

Building Community Resilience through Alleviating Violence against Women and Girls in Dombotombo, Marondera

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Abstract

This article builds an argument on the efficacy of strategies to alleviate violence against women and girls (VAWG) in building community resilience in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by four objectives, i.e. to identify the most prevalent cases of VAWG, assess whether women and girls are knowledgeable and fully informed to understand VAWG from awareness campaigns, assess the contribution of awareness campaigns to increased reporting of VAWG and how they can be improved to promote sustained ability of women and girls to withstand and recover from violence. Non-probability sampling techniques were employed to formulate 15 participants who participated in focus group discussion, in-depth and key informant interviews. Data were collected, organised, presented and discussed using qualitative research methodologies. Results revealed that the most prevalent cases of VAWG were domestic, physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic violence. The research revealed potential benefits of reporting. Participants lacked knowledge and understanding of VAGW except for key informants who portrayed practical understanding. It concluded that VAWG is still prevalent despite persistent efforts to alleviate it through awareness campaigns, the major strategy assessed in this study, and recommended the need to strengthen VAWG alleviation strategies in building community resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is not a new issue in societies. There has been increasing pressure from United Nations agencies, governments and various pressure groups to alleviate it. VAGW is regarded as a life-threatening issue that undermines dignity, causes immense pain and is a threat to equality that has been recognised as a severe universal health, rights and development concern (USAID and UNICEF, 2012). Past studies have shown that VAWG is high and statistics show that one in three (1 in 3) women have experienced violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2013). Based on recent studies, there is a higher prevalence of VAWG in Sub Saharan Africa with the lowest in Nigeria and highest in Ethiopia (Beyene *et al.*, 2019). VAGW is also regarded as violence inflicted on a child as a result of stereotypes and gender ascribed roles (Plan International Report, 2020), main public health concerns and abuse of women's rights. Worldwide 243 million girls and women, aged between 15 and 49 years, have been sexually and/or physically violated by their intimate partners (UN Women, 2020).

Given these high prevalence rates, alleviation strategies have sought to build community resilience through challenging value systems, norms and social environments that normalise violence. Awareness campaigns are usually aimed at sensitising and educating people of what VAWG is, its forms, what actions they can take when faced with this scourge, seeking a change of behaviour among perpetrators and survivors and curbing the increase in cases through zero-tolerance campaigning. Much of the activities to raise awareness on VAGW are conducted mainly during the commemorations of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence in that Zimbabwe joins the rest of the world to universally recognise that girls and women experience abuse and violence. However, although awareness campaigns have been extensively explored by past studies as an alleviation tool, what remains to be explored is their efficacy. Therefore, this study seeks to assess the efficacy of awareness campaigns in alleviating VAWG to build community resilience in Marondera, Zimbabwe.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A theoretical framework is a basis grounded on a standing theory in an area of investigation that correlates or replicates a study's proposition (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). It is a blueprint or guide for research that is over and over again referred to by the researcher to shape their own investigations. It comprises philosophies, ideas and paradigms that make up a theory that is important for providing a structure that shows the way a study can be defined logically, epistemologically, methodologically and rationally (Grant and Onsanloo, 2014). For the sake of this study, the researchers adopted Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as a basis for unpacking the efficacy of alleviating strategies of VAWG in building community resilience. Bronfenbrenner (2001) defines his ecological systems theory as a developing theoretical structure for a systematic study of human development over time. This theory divides an entity's environment into interconnected systems that include a microsystem that is an individual's immediate environment, the mesosystem that defines interrelationships between different microsystems, the exosystem that involves a setting wherein the individual is not actively involved and macrosystem that involves the society, traditional values and economic conditions in which families survive in (Ashiabi & O'Neal 2015). The interrelationship and configurations of interfaces within these systems affect each other and affect the individual (ibid.). According to the Global Women's Institute (2013), to eliminate the risk of VAWG, it is critical to developing an understanding of the complex interplay of biological, psychological, family and societal factors that expose women and girls to violence as explained by the ecological systems theory. Hence, this study adopted the ecological theory to conceptualise levels of risk and experiences of violence from an individual, relationship, community to society that resonates with micro-meso-macro-levels of conceptualisation (Rogers, 2010). However, whereas a number of scholars present the ecological systems theory as deliberation about violence using these four levels, very few have attempted to establish the impact of this theory in explaining mitigation strategies on VAWG at each level of the social ecology in enabling women and girls to withstand and recover from these adverse experiences that are applied in this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Plan International (2020), a global perspective revealed that the most prevalent cases of VAWG experienced by adolescent girls include child marriages, sexual violence, psychological or emotional violence, corporal punishment, female genital mutilation, honour killings, and slave or sex trading. Over 350 girls participated in this reported study from 12 countries, including Bolivia and Colombia, Dominican Republic, Liberia, Nepal, Paraguay and Uganda, among others, and an additional 797 girls participated via online platforms (Plan International Report, 2020). The study defined VAWG as violence inflicted on a child as a result of stereotypes and gender ascribed roles. It revealed that girls and young women are exposed to violence in the family, school and the journey to it, public places and public transport, during emergency situations and in online spaces that reveals the levels of risk experience as per the ecological systems theory. Reported VAWG alleviation strategies included teaching children about gender equality in schools, strengthening legislation to criminalise violence, prosecuting perpetrators and challenging social norms and values that promote violence. The study overly conceptualised VAWG and identified its most prevalent cases, the systems in which it happens and suggested ways to alleviate it. However, it was focused mainly on adolescent girls, leaving out young and older women who equally experience violence at micro, meso and macro-levels and also does not explicitly narrow to the discussion on the efficacy of alleviation strategies in building community resilience, is the heart of this study. Nevertheless, it fairly defines VAWG and outlines its most prevalent cases that are useful to this study.

