

# **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

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## **Abstract**

Matters to do with gender imaging and exploitation have adamantly sailed across decades, and much of the exerted efforts have often been realised in the form of financial, temporal, and physical losses, with very minimal resolutions towards significant policy reform, implementation, and gender-oriented mainstreaming. Even today, issues to do with domestic violence, gender inequalities, depravity, suppression, and harassment are still evident and continue to manifest in various settings and manifestations across sex divides. Whilst it can be conceded that a multiplicity of unfavourable encounters have, in many instances, hampered mercilessly upon the ‘vulnerable female counterpart’, this study aims to challenge the widely growing parochial and unanimously celebrated facet of presenting females as the only victims while the males are the sole perpetrators within both the traditional and legal fraternities. Using the case of the Tsonga culture, the study attempts to present a well-balanced investigation of gender-based abuses and the often ignored side where males’ sufferings and negative imaging are often ignored and objected to as trivial, absurd, and ridiculous cases. The study is, therefore, an endeavour to explore (far from bias) the concept of gender mainstreaming among the Tsonga people as enshrined in some traditional practices and other socio-cultural creeds in a bid to present a rationalised and balanced presentation of both the female and male vulnerable to the now, continuously narrowing discipline of gender studies.

**Keywords:** male, female, gender, GBV, Tsonga, mainstreaming.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Gender relations and gender typing have been on the spotlight on a global scale for many years. They have ignited emotions from across disciplines, gender-sensitive movements, academic institutions, and individuals. Conversely, the dual concept of ‘gender’ has significantly shifted in semantics across decades, to barely and precisely denote ‘females’ – especially matters to do with their plight within a male-dominated setting. Serious debates in the realm of gender have been biased towards the ‘others’, who have, through the stages of history, been identified as the ‘only’

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

vulnerable, affected, and deprived side. Financiers and those who would in several ways offer support and perhaps campaign for gender streamlining have been partially advocating for the voice, support, and equality crusades for the female counterpart. Legal justice administration as well as the operations and responses of the human rights and other bodies of advocacy – all and sundry, appear to lack insight into the philosophy behind ‘gender streamlining’ in the sense of the term, as well as to offer quick, meaningful and relative responses to Gender-Based Violence victims of either sex. It is inferred that “some scepticism in certain quarters that talking about the problem of male” gender-based violence will divert global attention and resources away from addressing female plights (Sivakumaran, 2010: 265) Even in instances where men report acts of sexual violence, those receiving the reports rarely handle the report with the sensitivity and awareness (it rightfully deserves (Kapur and Muddell, 2016)).

The at times stealth and unvoiced female-perpetrated violence against males has often been considered ridiculous, unmentionable, and worth ignoring. Violence against women has always been “newsworthy” when violence perpetrated against males is not (Sivakumaran, 2010: 261). This disproportionate regard perpetuates the plight of males as Gender-Based Violence victims whose experiences “continue to be underreported, misunderstood, and mischaracterized in transitional justice processes” (Kapur and Muddell, 2016). Considerations, it can be conceded, around taking seriously the plights, sufferings, and exploitation of males by females in various interactive settings have been trivialised and ignored by the very organisations that have been established to look into matters regarding gender streamlining. Thus, “the attention paid to male (gender-based violence) still languishes behind” (Sivakumaran, 2010: 261).

Among the most defensive reasons given for paying more attention to females’ pleas than males is the idea that females are ‘weaker vessels’ and therefore more vulnerable than males who can speculate multiple ways to circumvent their challenges. It is also argued that a man’s sexual suffrage in the hands of a female culprit is different from the suffrage of a female who would have gone through the same torture. In a sense, a man’s distress does not carry the same weight as that of a female counterpart. The case immediately gets shadowed by a popular adage, “Men don’t get sexually harassed, they get lucky!” (Jones, 2019). For this reason, coerced sensual relationships against males have remained an ignored area (Sivakumaran, 2010)

It is also vital to mention that the activities involving gender mainstreaming “tended to present and focus only on one side of the gender coin, which are women and girls” (Tu 2015: 2) at the dire

