awareness, expanding economic empowerment programmes, community-based attitudinal change initiatives engaging men and traditional leaders, and the decentralisation of GBV support services to the ward level. The findings presented in this chapter provide a comprehensive evidence base for the conclusions and recommendations contained in Chapter Five, which will synthesise the key insights from the study and propose targeted strategies for reducing gender-based violence and enhancing women's empowerment in Muzarabani District.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.I: Introduction

The dissertation on the effects of gender-based violence on women's empowerment in Muzarabani District concludes with this chapter. It presents a summary of the key findings generated across the study and offers recommendations for policymakers, practitioners, communities, and future researchers. The chapter also synthesises evidence gathered from the questionnaire survey of 44 women respondents, key informant interviews with 10 stakeholders, and two focus group discussions involving 10 women in wards 8 and 15 (Muringazuva and Gatu) of Muzarabani District. The overarching aim of the study was to examine the impact of gender-based violence on women's empowerment, and this concluding chapter reflects on the extent to which that aim has been achieved and what its implications are for theory, policy, and practice.

5.2 Summary of the study

The study was motivated by the recognition that gender-based violence remains one of the major barriers to women's empowerment, particularly in rural communities of developing countries such as Zimbabwe. Even if there are foundations for laws and policies like the Domestic Violence Act and various gender-responsive initiatives, GBV continues to affect many women in Muzarabani District. Chapter One introduced the research problem, aim, objectives, and research questions, and situated the study within the broader global, regional, and national context of GBV and women's empowerment. In Chapter Two, feminist theory was identified, and the theoretical and empirical literature supporting the study was evaluated, with ecological theory and the capability approach as the major theoretical foundations guiding the research. Feminist theory explained how patriarchal systems and unequal power relations sustain GBV as a mechanism of controlling women, while ecological theory showed how societal, relational, interpersonal, and communal elements combine to perpetuate violence. The capability approach further highlighted how GBV limits women's freedoms, opportunities, and ability to participate meaningfully in social and economic life. An integrated conceptual

framework was then developed to demonstrate the interrelationship among these theoretical perspectives in explaining GBV and women's empowerment in Muzarabani District. Chapter Three outlined the mixed-methods research design adopted for the study, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The study was conducted in wards 8 and 15 of Muzarabani District, where a questionnaire survey was administered to 44 women selected through simple random sampling. In addition, 10 key informants from institutions such as REPSSI, CAMFED, Musasa, Childline, Open Heart Disability Care Trust, Muzarabani Rural District Council, and the Ministry of Women Affairs were purposively selected for semi-structured interviews, whilst two focus group discussions involving 10 women selected through convenience sampling were also conducted. Microsoft Excel's descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data, while thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data. In accordance with the four research objectives, Chapter Four presented, examined, and discussed the study's results. The chapter combined quantitative findings presented in tables and figures with qualitative insights from interviews and focus group discussions. The findings revealed that GBV remains widespread in the study area and significantly undermines women's empowerment through limiting their economic independence, decision-making power, psychological well-being, and participation in community development processes. The findings also showed strong consistency with existing regional and global empirical literature on gender-based violence and women's empowerment.

5.3 Summary of key findings

Regarding the four research objectives that directed the investigation, the study produced a thorough body of evidence. The results showed that gender-based violence continues to be a significant issue for women in Muzarabani District and undermines women's empowerment in social, economic, and psychological aspects. Both quantitative and qualitative findings consistently demonstrated that GBV is widespread within the district and is strongly linked to deeply rooted patriarchal systems, cultural norms, and economic inequalities. The findings further revealed that women experience various forms of violence that negatively affect their participation in household decision-making, economic activities, and community life.

With regard to the first objective, the investigation found that Muzarabani District had a high rate of gender-based violence. Out of the 44 women surveyed, 77.3% (n=34) reported that they had experienced at least one form of GBV. According to 70.5% of respondents, emotional and psychological abuse was the most prevalent type of violence, followed by physical violence (59.1%), economic deprivation (54.5%), and sexual violence (31.8%). The results also demonstrated that violence is not experienced as separate episodes, as 43.2% of impacted women reported experiencing violence occasionally, 29.7% frequently, and 27.0% infrequently. Qualitative results from focus groups and key informant interviews verified that GBV is widespread and largely normalised within the community. Participants highlighted that patriarchal cultural norms, bride price practices, women's economic dependency, and the lax enforcement of the law are major factors in the continuation of violence. All 10 key informants identified cultural norms and traditional beliefs as major structural drivers of GBV prevalence in the district.