Sanjel (2013) explored the most prevalent cases of VAWG as physical abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, verbal, sexual and spiritual abuse. At micro-level, domestic violence was the most prevalent case perpetrated by an intimate partner or sometimes by a family member. At macro-level, Sanjel (2013) posits that women experience violence during armed conflict and where rape is used as an instrument of war. However, the study did not discuss the efficacy of VAWG alleviation strategies in building sustained ability of women and girls to respond to violence, hence the heart of this study.

In another study conducted in certain countryside wards of Nepal, key findings revealed that the majority of women (61,3%) were un-informed of laws that address VAWG and amid women who were conscious about existing laws, the majority were incapable of depicting the contents of the laws and 13% were knowledgeable about the particular domestic violence law (Government of Nepal, 2012). From a demographic lens, the study revealed that women with low levels of education, were married and had poor social networks and belonged to lower wealth quintiles, were not in a position to be conscious of laws on VAWG that protect them (*ibid.*). It also depicted that women in Nepal are not knowledgeable of the existing services for violence survivors, with only a quarter of the participants having been aware but were incapable of explicitly mentioning them, showing lack of knowledge and understanding of VAWG.

For Palermo *et al.* (2013), VAWG is prevalent worldwide but is underreported. Their study addressed issues surrounding formal and informal reporting of violence. Their analysis was centred on Demographic and Health Survey data from 284 281 women in 24 states, gathered between 2004 and 2011 and their study revealed that the majority of women who had experienced violence have told someone before with only a few having reported formally. Women who have been married before and those who had never been who reside in urban areas were demographic characteristics that were linked to violence reporting (*ibid.*). This publication thus revealed that underreporting of VAWG and failure to seek help occur worldwide due to barriers, such as shame, stigma, lack of awareness of available services and cultural beliefs (*ibid.*). Thus, this article seeks to assess the efficacy of VAWG alleviation strategies in building resilience among women and girls in urban communities.