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

expense of men and boys – as if men and boys are the only problems. This is largely advanced by proponents of Western feminism who tend to present matters in a way that makes people believe that females lack personal agency, a proclivity that does not only deny reality but proceed to thwart authentic solutions to a host of gender problems bedeviling the entire world (Ehrhard, 2018). Legal justice administration as well as the operations and responses of the human rights and other bodies of advocacy – all and sundry, appear to lack insight into the philosophy behind ‘gender mainstreaming in the sense of the term, as well as to offer quick, meaningful and relative responses to Gender-Based Violence victims of either sex. It is inferred that “some scepticism in certain quarters that talking about the problem of male” gender-based violence will divert global attention and resources away from addressing female plights (Sivakumaran, 2010: 265) Even in instances where men report acts of sexual violence, those receiving the reports rarely handle the report with the sensitivity and awareness (it rightfully deserves (Kapur and Muddell, 2016)”.

### **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Many studies among the Vatsonga have been carried out basing on how females have been exploited through the ages under the hash thumbs of their male counterparts. A preponderance of research on gender have blessed females as the sole victims in gender studies. It has become axiom that studies in gender mainstreaming focus sorely on how males oppress females and not the other way around. Studies on the exploitation of males have been ignored, short down, and trampled upon by both donors and the feminist academia. As such, the insidious exploitation of males by females remained a hidden subject that is not worth discussing, and ‘gender’ has been reduced semantically to mean ‘females’ - that is women and girls only. This study posits that such a myopic illustration of the gender scope is problematic, and it is becoming the major course for a continued discourse of gender imbalances across regions and the world as a whole. Thus, it is impossible to attempt to mainstream gender when focusing merely on the problems perpetrated upon one side of the dichotomy.

#### **Research Aim**

The study aims to present a rationalised inquiry of gender mainstreaming by attempting to lob a corrective analysis of cumulative biases within the broader field of gender studies. Using the case of the Tsonga culture in Southern Zimbabwe, the attempts to present a well-balanced investigation of gender-based abuses and the often ignored side where males’ sufferings and negative imaging are often ignored and objected as trivial, absurd, and ridiculous cases will be unveiled.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual frameworks, like theoretical frameworks in research, are critical in providing a lens through which the study can be viewed, conceptualised and understood conceptual framework chosen for this research is ‘gender mainstreaming’. Gender mainstreaming is defined by the United Nations Economic and Social Council thus:

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality...

Gender mainstreaming as a concept and a process within gender debates looks into the affairs of both men and women/ males and females across levels of human interaction to determine how each gender should be treated. It is a fight against the misuse of power across traditional gender hierarchies. It attempts to level the differences between males and females that long-standing human traditions have set in an endeavour to advantage one gender at the expense of another. Thus, the concept weighs both sides without any bias towards a specific gender.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sivakumaran (2007) investigated gender-based violence involving men against other men. The papers delves deeper into how men sexually molest other men, especially in armed conflicts, and how those exposed to such levels of pain and humiliation hardly find a place where to report the very abuse rendered upon them. it is also hinted that because of the physio-biological differences between men and women, those responsible for physically investigating the abuses may not be concerned or knowledgeable about checking the sexual abuses rendered upon men and this creates hard times for men who would have suffered such abuses. Sivakumaran (2007: 11) painfully writes:

If male survivors wished to report the abuse and were able to find the words with which to do so, they face the danger of consent being assumed if they are unable to prove the rape. This may lead to a finding of the victim engaging in consensual homosexual activity, which may, in turn, be a criminal offense under the law of the relevant state. The danger of this happening may dissuade some victims from reporting the abuse they have suffered.

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

All this, it is confirmed, happens because male sexual abuse is thought not to leave any visible scars upon the victims which may be proof for the violence perpetrated by the abuser. It is further argued that reports of sexual violence perpetrated upon men by other men are usually discovered in medical reports and are hardly found anywhere. This is because of the sensitivity and 'strangeness' attached to the issue. This paper is very critical in edifying the current research since it will assist the present researcher in the formulation of the current research.