Regarding the second objective, the investigation discovered that women's empowerment was generally low across all measured characteristics.. Over half of the respondents, representing 59.1% (n=26), rated their level of empowerment as low, while 31.8% (n=14) rated it as moderate, and only 9.1% (n=4) considered themselves highly empowered. The findings further showed that GBV significantly undermines women's participation in household decision-making, with 75.0% of respondents (n=33) indicating that violence had negatively affected their ability to make independent decisions. In terms of economic participation, 86.4% (n=38) reported that GBV had disrupted their economic activities and income-generating opportunities. Qualitative data revealed that many women experienced psychological trauma, low self-esteem, social withdrawal, and reduced confidence due to prolonged exposure to violence. The majority of women depended on subsistence farming with limited independent sources of income, which further reinforced economic dependency and vulnerability. Focus group discussions also revealed that many women had internalised negative perceptions about themselves as a result of continuous abuse, thereby weakening their sense of agency and empowerment.

Concerning the third objective, the study found a significant inverse association between women's economic and social empowerment and gender-based violence. Economically, GBV

reduced women’s productive capacity, limited their participation in markets and income-generating activities, and exposed them to financial control and confiscation of resources by abusive partners. Cross-tabulation analysis demonstrated that women who were more frequently victims of violence were more likely to consider their degree of empowerment to be poor. Socially, the findings showed that GBV reduced women’s participation in community activities, local leadership, and governance structures. Violence also limited women’s access to health and educational services while contributing to emotional and psychological distress that undermined their confidence and social belonging. The study therefore confirmed that GBV functions as a mechanism for maintaining patriarchal control over women and perpetuates structural inequalities, poverty, and disempowerment. These findings supported the integrated theoretical framework adopted in the study by demonstrating how feminist theory, ecological theory, and capability theory collectively explain the relationship between gender-based violence and women’s empowerment.

With regard to the fourth objective, the study reviewed an assortment of intervention techniques that could help improve women's empowerment and diminish gender-based violence in Muzarabani District. The major proposed strategies included strengthening legal enforcement and improving women’s access to justice, implementing community-based awareness and behavioural change programmes, promoting women’s economic empowerment through income-generating projects and microfinance initiatives, increasing education and rights awareness, and decentralising GBV support services to remote communities. The findings further revealed that the coping strategies currently used by women are largely informal and inadequate. About 29.5% of respondents indicated that they remained silent when experiencing violence, while 68.2% (n=30) reported that they were unable to access formal support services. These findings highlighted the urgent need for coordinated and multi-sectoral interventions aimed at addressing both the structural causes of GBV and the immediate protection needs of affected women.

5.4 Recommendations

Recommendations for the government of Zimbabwe and policymakers:

1. Strengthen the enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act through improved rural policing, GBV response units, ward-level reporting desks, and accessible legal aid services.
2. Mainstream GBV prevention and women's empowerment into national and district development plans with clear targets, budgets, and accountability mechanisms.
3. Increase investment in women's education, vocational training, microfinance programmes, and scholarship opportunities for girls in rural communities.

Recommendations for non-governmental organisations and development partners:

1. Strengthen decentralised community-based GBV response systems through safe spaces, trained community volunteers, and improved referral pathways.
2. Put in place initiatives that encourage boys and men to question damaging gender stereotypes and prevent GBV in partnership with traditional and religious leaders.
3. Improve coordination between NGOs and government agencies through joint planning, shared data systems, and harmonised referral mechanisms.

Recommendations for community leaders and traditional institutions:

1. Promote positive cultural transformation by discouraging harmful practices and publicly condemning GBV within communities.
2. Encourage women's active involvement in development, local government, and communal decision-making.

Recommendations for health institutions

1. Integrate routine GBV screening, counselling, and survivor support services into primary health care systems and strengthen trauma-informed training for health workers.

5.5 Conclusion

The study concluded that gender-based violence continues to be a significant obstacle to women's empowerment within Muzarabani District, undermining women's decision-making power, economic independence, psychological well-being, and participation in community development. The findings revealed that emotional, physical, economic, and sexual violence are widespread and sustained by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms, women's economic dependency, limited access to support services, and weak enforcement of existing laws. The study further established that women who frequently experience GBV are more likely to have low levels of empowerment, reduced self-confidence, and limited control over resources and opportunities. The integrated theoretical framework adopted in the study demonstrated that patriarchal structures, ecological factors, and capability deprivation collectively contribute to the persistence of GBV and women's disempowerment. The study therefore concludes that addressing GBV in Muzarabani District requires coordinated, multi-sectoral interventions that strengthen legal protection, expand access to support services, promote women's economic empowerment, and transform harmful cultural norms to achieve gender equality and sustainable community development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE (FOR WOMEN RESPONDENTS)

My name is Joshua Gamula; I am a student doing a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education. This study seeks to examine the impact of gender-based violence in women`s empowerment in Muzarabani District focusing on wards 8 and 15 (Muringazuva and Gatu). I would like to ask a few questions; your opinions and feelings are valuable for they will contribute to a better understanding and shall assist several GBV experts in near future. Your responses your responses will remain confidential and no references will be made to your names if the findings of this works are published. Nevertheless, open discussion and sincere responses to the question is greatly appreciated. For further clarification, you can call me or email me at 0775889374 or joshuagamulaone@gmail.com

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Age

   ☐18-25 ☐26-35 ☐36-45 ☐46 and above

2. Marital status

   ☐Single ☐Married ☐Divorced ☐Widowed

3. Level of education

   ☐No formal education ☐Primary ☐Secondary ☐Tertiary

4. Occupation

   ☐Farmer ☐Trader ☐Employed ☐Unemployed

SECTION B: GENERAL EXPERIENCES AND COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

1. What are some major challenges faced by women in your community?

   _____

   _____

   _____

   _____

2. In your opinion, how are women generally treated in relationships in your community?

3. Have you ever heard of any situation where women are mistreated, threatened, controlled or hammed in their relationships?

