



Cultural Practices and Human Rights: The Non-reporting of Rape Cases in the Lupane Rural District of Zimbabwe

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Abstract

While the non-reporting of rape is problematic internationally, it is particularly worrisome in the Lupane rural district of Zimbabwe. Therefore, this study was designed to understand the reasons behind non-reporting. Data was collected using narrative unstructured interviews with 44 purposively selected participants, consisting of 30 villagers and their 14 village heads. Three non-government organisations (NGO) registered as service organisations for the district formed part of the sample. The leave to interview Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) personnel was sought, and the Commissioner-General of ZRP declined to provide gatekeeper permission. Thematic data analysis identified key themes and their relationships and meanings. New conversations are recommended for village communities to initiate culturally sensitive awareness and improve the reporting of rape.

Keywords: Cultural sensitivity; human rights; psychosocial factors; rape.

Introduction

This article considers a critical issue at the convergence of culture, human rights, and sexual assault against women. In Zimbabwe, as in several parts of the world, cultural customs and traditions often conflict with the reporting and management of rape cases. This causes substantial difficulties for survivors seeking fairness and support (Mutanana and Gasva 2015). The Lupane rural district, like other rural areas in Zimbabwe, has cultural and spiritual traditions and norms that influence the reporting of rape cases. These cultural and psychosocial factors include societal norms across gender roles, attitudes towards sexual violence, stigma associated with survivors, and methods for resolving conflicts within the community.

This study sought to comprehend the non-reporting of rape cases in Lupane District, and a comprehensive method was used to explore both cultural elements and human rights perspectives. As one point of view, cultural practices deter survivors from reporting rape due to fear of retribution, social exclusion, or diminished trust in proper justice systems. From another standpoint, human rights contexts including international agreements and Zimbabwean legislation advocate survivors' rights to access justice and support services, and their fundamental right to live free.

In Lupane District, the dominance of Ndebele tribe men reinforces gender inequality, placing women in lesser societal roles (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2004). Aggressive behaviour by men is often excused as masculinity, overlooking women's rights (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018). Customary laws frequently fail to uphold women's rights (Baloyi 2017) and, according to Wood (2019), African societies' inability to protect women fosters patriarchal norms and violence against women, including rape. This cultural backdrop impedes women's rights and deters rape reporting, perpetuating gender-based violence. Rape in



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rural Zimbabwe echoes a complicated relationship of historic, traditional, and social and political aspects, guided by Christian theories, pre-independence legal systems, and post-independence nation-building endeavours. These elements characterise insights of rape, specifically within the context of marriage, where understandings of Christianity may either encourage gender equality opportunity or strengthen male-controlled norms. Pre-independence legal legacies and socio-political structures hierarchise male property rights and family stability over women's sovereignty, enabling latitude for violence against women. Understanding these dynamics is critical to inform policy and practice intercessions to uphold survivors' rights, challenge detrimental cultural norms, and cultivate access to justice and sustenance facilities for sexual violence survivors in Lupane District, and beyond.

Literature Review

The study aims to explore the factors that influence the non-reporting of rape cases. The discussion that follows analyses published and unpublished literature and other relevant sources on the non-reporting of rape. The definitions of rape, and moral judgement on rape survivors and perpetrators, are analysed. Rape perceptions and gender attitude roles are also presented. Factors associated with the non-reporting of rape generally speaking from a perspective, in a context are examined, with a particular focus on the rural areas of Zimbabwe. Non-reporting factors embedded in the literature survivors' perspectives, rape myths from an African perspective, and studies examining myths in Zimbabwe—are reviewed. Literature is explored on why women in rural areas chiefly Africa and Zimbabwe would not report rape, regardless of their knowledge of the definition of rape.

Rape

The definition of rape has progressed, with substantial legal patterns modelling its interpretation. In the matter of the *Prosecutor v Akayesu* before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 1998, rape was defined as "a physical incursion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under conditions which are intimidating" (Weiner 2013). This definition extended beyond traditional perceptions of rape, recognising coercion beyond physical force, incorporating intimidation and threats. Nevertheless, this definition differs with section 65 of the *Zimbabwe Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act* (Chapter 9:23) which confines rape to occurrences involving male perpetrators and female victims. In Zimbabwe, rape is defined as:

... a male person knowingly has sexual intercourse or anal sexual intercourse with a female person and, at the time of the intercourse (a) the female person has not consented to it; and (b) he knows that she has not consented to it or realises that there is a real risk or possibility that she may not have consented to it ... (*Zimbabwe Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act* (Chapter 9:23), s. 65(1))

Notwithstanding legal divergences, attempts have been made to address extensive forms of sexual violence under Section 66 of the same Act (Alvarez 1999; Weiner 2013).