Josolyne (2011) writes about the abuse of men by females within heterosexual affairs. The writer notes that the notion regarding the exploitation of males by females in heterosexual intimate relationships is a stealthy and hard-to-unpack phenomenon. This is because of human tradition that echoes and holds as an axiom the notion of male abusers and female victims. It is hinted that the reversal of such long-standing traditions comes with many misunderstandings that render its credibility a matter of doubtful authenticity. Josolyne confirms that the patriarchal nature of human society does not expect to hear from men that they have been battered or exploited in any way by their wives because it is well known that men have the upper hand over their wives in all respect, and can even beat their wives for the slightest mistakes just to prove that they are the heads of their respective families.

The study also confirms that academia has been known for its concentration on research on women abuse and exploitation by males without considering how abusive females explore and oppress the world of males. Such research are well known for encouraging and supporting feminist's movements that myopically investigate the abuse, deprivation, and welfare of females by casting a wink upon the female-induced sufferings of males. It is also argued that very few cases have been reported to have reported and scarcely any are willing to go and report to the relevant offices the abuses perpetrated upon them for the very reasons of suffering ridicule and subsequent humiliation. The reviewed paper is in line with the current study in that they are both addressing issues relating to the exploitation of males, especially by females as a way of divulging the truth that females are not the only victims in the game of gender-based violence but both sides can exchange sides as either victims or abusers. This mindset will serve useful posts in the current study by pointing out how legislation, culture, and many gender movements have being biased in their consideration by carving meaningful trajectories towards holistic gender mainstreaming campaigns for the goodness of both sides.

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

Pizzey et. al. (2000) write about very painful incidences where feminist-orientated females abused and shouted at both males and children without anyone brave enough to cool them down. The researchers make it clear that females have become independent in a way that males will strive for years to attain. It is also sad to discover that even males are not in a position or willing to assist financially, other abused men, at least in ways that females are willing to console and assist their fellows affected by an abusive relationship

During all the years that I specialised in working with violent women and their children, I could never come to terms with the fear men had of violent women. I sat around dinner tables and in sitting rooms, listening to the feminist women abusing the men they lived with. I saw some women running what amounted to mini-concentration camps behind their front doors. I rarely ever saw a father stand up to a violent wife or lover... Even now people laugh when a man says he has been abused.

The study proceeds to touch on both sides of the coin where both males and females are involved in the abuse of one another, making the gender aspect not only tricky but an issue that needs thorough investigation before blaming one and only one of the sexes. It is also hinted that the fact that males are the only blamed parties in many relationships opens avenues for notorious females to expand crevices for divorce by hampering blames on their husbands as abusive and at times lying that the husband abuses children. This study is in line with the current study that focuses on gender mainstreaming in which case gender is properly defined to mean both males and females without the bias of looking at females as the mere victims in all relationships with men.

Alberta (2008) demonstrates the multi-faceted exploitation of males by females within the circles of intimate relationships. The study proves that the oppression of males by females is a fact and many a man have proven that they are confronting fierce encounters within their relationships. The research also details the various approaches that people should use when consoling or interacting with men who live with abused partners. The various ways that women use to abuse men like enforcing strange styles of intimacy, trying to control man's behaviour as well and limiting and controlling their networks are mentioned as some of the key areas where men suffer abuse. Instances of such abusive behaviour perpetrated by females upon their male counterparts unveil thus:

Abuse of men by their partners happens when the partner uses emotional, physical, sexual, or intimidation tactics. She does it to control the man, get her way, and prevent him from leaving the

relationship. The abused man is always adapting his behaviour to do what his partner wants, in the hopes of preventing further abuse (p. 2).