Muluneh *et al.* (2020) systematically reviewed studies that examined the prevalence of VAWG in Sub-Saharan Africa using 58 articles published in English from 2008 to 2019. Forms, such as Intimate Partner Violence (PV) and non-Intimate Partner Violence, among women, were used to classify the occurrence of VAWG. The authors also refer to VAWG as an international human rights abuse that occurs in both developed and developing countries, regardless of culture, socio-economic class or

religion and it varies in form and extent from country to country (*ibid.*). Muluneh *et al.* (2020) also revealed that women and girls suffer from violence in silence due to a lack of knowledge of available services and attitudes surrounding violence as a normal component of life and refer to the culture of silence in reporting VAWG as 'Tip of the iceberg or silent epidemic' as survivors of violence fear to report due to stigma, shame and financial barriers. This results in underreporting and challenges in accurately measuring the prevalence of VAWG (*ibid.*).

A study by Beyene *et al.* (2019) proved that VAWG is widespread in Sub-Saharan Africa in accordance with its various forms and risk factors among female youths in institutions of learning. The study showed the overall statistics of prevalent cases of VAWG, including physical violence, emotional and sexual violence as highest in Ethiopia and lowest in Nigeria. Beyene *et al.* (2019) also showed that these most prevalent cases of VAWG were strongly associated with educational and marital status, misuse of substances and witnessing parental violence. The publication then recommended Sub-Saharan African states to formulate inclusive educational institution-based prevention strategies and robust ways of mitigating VAWG (*ibid.*) which in turn reduce risk among women and girls, thereby building resilience that informs the heart of this study.

Another study by Akamike *et al.* (2019) showed a significant relationship between education level and risk of exposure to violence and that women and girls with lower levels of education were more likely to experience violence as they usually do not understand what VAWG is. Akamike *et al.* (2019) have also revealed that VAWG is still high in Sub-Saharan Africa and reports of greater than 50% included Ethiopia, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and South Africa due to the African culture that expects women to be submissive and dependent on their male counterparts and any attempt to resist is unacceptable. As a result, women do not readily report violence cases formally and the publication also mentions lack of awareness as one factor perpetuating the culture of silence among women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa. Akamike *et al.* (2019) have also highlighted in their study that despite the interventions geared towards reducing the rate of VAWG, its prevalence continues to be high but they

do not mention the efficacy of alleviation strategies in building community resilience that happens to be the core of this study.

A report by Sommerfelt and Borwankar (2009) on VAWG in Sub Saharan Africa showed that gender-based violence is a systemic issue that affects all sectors of society. They pointed out that VAWG affects the physical and emotional health of women and ultimately damages societies, affecting individuals from micro-level to macro-levels. Sommerfelt and Borwankar (2009), however, noted that despite this well-known magnitude of the violence problem, national leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa fail to formulate and implement policy and programmatic measures needed to mitigate this scourge and build community resilience. The authors of the report focused on reviewing Demographic Health Surveys data on domestic violence from seven countries, including Cameroon, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The idea was to determine if countries are using compelling evidence to inform national planning around VAWG. They also pointed out the gaps that exist not only in the evidence informing policies, but also continuing gaps in the implementation of VAWG interventions and laws. This report, therefore, relates to how to better improve VAWG alleviation strategies to reduce risk of violence experiences to build community resilience.

From a local perspective, Mashiri (2013) argues that VAWG is a cause for concern in every corner of the world and Zimbabwe, in particular, although numerous approaches have been executed by the government and organisations to absorb it to build community resilience. His study presented the most prevalent cases of VAWG, its pervasiveness, effects and its relationship to development. The research brought up violence in three levels: micro-level violence that is one perpetrated by an intimate partner or family member, including physical abuse; mezzo level violence perpetrated by a non-family member or a stranger; and macro-level violence perpetrated by state agents, all which affect women and girls (SAFAIDS, 2009 cited in Mashiri, 2013). The publication also revealed the underreporting of VAWG cases in Zimbabwe where girls and women are promoting the culture of silence due to factor such as economic dependence on their male counterparts, who happen to be the major perpetrators and also fear of losing their homes. Mashiri (2013) reveals

that results from the Zimbabwe Demographic and Health Survey (2005-2006) show that the majority of women do not report violence or tell anyone. However, the publication acknowledged that there is limited data on VAWG and that it is largely incomparable considering resilience building.