Moral Judgement and Rape Perceptions

Rape is perceived as a serious offense, leading to negative moral judgments against perpetrators. Gender role attitudes often influence blame attribution in cases of rape (Angelone, Mitchell and Lucente 2012). Traditional communities tend to uphold gender norms that portray women as submissive, and blame survivors while excusing perpetrators, perpetuating rape myths (Angelone et al. 2012). These attitudes are shaped by social norms endorsing men's sexual dominance and women's subservience (Flood and Pease 2006).

Moral Judgement on Rape Survivors and Perpetrators

Moral judgment involves making decisions based on defined moral principles and conforming to them (Van Vugt et al. 2011). Society often holds stereotypical views of rape survivors, condoning men's aggression against women. This stems from survivors' character analysis and moral judgment, influenced by pre-existing ideologies that overlook the circumstances of the rape. Niemi and Young (2014) suggest that moral judgment ideologies toward rape survivors are shaped by various factors, such as societal norms regarding gender and attire.

Rape Perceptions and Gender Role Attitudes

Esina et al. (2018) elucidate gender roles and attitudes, highlighting the conflicting views that motivate men's inclination to sexual assault and rape. In contrast, an egalitarian perspective advocates for gender equality and equal rights (Angelone, Mitchell and Grossi 2014). Individuals adhering to traditional gender roles perceive men as dominant and assertive, while

women are viewed as submissive and reluctant to engage in sexual activities (Ben-David and Schneider 2005). This adherence to traditional norms may contribute to the tolerance of rape in society.

Intersections of Culture and Rape

Ogunbode, Bello, and Ogunbode (2014) identify cultural norms in patriarchal societies as facilitators of rape, where survivors fear stigmatisation and prioritise traditional norms over reporting. There is also hesitance to criminalise intimate partner rape, with a preference for family harmony over legal action (Lievore 2003). Leaders may minimise rape's severity, blocking survivors from seeking justice (McCleary-Sills et al. 2013; Šimonović 2020), especially in rural areas with deep-seated attitudes that both normalise rape and deter legal recourse (Lewis 2003).

Factors Associated With the Non-Reporting of Rape From a Global Perspective

Factors related to non-reporting of rape among women differ broadly across diverse cultural, social, and economic perspectives worldwide. Knowing these factors is necessary to improve intermediations addressing barriers to reporting and aiding sexual violence survivors. We now deliberate key elements linked with the non-reporting of rape among women from a global view, drawing on current literature.

Stigma and Shame: Amongst substantial barriers to reporting rape is the stigma and shame correlated with being a sexual violence survivor. Sexual assault survivors might fear judgment, blame, or social exclusion if they divulge their encounters. Ahrens, Stansell and Jennings (2010) and Ullman and Filipas (2001) highlight the prevalent impact of stigma on survivors' readiness to report sexual violence and seek support.

Fear of retaliation: Fear of retribution from offenders or their allies is another predominant reason women may elect not to report rape. Chadambuka and Warri (2019) and Jewkes et al. (2012) accentuate the fear of future violence or harm as a major deterrent to reporting amongst survivors.

Lack of trust in authorities: Numerous survivors have scepticism and uncertainty about law application and the sympathetic and efficient management of rape cases by justice systems and support services. Studies by Mannell et al. (2018) and Mashiri and Mawire (2013) exhibit the value of developing confidence and assurance in institutions to persuade survivors to step forward and report rape.

Cultural and religious beliefs: Cultural and religious theories can impact survivors' perceptions of rape and reporting tendencies. In certain communities, male-controlled norms, gender imbalance, and victim-blaming attitudes may possibly inhibit survivors from frankly expressing themselves. Jewkes et al. (2009) and Gibbs et al. (2017) highlight the role of cultural factors in influencing victims' responses to rape.

Legal and structural barriers: Legal and structural barriers, such as intricate legal systems, inability to access legal aid, and limited support services, can impede survivors' propensity to report rape and pursue justice. Studies by Rennison (2002) and Logan et al. (2007) point out the significance of tackling these universal hurdles to enhance reporting rates.

Trauma and psychological effects: Rape survivors may possibly experience substantial distress and emotional anguish, which can affect their resolve. Research by Anderson and Overby (2020) and Dardis et al. (2018) features the enduring impacts of suffering on survivors' welfare and their hesitancy to involve recognised reporting practices.