This cited exemption unravels a clear picture of how sour heterogeneous relations can be. The exempt also defies tradition by displaying the traditionally veiled side of humanity. It is men who are kept silent, abused, manipulated, and presented as insecure creatures whose survival dangles pitifully at the mercy of women. This study was carried out in Jamaica but carries similar sentiments with studies conducted in some parts of Africa in general and among the Zimbabwean Vatsonga in particular. The study will enlighten and augment especially the methodological segment of the current study through a revelation of a myriad of issues that have been underscored as critical when interacting with victims of abuse.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The study is a qualitative investigation where interviews were used for collecting data. The population considered comprised Xitsonga speakers purposively chosen from potential undergraduate students from a given university that resists naming for ethical purposes. Data was analysed using narrative analysis technique.

##### **Significance of the study**

It is anticipated that a study of this kind will serve as an eye-opener to feminists, and human rights bodies as well as bring forth awareness among policymakers in sharpening and re-designing their scope to include ‘the state of males’ within gender debates, which they have always left in the background – unattended. The findings from this study will also bridge the available gaps in the literature and is anticipated to rekindle further research into the redefined ‘other sex’ that has, for so many years, been unexplored, particularly on issues to do with gender sensitivity in the face of both cultural and legal considerations.

##### **Ethical considerations**

Issues to do with gender (in its dichotomous application) have been sensitised, especially amongst the Tsonga – a culturally binding ethnicity whose values, they believe, serve to cement emotively, the very fabrics that inform their humanness (*vumunhu*). It is therefore imperative that matters to do with the exploitation of males by females be kept under the table, or veiled and dealt with indoors since they are not newsworthy. This is because a man is so-called because of his prowess, bravery, and power to suppress and subdue all females including his wife/wives. Given this



backdrop, the researcher was particular about ethical principles relating to confidentiality and the interviewees' consent in participating during interviews.

### **Gender relations among the Vatsonga people: A Discussion**

The exploitation of males by females in its various manifestations has been witnessed by many a Tsonga man in many gendered settings. Traditionally, among the Vatsonga, it is taboo for a man to report being beaten or has suffered under the cruelty of a female. This is because females are 'weaker vessels' who can only be protected by men and not vice versa. It is also needless to mention that men are the ones who reside over and administrate traditional offices, court proceedings as well as the decision of who should speak and not to do so. Traditionally, the proverb "wansati a nga na huvo" (a woman has no (court) voice) gives a comprehensive appraisal of how women, in general, are viewed and treated among the Vatsonga. It is this very insidious background that makes the exploitation of males by females a very questionable and ridiculous occurrence within such a highly patriarchal society. As such, the sufferings of males remain a hidden and undisclosed issue since it is not only strange but raises very unhealthy questions about the manliness of the reportedly exploited males.

Various private and verbal reports reveal that "Vanwana vavasati va ba vanuna va vona ni ku va xanisa hi tindlela ta tsandzavahlayi" (some women can beat and exploit their husbands in multifarious ways). This unveils that even though men, by nature, are physically stronger than females, their some females who are stronger than their males, making it easier for them to exploit them physically and otherwise. In such settings where the female has an upper hand in the home, the husband has little to say in terms of decision-making and how matters should be directed within the family but a preponderance of the decisions come from the wife. However, for fear of the set societal decorum, such a patriarchal structure usually remain hidden and localised in case the broader society may not only ridicule the family in its entirety but may proceed to harass the female for breaking the general regulation of traditional Tsonga society.

In some instances, the defiance of females and exploitation of males by their wives has come in the way females respond to societal callings of duty. That is how they respond to what society expects them to do for their males as part of predetermined gender roles. It has been discovered that "Vavasati van'wana va sungula va hlamba va ta nyika vavanuna va vona mati lawa va nga hlamba leswaku va hlamba hi mati mo thyaka" (Some women first take a bath and then give to their husbands the same dirty water for a bath). This, as part of indoor exploitation, normally



## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

remains undisclosed for years giving rise to emotional turmoil among many a man within Tsonga societies. Sadly, such insidious relations between married couples cannot be reported in public courts, nor do the suffering males want to have them divulged for fear of being valued as ‘not manful enough’ in society. Men who report being exploited by their females would be labelled females and become communal laughingstocks for years. This worsens their plight rather than alleviating it. Society expects them to be strong enough to handle every situation confronting them, especially at the level of their family. Hence men normally suffer silently when no one is ready to lend an ear to their plight.

