

Effect of Gender Based-Violence on the Social Well-being of Women in Rwanda. Case Study of Ngoma Sector, Huye District

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of gender-based violence (GBV) on the social well-being of women in Rwanda, focusing on the Ngoma Sector in Huye District. Guided by three main objectives, it explores how GBV affects women's social well-being, identifies prevalent forms and causes of GBV, and proposes strategies to address the issue. Using a mixed-methods approach with data collected from 40 women through questionnaires and interviews, the study uncovers various forms of GBV, including intimate partner violence and discriminatory societal norms. Root causes are linked to cultural traditions, economic hardships, and systemic barriers. The research highlights strategies for combating GBV, such as community awareness programs, legal reforms, and economic empowerment initiatives. These measures aim to reduce GBV and improve women's social and economic status. The study concludes by emphasizing the critical link between GBV and women's social well-being, providing a basis for interventions that promote gender equality, protect women's rights, and enhance their overall welfare in Rwanda. It offers insights to guide efforts in mitigating GBV in the Ngoma Sector and beyond.

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1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a persistent worldwide issue that extremely affects women and girls, with substantial social, psychological, and economic consequences. It is also a serious historical and global problem that has been described by the United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) as “the most pervasive yet least visible human rights violation in the world” (Dilip & Bates, 2021). World Bank (2019) found that psychological, physical, and sexual assault toward women were positively correlated with depression and anxiety in various countries. The research conducted by Heather et al., (2018) in Nigeria on women's experiences with physical, psychological, and sexual intimate partner violence, and associated mental health outcomes and found that psychological abuse is associated with an increased risk of experiencing symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as psychogenic seizures. The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is still a widespread problem in Africa where women are still affected by the issue (Ologede et al., 2020).

Sexualized and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in psychological, physical, economic, or sexualized forms is still widespread in Rwanda. The 56 % of Rwandan women have experienced violence in their life (UN Women, 2023). According to the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR), (2021), 37% of women and girls who are aged between 15-49, had experienced physical or sexual, or psychological violence. The same report indicated that 46% of ever-married women and 18% of ever-married men have experienced spousal, physical, sexual, or emotional violence. Gender-based violence (GBV) negatively affects women and girls' well-being and prevents them from fully participating in different spheres of society.

Rwanda is recognized globally as a leader in advancing gender equality. The Rwandan government has implemented bold policies, laws, and innovative local strategies to close the gender gap. Although this progress is praiseworthy, challenges persist in enforcing gender policies and changing traditional gender roles and social norms, which continue to prevent girls and women from fully enjoying their rights and realizing their potential. Many women and girls have experienced multiple and intersecting forms of violence and oppression including intimate partner violence, sexual violence and early and forced marriage (Bizimungu, 2018). Dilip & Bates, (2021) stated that Gender-based violence, or GBV, has significant and negative health outcomes for victims, including physical, emotional, and sexual injury, unwanted pregnancy, and exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

In Rwanda, there are no many articles about the effects of gender-based violence especially in the Huye district in clearing the consequences, the forms, and strategies to fight against it, for example, the report of USAID (2020) and study of Bizimungu (2018), Anna et al. (2020) on the effect of gender-based violence in Rwanda. The findings of their research clearly show that there is still gender-based violence in Rwanda, but they do not show well the situation in the Huye district, especially in the Ngoma sector. Gender-based violence both reflects and reinforces discrimination between men and women and compromises the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims (Bizimungu, 2018).

Therefore, the present study aims to explore the explicit impacts of gender-based violence on women's social well-being in Ngoma Sector, Huye District. By analyzing the lived experiences of women affected by GBV, the study will shed light on the social consequences of violence, highlighting the barriers it creates to women's empowerment and social participation. The findings of the paper will give to the broader discourse on combating GBV and promoting the social well-being of women in Rwanda, while offering policy recommendations tailored to the local context.