The study by Kalra and Bhugra (2013) shows a noteworthy percentage of rape cases assessed at between 67% and 84% are not reported, due to the delicate nature of the crime thereby making it challenging to precisely measure the pervasiveness of rape and the extent of the problem. In spite of legislative restructurings in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi, Namibia, Lesotho, and South Africa to widen the definition of rape, survivors still display disinclination to report occurrences. Women's rights groups estimate that up to 95% of cases go unreported (Seelinger, Silverberg and Mejia 2011). Furthermore, a study across 10 countries revealed that 55% of women who experienced sexual abuse elected not to report it, with only 15% of rape victims in the United States reporting the offense (Seelinger, Silverberg and Mejia 2011).

In conclusion, the under-reporting of rape among women emanates from a combination of stigma, fear, distrust, cultural norms, legal obstacles, and trauma. Addressing these factors demands an inclusive approach that initiates conversations on structural imbalances, augments survivor-centered support services, and questions societal attitudes toward sexual violence.

The Reasons for the Under-reporting of Rape, in the African Context and in the Rural Areas of Zimbabwe

Previous studies extensively explored the reasons for the under-reporting of rape, shedding light on various contributing factors, particularly in African contexts and in rural Zimbabwe. Acknowledging these aspects is critical for effective interpositions to address reporting barriers and support sexual violence survivors. Studies by Jewkes et al. (2012), Gibbs et al. (2017), Nduna et al. (2010), and Chikwiri and Lemmer (2014) underscore the patriarchal societies, gender inequality, and stigma that silence rape survivors.

Fear of reprisal and the social stigma associated with rape dissuade survivors from pursuing help or reporting cases to the police. Chadambuka and Warria (2019) and Machakanja, Jerenyama, and Bere (2016) emphasise fear of retaliation, victim-blaming attitudes, and concerns about privacy and confidentiality as key reasons for non-reporting among survivors in Zimbabwean communities.

Structural factors, such as accessibility and responsiveness of justice and support services, also influence reporting decisions. Mashiri and Mawire (2013) stress the importance of strengthening institutional responses, providing survivor-centered services, and addressing gaps in the legal framework to enhance reporting rates and support survivors effectively.

In rural areas, limited access to healthcare, legal assistance, and law enforcement agencies further impede reporting. Nzaumvila and Mabuza (2015) highlight challenges of geographical isolation, resource constraints, and inadequate infrastructure in rural Zimbabwe, hindering survivors' access to essential services and justice.

In general, these studies highlight the complicated interplay between cultural, social, economic, structural, and psychosocial factors contributing to the under-reporting of rape in African communities, specifically rural Zimbabwe. Tackling these hurdles requires multiple perspectives with different approaches to address cultural norms, reinforce institutional responses, and develop access to support services for sexual violence survivors.

Non-Reporting Factors Embedded in the Literature: Survivors' Perspectives

Sexual violence survivors frequently face complicated moral judgments, societal stigma, and gender-based perceptions that influence their choices on whether to report rape. Ahrens, Stansell, and Jennings (2010) and Ullman and Filipas (2001) emphasise the incorporation of societal attitudes, leading to feelings of guilt and self-blame amongst survivors. Negative perceptions of the justice system, as discussed by Mannell et al. (2018) and Mashiri and Mawire (2013), can further erode trust and discourage reporting. Gender roles and power dynamics within society play a substantial role in survivors' reactions to sexual violence. Patriarchal norms contribute to victim-blaming attitudes and weaken survivors' support, as demonstrated by Gibbs et al. (2017) and Jewkes et al. (2009). Cultural convictions and attitudes surrounding rape vary across communities, prompting survivors' decisions to divulge sexual violence. Jewkes et al. (2012) and Gibbs et al. (2017) highlight the impact of cultural norms on reporting barriers. Intersectional factors, including race, ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation, intersect with gender to shape survivors' experiences and reporting likelihood. Marginalised groups, such as women, face additional barriers due to systemic inequalities and discrimination (Anderson and Overby 2020; Campbell et al. 2001). In conclusion, survivors' choices to report are shaped by moral judgments, justice perceptions, cultural views, and gender dynamics. Accepting these elements is crucial for improving survivor-centered acknowledgements that address extensive barriers and support survivors in search of justice.