In Zimbabwe, existing literature also shows that girls and women lack knowledge and understanding of VAWG. Mukanangana *et al.* (2014) studied VAWG and its effects on women's reproductive health and the findings revealed that normally, unemployed, uneducated and married women are subjected to physical abuse because of their total dependence on their male counterparts. Their study also revealed that because of lack of knowledge, these women still uphold the cultural belief that, at one point in marriage, a woman has to be beaten up by their husband and that a husband who does not beat his wife does not love her. Most of the respondents in this study again showed that they did not know that spousal rape is one of the classified sexual offences in the Domestic Violence Act and married women concurred that it is very improper to report spousal rape. Though prevalent, view it as men's conjugal rights in marriage at the expense of their health.

It is also revealed that in Zimbabwe, women and girls do not report violence cases due mainly to cultural and societal expectations. Police officers from the Victim Friendly Unit who took part in this study revealed that women do not take spousal rape as a serious offence and it is less than 5% of reported violence cases (Mukanangana *et al.*, 2014). Participants in that research attested to the fact that it is improper to report spousal rape because culturally, women are married or are in affairs to satisfy men's sexual desire and reporting a husband or partner is tantamount to exposing a woman's failure in sexual obligations, which is culturally unexpected. The Mukanangana *et al.* (*ibid.*) study thus fairly elaborates women and girls' lack of understanding and knowledge about VAWG and the culture of silence in reporting. Their study, however, did not explore the efficacy of strategies to alleviate VAWG in strengthening women and girls' ability to deal with violence that is the heart of this study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study involved primary data collection to obtain first-hand information from participants using qualitative research methods, i.e. focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Mcleod (2019) defines the qualitative research method as a process of collecting and analysing data that is non-numerical, such as language using in-depth interviews or diary accounts and analysed using thematic analysis.

The target population comprised women and girls of ages between 15 and 35 years in the Dombotombo Community in Marondera District. It was targeted because of its efficacy to broadly unearth VAWG of school-going age, teenagers, girls in intimate relationships, women in marriages and those who are not. The Young Women's Forum (YWF) chairperson, Organising Secretary and YWF member from Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) were key informants. This was done to obtain a comprehensive assessment of VAWG mitigating strategies that reduce risk of exposure to and experiencing violence, thereby building community resilience.

The researcher employed non-probability sampling techniques to formulate study participants. Snowballing was used to pick a few participants who had either experienced or witnessed VAWG and then asked them to recommend others within their social networks who also may have experienced violence and are willing to participate. This enabled the researchers to find participants who met the demands of the study as survivors usually do not openly disclose to an outsider and to balance resource savings of time and money. It also helped the researchers to have the required sample size of 15 participants.

Qualitative data analysis was employed using the process of thematic content analysis. Data were collected, coded and transcribed to formulate themes from interview transcripts and FGDs. The process was repeated to identify further themes emerging from major themes. A combination of data analysis during and after data collection was employed and results are presented in tables and verbatim quotes.

RESULTS

This section focuses on the presentation of findings as informed by qualitative research methodologies used to collect data on building community resilience through alleviating VAWG. Four main themes emerged from the study along with the research objectives.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

This section presents key demographic characteristics of participants that have a bearing on this study, which are age range, educational levels, religion and marital status.

AGE RANGE

The total number of participants was 15, including six women, six girls and three key informants from Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ), purposively selected using snowball sampling. The ages of girls ranged between 15 and 25, women between 21 and 35 and key informants ranged between twenty-six and thirty-five years.

RELIGION, EDUCATION, AND MARITAL STATUS

All participants who took part in this research study were Christian believers and none of them belonged to Muslim or African Traditional Religion. The majority of them were also not highly educated with only five out of the 15 participants having reached higher and tertiary education (three key informants from WCoZ and two girls). Seven out of 15 participants indicated that they were married or in intimate relationships and they attested that they had experienced intimate partner violence in their relationships.