   ☐Yes ☐No

4. What forms of mistreatment or violence against women are common in your community?

   ☐Physical violence

   ☐Sexual violence

   ☐Emotional or psychological abuse

   ☐Economic deprivation

   ☐Other (Specify)

   …….

5. Why do you think some women fail to report such experiences?

SECTION C: PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

1. Have you ever experienced any form of Gender-Based Violence?

   ☐Yes ☐ No

2. If yes which type(s)? (Tick all that apply)

   ☐ Physical ☐Sexual ☐Emotional ☐Economic

3. How often does it occur?

   ☐Rarely ☐Sometimes ☐Often

4. In what ways has such treatment affected your daily life?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION D: IMPACT OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ON WOMEN`S

1. Has GBV affected your capacity to make decisions in your household?

   ☐Yes ☐No

2. Has GBV affected your economic activities?

   ☐Yes ☐No

3. Has gender-based violence affected your confidence and independency as a woman?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

4. Rate you level of empowerment

   ☐Low ☐Moderate ☐High

SECTION E: COPING MECHANISMS

1. How do you respond to GBV?

   ☐Report to the authorities

   ☐Seek family support

   ☐Remain silent

   ☐Seek counselling

☐Other

(Specify)……

2. Are support services accessible to you?

   ☐Yes ☐No

3. What measures do you think can help reduce gender based violence in your community?

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE (KEY INFORMANTS)

My name is Joshua Gamula; I am a student doing a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education. This study seeks to examine the impact of gender-based violence in women`s empowerment in Muzarabani District focusing on wards 8 and 15 (Muringazuva and Gatu). I would like to discuss a few questions with you; your opinions and feelings are valuable for they will contribute to a better understanding and shall assist several GBV experts in near future. Your responses your responses will remain confidential and no references will be made to your names if the findings of this works are published. Nevertheless, open discussion and sincere responses to the question is greatly appreciated. For further clarification, you can call me or email on 0775889374 or email me on joshuagamulaone@gmail.com

1. What are common forms of Gender-based violence in this area?
2. What are the contributing factors of GBV in Muzarabani?
3. How does GBV affect women`s empowerment in the area?
4. What cultural practices that are contributing to GBV in this community?
5. What measure are in place to address GBV?
6. What are challenges that are being faced in combating GBV?
7. How effective are the current interventions?
8. What recommendations would you suggest to enhance women`s empowerment?

APPENDIX 3: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

My name is Joshua Gamula; I am a student doing a Bachelor of Science Honors Degree in Development Studies at Bindura University of Science Education. This study seeks to examine the impact of gender-based violence in women`s empowerment in Muzarabani District focusing on wards 8 and 15 (Muringazuva and Gatu). I would like to discuss a few questions with you; your opinions and feelings are valuable for they will contribute to a better understanding and shall assist several GBV experts in near future. Your responses your responses will remain confidential and no references will be made to your names if the findings of this works are published. Nevertheless, open discussion and sincere responses to the question is greatly appreciated. For further clarification, you can call me or email on 0775889374 or email me on joshuagamulaone@gmail.com

Opening Question

1. What does women's empowerment mean to you?

Discussion Questions

2. What types of GBV are common in your community?
3. What causes GBV in this area?
4. How does GBV affect women's lives and opportunities?
5. How do women usually respond to GBV?
6. What support systems are available?
7. What challenges do women face in seeking help?
8. What can be done to reduce GBV and empower women?

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

BINDURA, ZIMBABWE
WhatsApp: +263773281212
E mail: jbowora@buse.ac.zw or jb.bowora@gmail.com

BINDURA UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

CHAIRPERSON'S OFFICE

Friday, 17 October 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: RESEARCH SUPPORT LETTER FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STUDENT

This is to confirm that **GAMULA JOSHUA** Registration Number **B225199B** is our fourth-year student doing Bachelor of Science (Honours) Degree in Development Studies (HBSc.DG) at Bindura University of Science Education in the Sustainable Development Department.

In the fourth-year, students are required to do field research which require them to do data collection for their research purposes from various sources as part of their degree programme.

Kindly accord him/her the due cooperation the student truly deserves.

Yours faithfully,

CHAIRMAN
GEOGRAPHY DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF SCIENCE

Dr. J. Bowora (PhD)
(Chairperson)