Rape Myths from an African Perspective

Rape myths that rationalise sexual assault and victim-blaming are strengthened by cultural norms and male supremacy dynamics in African societies, intensifying their harmful impact on survivors (Jewkes and Morrell 2010; Lonsway and Fitzgerald 1994; Mashiri and Mawire 2013). These myths, incorporating the idea that women should avert rape through their conduct or appearance, maintain traditional gender roles and shift the obligation of preventing assault onto women (Jewkes and Morrell 2010; Mashiri and Mawire 2013). Such views not only blame women for incitements through apparel or behaviour but also inspire them to adopt surviving strategies like humility or respect which are, in due course, futile and preserve detrimental stereotypes (Jewkes and Morrell 2010; Mashiri and Mawire 2013). Addressing these myths requires dismantling patriarchal conceptual elements, nurturing gender equality, and guaranteeing liability for perpetrators to support survivors and curtail sexual violence (Jewkes and Morrell 2010; Mashiri and Mawire 2013).

Studies Examining Myths in Zimbabwe

Research on rape myths in Zimbabwe is insubstantial but provides insights into societal attitudes towards rape. Fidan and Bui (2016) investigated women's understandings of intimate partner violence (IPV) and associated viewpoints. Mashiri and Mawire

(2013) centered on legal aspects of rape in Zimbabwe, elucidating societal attitudes. Sande and Chirongoma (2021) studied the pervasiveness of rape myths among Zimbabweans, showing their influence on experiences of sexual violence. Furthermore, Siziba (2020) studied Zimbabwean women in South Africa, exploring theories within the diaspora community. Nonetheless, these studies did not entirely capture the pervasiveness and influence of rape myths across various regions and communities in Zimbabwe.

Traditional Forms of Justice in the African Context and Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe and across Africa, traditional justice systems prioritise reconciliation and community cohesion over punitive measures, employing various methods to address offenses like intimate partner rape. Traditional justice mechanisms to resolve rape disputes include mediation by elders (Fidan and Bui 2016), community-driven family meetings, restitution by offenders (Sande and Chirongoma 2021), and apology rituals (Fidan and Bui 2016). Offenders may also face social sanctions. While providing resolution pathways, these practices prompt discussions on gender equality and human rights, highlighting the need for survivor-centred approaches in diverse cultural contexts.

Rape Non-Reporting by Women in Rural Zimbabwe and Africa, Despite Understanding its Definition

In rural areas, including Zimbabwe and other parts of Africa, the under-reporting of rape is complex, influenced by social, cultural, and economic factors. Survivors often fear stigma, judgment, or retaliation, leading them to remain silent about their experiences. Traditional gender norms and patriarchal power structures place the burden of maintaining family honour on women, prioritising community harmony over justice for sexual violence (Fidan and Bui 2016; Mashiri and Mawire 2013). Practical barriers, such as geographical distance, lack of transportation, and financial constraints, further hinder survivors from reporting rape. Distrust of law enforcement or perceptions of corruption within the justice system may also deter survivors from seeking assistance. Additionally, limited awareness of legal rights and support services in rural communities exacerbates survivors' reluctance to report sexual violence.

Method

Design

The researchers selected narrative research because the area under study is rural, confined, and relatively less explored (Ncube 2022). Through storytelling, the researchers were able to garner a rich and deep narrative to let the voice of the Lupane rural district community be heard (Elçi and Devran 2014). Africa has a legacy of oral history which is as ancient as its existence (Butina 2015). Even to this day, historical information relentlessly circulates *viva voce* in African societies.

The researchers opted for interpretivism and constructionism, aiming to comprehend the district's social world through the inhabitants' perspectives and interpretations. By employing an inductive approach that emphasises story themes, they narrowed the study's scope (Islam and Samsudin 2020). Qualitative research, grounded in a constructivist worldview, was chosen, influenced by the researchers' familiarity with the study area. This background provided insight into the participants' worldviews, shaping the study's design. The team's exploration of local cultural practices and proactive bracketing were strategies to reduce research bias. Permission for ethical clearance to conduct the research was sought from the College of Law's Ethical Clearance Committee as guided by the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics (2016). The researchers received ethical clearance from the Ethical Clearance Committee of the College of Law, with the certificate ERC Reference No: ST124-2019.

A narrative methodology was chosen, mainly for its capacity to develop an epistemological framework centring on knowledge and access to challenging questions through intersubjective negotiations (Collins and Stockton 2018). The qualitative data collection was conducted with consideration of intuitive ethical issues around information gathering in the participants' homesteads or working environments (Moser and Korstjens 2018).