CASES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

Participants were asked to describe cases of violence that women and girls are subjected to. The findings depicted that VAWG cases are prevalent among women and girls at all levels of the social ecology from an individual, relationship, community to society. During in-depth interviews with women and girls, they described that VAWG cases are rampant and women and girls experience violence in their everyday life at home and in the community. One of the participants, Mrs X, noted:

Girls and women are experiencing violence in their everyday lives both at home and community levels that are sometimes perpetrated by married men who openly cheat on their wives with young girls.

Key informant interviews further deduced that VAWG is prevalent, including domestic violence, physical abuse, emotional, verbal and economic abuse as noted by one key informant, Ms Y:

I think physical violence is most prevalent even girls are also experiencing it in their intimate relationships, sexual and domestic violence are prevalent in the whole country.

Another key informant also noted that violence has become prevalent in the community and neighbourhood, especially over backyards for gardening and planting crops generally; as quoted from one key informant:

There is also verbal VAWG at community level between neighbours especially over backyard spaces for gardening and planting crops, generally in the rain season resulting in peace orders from the police.

Findings from the study also established that VAWG have intensified in this COVID-19 pandemic period. From a focus group discussion, findings were that domestic violence is prevalent considering that couples and families have to spend a lot of time together in homes due to lockdown restrictions imposed to curb the spread of the virus, resulting in cases of verbal, sexual and emotional abuse. Participant Z noted that domestic violence cases towards daughters increased due to these lockdowns.

KNOWLEDGE ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

The study assesses whether women and girls are knowledgeable and fully equipped to understand VAWG. During FGDs, in-depth and key informant interviews, participants were requested to describe their understanding of VAWG from what they know from awareness campaigns as the major mitigating strategy. The findings showed that the majority of women and girls do not really understand and lack knowledge

about VAWG, although they have heard of the term in their lifetime as noted by one participant;

We only hear of it but we do not really understand what it means. As a result, most of us are subjected to violence but because of lack of knowledge and understanding we always suffer in silence.

During a key informant interview, VAWG was described as violence against a female because of their gender as noted by one key informant: “VAWG is violence against a woman because of being female.” Key informants were also asked about the kind of information they disseminate to women and girls to educate and inform them about VAWG. Findings were that information is disseminated to women and girls through awareness campaigns that VAWG is a human rights violation from a Human Rights perspective. One key informant said that girls and women are educated and informed during awareness campaigns that are conducted to capacitate them to know that VAWG is a violation that undermines human dignity and worth.

AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS AND REPORTING VAWG

The study assesses the contribution of awareness campaigns to increased reporting of VAWG and breaking the culture of silence. As such, during an FGD, participants were asked about their understanding of awareness campaigns on VAWG and the findings showed that they lack understanding of awareness campaigns as a mitigation strategy to inform and educate them in building resilience. Instead, they likened awareness campaigns to political rallies as noted by one Participant Z: “I think awareness campaigns encompasses such education that is delivered to people during political rallies.”

During FGDs and interviews, participants were also asked potential benefits of reporting VAWG to the survivor, family, community and society at large from an ecological systems theory lens that systemises the benefits into a micro, meso and macro-levels of conceptualisation. The findings depicted potential benefits in Table 1.

Table 1: *Potential Benefits of reporting VAWG to the survivor, the family and community* (Palermo et al., 2013)

Benefits to the survivor	Benefits to the family	Benefits to the community
By reporting and holding the perpetrator accountable, the survivor becomes a helper to other victims who may be suffering in silence. That builds resilience.	Early reporting of violence cases lowers extreme effects of domestic violence, such as the death of either spouse and/or children.	Reporting builds community resilience by enabling it to realise that VAWG is a crime and a violation of human rights.
Survivor has peace of mind after having been helped.	Reporting prevents harmful fights, some of which result in burns.	Perpetrators of VAWG will be in fear of the rule of law, such as jail sentencing, community service and paying fines.
The survivor will spread the word of where to get help.	Reporting creates a peaceful and conducive environment for a family, thereby building resilience.	Other survivors of VAWG will have the courage and confidence to withstand and report violence and that builds resilience.