In some extreme cases, females can also expose their males to psychological trauma because “vavhelenisa vavanuna endlwini ya vona (they bring other men into their bedrooms). Whilst many men are indeed notorious womanisers, it can also be conceded that there are also women who decide to involve themselves in a sexual triangle. Such extramarital affairs may not only destabilise their marriage but proceed to affect males psychologically, especially where the male feels culturally tight to the marriage irrespective of what may happen. At times the male feels that exposing her wife’s extra-marital affairs will do more psychological harm to him than to the wife, and therefore considers hiding it better than exposing her. This is because it is one of the highest levels of proving how unfaithful one is to her spouse. It even becomes more painful when it normally happens when the husband is away fending for her and the children and the ‘beats’ enjoys the fruits of his sweat back home.

It has also been reported that other women, for want of freedom expose their men to emotional pain by “ku siya vavanuna va vona makaya va ya kucineni lomu mitlangwini” (leave their husbands at home and go for dance parties). Married people normally marry for a cause. To create a unified soul, that will yield a unified family and live in harmony. They normally long to live together and do all that make both sides happy, without disappointing one another. They long to be faithful to one another. That bond and all the longs witness a huge fissure when the other partner seeks her happiness which turns out to be a source of disappointment to the one she is married to. It is well known that parties have many unpleasant outcomes. Potentially, marriages are broken, weakened, or diverted. This fear is normally powerful enough to crack and destabilise a strong marriage tie before there are any symptoms of it being affected because of the emotional suffering that register the man’s psyche. The fear of what might be happening to the wife wherever she is

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA**

with other men. This shows how women can also abuse their males without it being reported or recognised by gender-affirmative institutions.

The fact that some males are hostile and bear the strength to control all the actions in the family has led some women to speculate for some outrageous methods of curtailing them. It has also been discovered that “Vavasati vachelela vavanuna va vona eswakudyeni leswaku va ta phuntha, va kota ku endla leswi va swi lavaka va nga kanukiwi” (women exercise love portion tricks on their men so that they will be free to do whatever they want without being controlled). In some instances, it has been discovered that such love portions have gone beyond what these women expected. Some portions result in psychological harm to the victims, so much that the victims become mad or just unreasonable. All such actions are exercised for the female, in some instances, to be free from the manipulations and control of the family’s father head, who according to the dictates of Tsonga society, should be a man. Such ideas, which come mainly from Western influence, instill ideas of freedom even from marriage and normally create chaos within African family setups.

### **5. FINDINGS**

- The gender fraternity is biased towards female victims at the expense of male gender-based victims.
- Some gender-based violence is perpetrated by members of the same sex (female-female/male-male)
- Many males are victims of gender-based violence but their cases are either not reported or given a wink by those who receive the reports
- Human Rights bodies and other institutions dealing with gender issues only consider females as the affected side and are less likely to take the plight of males seriously

### **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that human rights bodies, the government in question as well as organisations dealing with matters related to male-female relations in the country be willing to carry out meaningful investigations into the underlying relationships between males and females from various forms of associations and affairs. This will give an accurate picture of how males and females treat and accommodate each other socially, physically, emotionally, and sexually, and will ultimately inform better procedures towards fruitful gender streamlining in the country, as well as in Africa as a whole.

### **7. CONCLUSION**

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL BIASES: A RE-READING OF GENDER DISPARITIES AMONG THE VATSONGA

The paper summed up the underlying and stealthy feminine machinations towards the strange, so believed, ‘vulnerability of males’. The research is one of those studies venturing into academically sensitised zones ‘where academics fear to tread’ because of the area’s highly contested orientation. It has been divulged that men, even though they are popularly known as life-long abusers of females, are in some peculiar contexts, victims of the very females purported to be the sole vulnerable. This enlightening is critical in that it will open up new venues for gender debates that will inform policy reforms and trigger new insights for and trajectories for both gender studies and mainstreaming.

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