Participants

The study population comprised three groups, including 30 villagers (men and women) aged 18 years and above from the Lupane rural district resettlement area, and 14 village heads who oversaw cultural matters and local governance structures. Additionally, three non-government organisations, including two registered service organisations and one operating under the Numerical Church Leaders Forum, were involved as depicted on Table 1 below. The Lupane rural district consists of 14 villages with 1,386 homesteads, each with an average of eight individuals per family. Purposive, snowball, judgment, and convenience sampling methods were employed to select participants based on availability, placement, schedules, and readiness (Lopez and Whitehead 2013). However, gatekeeper permission from the Commissioner-General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)

to interview ZRP personnel was not obtained. The perspective of ZRP personnel is crucial to fully understand the issue of non-reporting of rape, given their role as the first point of contact for survivors seeking justice and support. By examining the experiences, attitudes, and practices of police officers, researchers had aimed to gain insights into the systemic barriers and challenges that deter survivors from reporting rape.

The 30 villagers and 14 village heads in the study shared a homogeneous socio-demographic context, including language, cultural beliefs, religion, values, and worldviews. Jager, Putnick, and Bornstein (2017) suggest homogeneous convenience sampling involves purposely restricting the sampling frame to specific socio-demographic factors such as traditional beliefs, ethnicity, and shared values.

The Lupane District population comprises peasant farmers and individuals who have migrated illegally to neighbouring countries, primarily South Africa. Many of them engage in menial jobs, while others resort to criminal activities to support their families back home. Despite their lack of formal education and qualifications, they are perceived as role models for their ability to provide for their families.

Table 1: Description of participants, site population, and size and age category

	Participant groups targeted for the research	Site population size	Age category of group
Group 1	Resettlement community, both men and women	1,386 homesteads in the 14 villages	18 years old or above
Group 2	Village heads/community leaders	Village heads/community leaders	18 years old or above
Group 3	NGO operating in Lupane rural district	NGO representative operating in the resettlement community	NGO worker employed at the age of 18 years or above

The researchers adhered to the district's traditional customs and local culture when engaging with the community before data collection, to minimise refusals. Female participants also sought approval from their husbands or household gatekeepers to participate, ensuring their involvement was consensual and avoiding potential repercussions (Elias 2013).

Data Analysis

NVivo 9 software was used to automate tasks and identify trends, themes, and assumptions efficiently (Hilal and Alabri 2013; Zamawe 2015), streamlining transcription and enhancing accuracy and speed (Daher et al. 2017). The methodology employed narratives to understand human experiences, initially summarising discussions into concise participant narratives (Riessman 2008), then expanding them into detailed accounts to explore cultural and human dynamics (Smith and Sparkes 2009). Recurring themes were identified, focusing on barriers to reporting rape incidents (Braun and Clarke 2006), including fear of blame and judgment, fear of justice, and fear of aftermath (Fisher and Pina 2013; Peter-Hagene and Ullman 2016). The thematic analysis uncovered consistencies and patterns across narratives, providing insights into socio-cultural and psychosocial factors influencing reporting decisions (Sandelowski and Barroso 2003). This iterative approach yielded a nuanced understanding of unreported rape cases, revealing underlying complexities (Fisher and Pina 2013; Peter-Hagene and Ullman 2016).

Results

The research findings elucidate the complex interchange between cultural practices, human rights, and the non-reporting of rape cases in the Lupane District of Zimbabwe. In conformity with the literature review, the research accentuated the importance of appreciating socio-cultural and psychosocial factors in determining survivors' decisions regarding reporting rape. As highlighted in the literature review, cultural norms, gender expectations, and community attitudes profoundly influence

survivors' experiences and responses to rape, contributing to under-reporting globally, and specifically within African contexts (Jewkes et al. 2012; Fidan and Bui 2016).

Cultural Practices and Non-Reporting of Rape

Participants noted stigma, fear of retaliation, and victim-blaming attitudes in their communities, hindering survivors from seeking justice and support. This aligns with literature on cultural beliefs perpetuating rape myths, and blaming survivors (Gibbs et al. 2017; Mashiri and Mawire 2013)

Human Rights Considerations

The research findings were scrutinised through a human rights lens. It became apparent that the non-reporting of rape cases in the Lupane District raises critical human rights concerns. Survivors' rights to access justice, receive support services, and be free from biases are regularly compromised due to cultural barriers and systemic limitations in the formal justice system. This aligns with the literature review, which underscored the importance of tackling structural inequalities, promoting survivor-centered support services, and challenging societal attitudes toward sexual violence to sustain human rights values (Mannell et al. 2018; Logan et al. 2007).