IMPROVING EFFICACY OF AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

The study established how awareness campaigns can be improved to render effective mitigation against VAWG. In FGDs participants were asked how the government, NGOs, and women's organisations can improve awareness campaigns to effectively mitigate VAWG to build community resilience. Findings revealed that awareness campaigns can be improved by being inclusive and accommodating, despite differences that may exist among individuals. One participant Mrs X said:

It is my view that all programmes that involve awareness raising on VAWG should just include everyone regardless of individual differences and backgrounds.

Key informants were asked about ways to improve awareness campaigns to effectively mitigate VAWG and findings emphasised the need to shift from traditional ways of conducting awareness campaigns to modern ways to build community resilience VAWG as noted by one key informant:

I would think of engaging churches in community preparedness activities and doing programmes, such as women's fellowship, unlike the old way of conducting awareness campaigns at townships and shopping centres where some women and girls are even restricted to go. It is at the church where we see women seeking advice and help when faced with marital or relationship problems that usually result in domestic, physical, sexual and emotional violence.

Another key informant also noted the need to improve awareness campaigns through the use of online methods, such as social media platforms so that women and girls can access information and help in the comfort of their homes without having to go out to public places to attend a campaign. The findings also emphasised that online campaigns will build resilience through creation of networks and relationships for wider support. Ms Y noted:

Using social media can be effective to have a wider coverage and support in raising awareness and this should be done consistently to impact relevant information to women and girls.

Key informants also pointed to the greater impact of investing in Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials to improve the efficacy of awareness campaigns in mitigating VAWG as noted by one key informant:

There is impact in printing awareness messages on IEC materials, not only fliers and posters but mainly t-shirts and caps to continue raising awareness as people are usually tempted to read what is written either on the back of a t-shirt or on a cap. Normally, if not understood well, the reader may even go further to ask about the meaning of the message that can greatly contribute to resilience building.

DISCUSSION

This section analyses and discusses results in relation to the reviewed literature in line with building community resilience through mitigating VAWG and from an ecological systems lens that is the theoretical framework for this study. This study's aim is to assess the efficacy of awareness campaigns in mitigating VAWG in Zimbabwe.

Ages of girls ranged between 15 and 25, women between 21 and 35 and key informants ranged between twenty-six and thirty-five years. This age

range had a bearing on this study in complementing the fact that adolescent girls and young women are at a greater risk of violence, particularly where it is normalised and taken as a private affair (Plan International, 2020). Global estimates also support this by stating that one in three women has experienced violence in their lifetime (WHO, 2013) and all the 15 participants who participated in this study attested that they had experienced or witnessed violence in their lives.

Education levels of participants revealed that only five of the 15 participants have reached higher and tertiary education (three key informants from WCoZ and two girls). However, besides all of the participants attesting that they had experienced violence, the remaining 10 who had low levels of education indicated a lack of understanding of VAWG and have unknowingly experienced violence, unlike the others. Mukanangana *et al.* (2014) support this by arguing that normally unemployed, uneducated and married women are subjected to violence because of their total dependence on their male counterparts.

Seven out of 15 participants in this study indicated that they were married and attested to have experienced domestic violence at the hands of their spouses and the remaining eight unmarried also confirmed to have either experienced or witnessed violence from intimate partners. All of the participants indicated that they had never reported any of these cases of intimate-partner violence.

The first objective sought to establish the most prevalent cases of VAWG and findings depicted that physical, emotional, verbal, economic, sexual and domestic violence were the most prevalent cases. This is also supported by Beyene *et al.* (2019) who revealed that sexual, physical, and emotional violence are high in Sub-Saharan Africa, Zimbabwe included. Another objective was to assess whether women and girls are knowledgeable and fully equipped and well-informed to understand VAWG from awareness campaigns. The findings, however, revealed that the majority of grassroots women and girls do not understand what VAWG means due mainly to lower levels of education and, therefore, do not know that it is a human rights violation. However, key informants proved that they had a practical understanding of the meaning of VAWG

and this shows that information must be disseminated to grassroots women for resilience building. Women and girls also lacked knowledge about awareness campaigns as a developmental tool to build community resilience. This contradicts the views of Damba *et al.* (2013) that awareness campaigns, particularly in Zimbabwe, are aimed at sensitising people about VAWG and its forms and that they have informed much of the workshops and discussions around GBV issues.