In the discussion, the researchers outline the theme, present diverse responses, and incorporate participants' quotes. Employing introductory prompts to engage participants in defining rape according to the *Zimbabwe Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act* (Chapter 9:23) facilitated participant awareness and meaningful discussion on the topic.

Psychosocial Factors which Contribute to Unreported Rape Cases

Three subthemes emerged in the discussion on psychosocial factors influencing the reporting of rape: fear of blame and judgement, fear of justice, and fear of aftermath (see Table 2). These psychosocial factors were used as characteristic words or phrases to describe and identify perceptions. The broad nature of the subthemes allowed the researchers to effectively explore and understand the new concepts related to the research question.

Table 2: Subthemes and their definitions (Source: Compiled by the researchers)

Code	Theme	Subthemes	Definitions
PF	Psychosocial Factors	Fear of Blame and Judgement	Fear of being disbelieved and blamed. Fear of being further attacked and having diminished emotional strength.
		Fear of the Justice System	Fear of the unknown—not understanding the justice system or being in denial about how it works. Feeling that the justice system has no remedy for them. Fear of corroboration requirements and testing of consent. Fear of having their character probed—a form of re-victimisation.
		Fear of Aftermath	Cases are not reported because the survivor has been raped by a guardian or close relative.

The psychosocial factors had subthemes that helped achieve a comprehensive interpretation of the data and identify patterns in the participants' narratives. The theme highlights the narrative descriptions of position and identity, clearly presenting the participants' stories. The researchers used subthemes to describe the psychosocial factors, as illustrated in Figure 1.

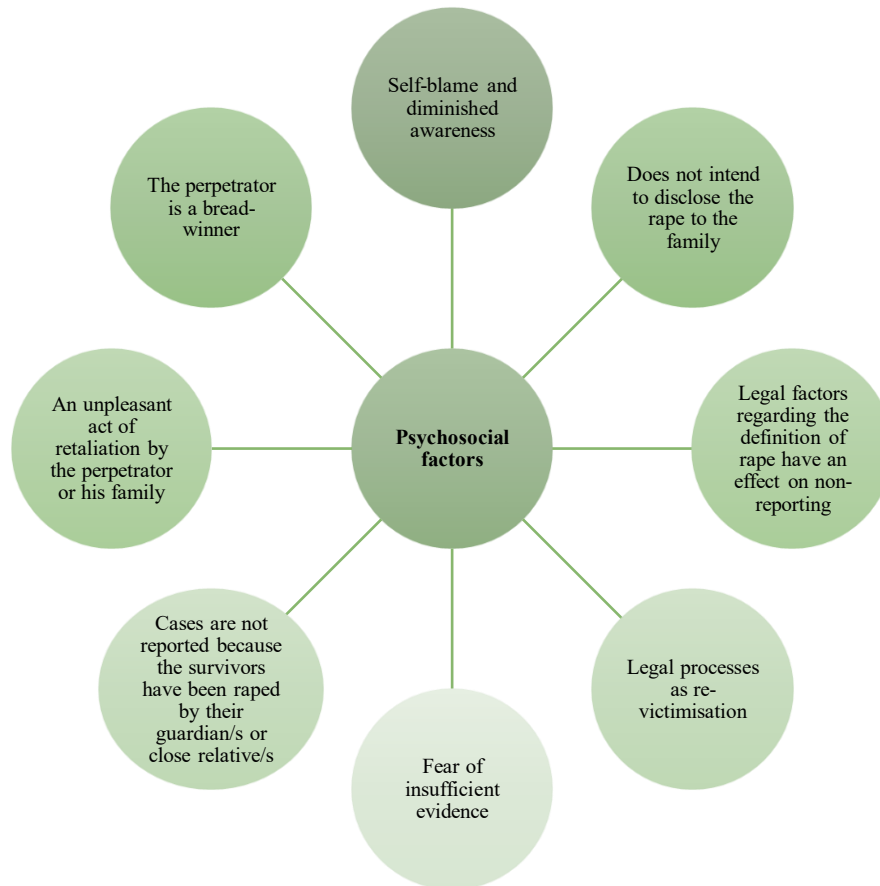


Figure 1: Emerging subthemes from the theme psychosocial factors (Source: Compiled by the researchers)

Psychosocial barriers to reporting rape, as identified by participants, include self-blame and reduced awareness; reluctance to disclose the rape to family; legal issues affecting reporting, such as re-victimisation through legal processes and fear of insufficient evidence; cases involving rape by a guardian or close relative; and fear of retaliation, especially if the perpetrator is a breadwinner. Nearly two-thirds of participants cited psychosocial factors as obstacles to reporting rape.

Fear of Blame and Judgement

Fear of blame and judgement constituted the fear of being disbelieved, blamed, further attacked, and having emotional strength diminished. In the study, about a fifth of the participants revealed the fear of blame and judgement as a barrier to reporting rape.

Self-blame and Diminished Awareness

Research findings from five participants revealed that rape survivors in the district feared blame for reporting rape, deterring disclosure. Community narratives often cast doubt on survivors' credibility, placing them at risk of being accused of lying or consenting to the assault. A male participant described how women silently endure pain, hesitant to report rape due to potential repercussions:

... the aunt's aggressive response to discussions about the rape deterred the girl from reporting it. She feared her aunt would blame her and chose to keep the incident secret.

Five participants attributed self-blame to rape, indicating its association with reduced disclosure. The participants suggested that openly discussing rape is seen as bringing shame to a household.

Does not Intend to Disclose the Rape to the Family

Findings from four participants revealed that dealing with the aftermath of rape strains families. Some survivors avoid reporting to protect their families and maintain household peace, as one participant noted:

... and being in a prominent church position, she hesitated to report the rape for fear of tarnishing her reputation She also refrained from reporting because she didn't want others to learn about her nightlife activities, particularly her parents.

Survivors may not report rape due to cultural norms that stigmatise reporting and further victimise them. In the district, women are expected to adhere to strict sexual conduct standards, leading to fears of reporting without family support, social isolation, stigma, blame, expulsion, or forced marriage to the perpetrator. These cultural barriers significantly hinder rape reporting.

Fear of the Justice System

Six participants cited the justice system as a reporting barrier, focusing on legal factors, such as the definition of rape and concerns about legal processes re-victimising survivors or leading to insufficient evidence. These findings suggest a lack of confidence among survivors in the district regarding the effectiveness of the justice system.

Legal Factors Regarding the Definition of Rape and its Effect on Non-reporting

Two participants highlighted that some rape cases go unreported due to a lack of familiarity with the definitions and types of rape among district residents and survivors:

In our village, a 70-year-old man married a mentally challenged woman, and it seems his relatives accept the situation.

Marriage and procreation by individuals with severe mental disorders are legally prohibited. Consent cannot be coerced through misrepresentation or forced marriage, including marrying someone with severe mental illness. This suggests that survivors may not report rape due to a lack of awareness about what legally constitutes rape.

Legal Processes as Re-victimisation

Two participants revealed that survivors experience secondary victimisation during legal procedures post-reporting, discouraging further reporting:

Rape victims fear navigating the justice system alone, fearing disbelief and lack of support.

Participants noted that survivors faced intrusive questioning by law enforcement and prosecutors, lacking privacy and assurance of reputation protection. Additionally, authorities often made derogatory remarks about survivors' attire during the assault and their past sexual history, leading to re-victimisation through the legal process.

Fear of Insufficient Evidence

Two participants highlighted the under-reporting of rape due to mental health issues and trauma, as survivors' statements are perceived as insufficient or unreliable. They noted that survivors' narratives of sexual assault often lack coherence. This raises doubts about their credibility and reliability as the responses do not conform to typical patterns of credible testimony. One participant said:

... however, they refrained from reporting to the police, fearing the mentally disturbed survivor would struggle to recount the rape.

Society expects rape survivors to exhibit visible signs of struggle, such as screams and bruises, to be deemed credible. This perpetuates the myth of the 'ideal victim,' reinforcing stereotypes about how survivors 'should' behave. Law enforcement's lack of training on rape and the emphasis on physical evidence hinders effective support. The emphasis on physical signs of trauma reinforces gendered stereotypes about masculinity and femininity, further marginalising survivors who do not fit the 'ideal victim' mould.

Fear of the Aftermath

Some cases remain unreported due to fear of repercussions. Participants mentioned instances where the perpetrator was a guardian or close relative, silencing the victims. Fear of retaliation from the perpetrator or their family and the perpetrator being a breadwinner also deter reporting.