Results also showed a lack of reporting of VAWG. Key informants revealed that awareness campaigns have contributed to the alleviation of VAWG and reporting of cases though to a lesser extent. Findings showed that coverage of these awareness campaigns is still less effective in mitigating VAWG. Nevertheless, potential benefits of reporting at all levels of the ecosystem from the individual, home and community were established in accordance with the ecological systems theory. Findings also portrayed the need to improve awareness campaigns as a mitigating strategy in building community resilience specifically a shift from the primitive way of conducting them at shopping centres to a new approach of adopting online means, IEC materials and strategic gatherings, such as churches and schools as supported by WHO's (2009) emphasis on school-based, community-based and mass media interventions towards building community resilience.

An analysis of the findings shows that VAWG is sometimes seasonal and situational, including domestic violence, physical, emotional, sexual and verbal violence as supported by the UN Women (2020) report that revealed that due to COVID-19, VAWG, particularly domestic violence, has intensified in many countries, as security, health and money worries create tensions perpetuated by the new living conditions in the lockdown.

The findings also showed the levels of risk experienced by women and girls from family, relationship, neighbourhood to community levels in line with Heise (1998), who argues that VAWG is a complex phenomenon centred on the interaction among individuals, situational, and socio-cultural factors. From an ecological systems theory lens, women and girls are subjected to violence from a micro-level, (their families), meso level (the immediate community) and at macro-level (violence perpetrated by

state agencies). Mashiri (2013) supports this by pointing out that females in Zimbabwe were exposed to violence since the liberation struggle and the *Gukurahundi* disturbances in Matabeleland in the 1980s that revealed violence experience at micro, meso and macro-levels.

The findings thus depict that there is still a long way to go for strategies to mitigate VAWG to build community resilience. There is need to improve awareness campaigns as a mitigating strategy to attain Sustainable Development Goal 5 that speaks to the equality of sexes and empowerment of females and to respect and implement the stipulations of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) General Recommendation 35.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study assessed the efficacy of strategies to alleviate VAWG in building community resilience. Data were gathered, organized and presented using qualitative methodologies. Findings from the study showed that VAWG is still prevalent, despite efforts to alleviate it. In relation to the study's first objective to identify the most prevalent cases of VAWG, prevalent cases that were described by participants include physical, sexual, emotional and economic violence. The study revealed that women and girls are exposed to these cases at micro, meso and macro-levels. As the study sought to assess whether women and girls are knowledgeable and fully informed to understand VAWG from awareness campaigns, findings showed that grassroots women lack knowledge and understanding. Key informants portrayed practical knowledge. The study also sought to assess the contribution of awareness campaigns to increase reporting of VAWG and it established potential benefits of reporting violence in building community resilience. Finally, the last objective sought to establish how awareness campaigns can be improved to effectively mitigate VAWG to build community resilience and the findings depicted ways to improve them, such as the use of online platforms and engaging churches to build resilience in communities.

This study puts forward recommendations to various pressure groups, the government and public generally to build community resilience through alleviating VAWG.

- There is need to strengthen GBV alleviation strategies to influence gender-sensitive social policy and social protection programming with a specialised approach to building community resilience;
- There is also need for the government to capitalise on putting the law into practice, both international and domestic, to invest in digital technology to enhance VAWG alleviation strategies and to fully support women's organisations and other pressure groups involved in building community resilience through alleviating VAWG;
- The study also recommends the need to ensure safety, respect and confidentiality of survivors, engagement of male champions in building community resilience and user-friendly language when disseminating information on VAWG in communities.

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