Survivors are Financially Dependent on Perpetrators

Financial dependence on perpetrators deters rape survivors from reporting, echoing literature on barriers to reporting in situations of rural poverty. This dependence creates power imbalances, leaving survivors vulnerable and less likely to disclose abuse. Perpetrators exploit this to prevent reporting. Limited resources and social inequality worsen the situation. Fear of retaliation or economic loss, especially from a spouse or family member, further inhibits reporting. Cultural norms valuing family harmony over safety, and patriarchal pressures to preserve family reputation also silence survivors, prioritising social order and financial security.

An Unpleasant Act of Retaliation by the Perpetrator or his Family

Three participants indicated that survivors in the district are afraid of retaliation, due to their close links to the perpetrator or their family. This cohesive community inhibits survivors from reporting rape to the police. Fear of reprisal emanates from the potential for a serious aftermath, including recurring victimisation:

The survivor didn't report the matter due to fear of vengeance from the traditional healer, and because she believed her parents wouldn't trust her due to their strong faith in him.

Survivors are reluctant to report rape to the police due to fear of reprisal. This encompasses concerns about metaphysical repercussions, such as impersonation of witchcraft. Two participants noted the weighty influence of witch doctors, pastors, and prophets in the district, whose orders are incontestably respected. For instance, some churches approve marriages uttered by prophets, irrespective of the groom's age, resulting in young women marrying much older men. This cultural perspective imparts fear in survivors, who believe these figures have divine authority to punish them for resisting sexual advances. The participants' versions highlight the continual fear of retaliation emanating from both sexual violence dynamics and the influence of powerful figures in the community.

Recommendations

New Conversations

The research findings and discussion highlight the need for new conversations on psychosocial factors that influence the under-reporting of rape. Kothari (2008) and Johnston (2014) advocate for exploring new questions in the literature, thereby generating the spirit of Ubuntu philosophy (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018). This pacificatory approach intends to argue factors contributing to the under-reporting of rape through amiable conversation and traditional dispute resolution practices (Rammala 2021).

The Ndebele cultural norms assume women need to safeguard family honour by obviating perpetrators (Rammala 2021). Therefore, these recommendations incorporate culturally profound interpositions addressing these norms. Indigenous wisdom systems and practices, acknowledging community principles and merging cultural perspectives, should be initiated (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018). Community-based education and awareness campaigns are critical to challenge societal myths and support structures that curtail victim blaming (Rammala, 2021).

Conversations should aim to transform societal views on premarital sex and support survivors' inclusion and respect within their families and communities (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018). The establishment of community-based support services, comprising psychotherapy and legal backing, is fundamental to support survivors' needs in rural areas (Rammala 2021).

Collaboration and cooperation among NGOs, grassroots organisations, and community stakeholders are fundamental in addressing primary drivers of rape non-reporting (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018). The susceptibility of women to sexual assault and financial dependency can be curtailed by empowering women with knowledge and economic independence initiatives (Rammala 2021).

Comprehensive implementation of these recommendations can create safer environments, promote perpetrator accountability, and sustain the rights of sexual violence survivors in the Lupane rural district of Zimbabwe (Ghebretsele and Rammala 2018).

Meaningful progress in addressing the cultural practices and human rights issues surrounding the non-reporting of rape cases can be made through a collaborative and sustained commitment.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Connell (2007) observed a structural partiality in social science knowledge innovation toward Anglophone countries in the Global North. Hence, this study holds noteworthy value for knowledge creation in the Global South and the growth of Southern criminology. Accepting the restraints of current research on rape non-reporting is vital for developing knowledge and improving interventions and support systems for victims. Future research directions can tackle knowledge gaps and provide insights into developing issues and dynamics around rape non-reporting.

Research Limitations:

- Refusal by the Commissioner-General of the Zimbabwe Republic Police to access information in their space impeded the addition of significant police perceptions.
- Research fixated on identifiable demographics, restricting generalisability.

Recognising Future Research:

- Research on how community responds to non-reporting of rape: Exploring how societies respond to non-reporting of rape, incorporating examination of community norms, traditional convictions, and institutional traditions. The responses may support victims to curtail stigma.
- Research on how technology and social media can enhance the reporting of rape: Examining how online platforms may provide support and advocacy, and the role of technology in reporting decisions and accessibility of resources.

Conclusion

The majority of incidences of rape in the Lupane District are not reported to the police due to tensions between cultural practices and human rights which were extrapolated in the study. The research findings indicate Lupane District village heads and residents must be engaged in conversations to build awareness of, and empowerment on, balancing cultural practices with human rights. This will facilitate rape reporting to police and other community stakeholders who can support survivors in a manner accommodating, and grounded upon, Ndebele culture.

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