The remaining section of this paper is structured as follow as: Section two is about Literature review on the forms, causes of GBV and the effects of its on social well-being of women. Section three deals with research method used to acquire and analyze data, while section four presents, analyses and discusses the findings and Section five sum up with conclusion and policy implications.

2. Review of Related Literature

According to the Rwandan Law n° 59/2008 of 10/09/2008 on prevention and punishment of gender-based violence, GBV is defined as any act that results in a bodily, psychological, sexual or economic harm to somebody just because they are female or male (Government of Rwanda, 2008). This violence may be exercised within or outside the household (Bizimungu, 2018). Therefore, gender-based violence should be seen as physical, sexual, emotional, or social harm or abuse directed against a person because of his or her gender role in a given society. According to Ouedraogo & Stenzel (2021) gender-based violence is defined as any act of violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

In the research conducted by Polischuk & Fay (2020) on the administrative response to concerns of COVID-19, it was found that gender-based violence (GBV) has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic in many settings, and South Africa has one of the world's highest burdens of GBV in sub-Saharan Africa. This massive public health issue is highly influenced by gender and inequity, but also driven by factors such as poverty, poor mental health, and substance abuse (Hourani et al., 2021).

Many women and girls, and to a lesser degree men and boys, either directly experience or face the consequences of some of gender-based violence in their lifetime (Dilip & Bates, 2021). Gender-based violence manifests itself in multiple forms and involves a wide variety of perpetrators from intimate partners and family members to strangers to institutional actors such as police, teachers, and soldiers (UN Women, 2018).

There are various forms of GBV and the most commonly cited forms of GBV are physical, psychological, and sexual (Heather et al., 2018). These forms of GBV may occur individually or may be overlapping and occur together. Psychological violence is inherent in neglect and physical and sexual violence but may also be a stand-alone form of violence (Russo, 2019).

Therefore, the cumulative effect of Gender-based violence has substantial deleterious impacts on the physical and psychological welfare of individuals given their cumulative, ongoing, and pervasive nature (Bdier & Mahamid, 2021). Further, the effects of these experiences may spill over to other domains of development; for example, receiving repeated, demeaning comments by a parent/guardian can extend to a lack of confidence in school or extra-familial relationships (Tabitha, 2003).

This kind violence affects the well-being of women and girls. Well-being has been defined as the combination of feeling good and functioning well; the experience of positive emotions such as happiness and contentment as well as the development of one's potential, having some control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships (Bdier & Mahamid, 2021). Well-being has been linked to success at professional, personal, and interpersonal levels, with those individuals high in well-being exhibiting greater productivity in the workplace, more effective learning, increased creativity, more prosocial behaviors, and positive relationships (USAID, 2020). Higher well-being is linked to a number of better outcomes regarding physical health and longevity as well as better individual performance at work, and higher life satisfaction has been

linked to better national economic performance (Samakao & Manda, 2023). More specifically, Social Well Being is defined as a person's cognitive and affective evaluations of his or her life, as these evaluations include emotional reactions to events as well as cognitive judgments of satisfaction and fulfillment (Bdier & Mahamid, 2021).

Gender-based violence has several consequences for women's mental health, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, substance abuse, psychosomatic symptoms, fear, suicide, sleep disorders, and overall low levels of well-being (Enaifoghe et al., 2021). Gender-based violence has been found to affect women's well-being negatively, causing unhappiness, and difficulty in enjoying life, thinking, and making decisions (Hourani et al., 2021).

In a meta-analysis of studies on the relationship between GBV and psychological well-being, it was found that GBV is fundamental to its harmful effects on psychological well-being (Heather et al., 2018). Violence against women has also been found to be negatively associated with their quality of life. Because of the negative effects of GBV on women's psychological well-being, it is considered a primary risk factor for mental health problems (Niyonzima & Bayu, 2023).

Dilip & Bates, (2021) explored the relationship between intimate partner violence (IPV) exposure and mental illness in a UK population, and found a strong association between exposure to IPV and depression, anxiety, and serious mental illness among women.

In Rwanda, there is a scarcity of publications addressing the effects of gender-based violence (GBV), particularly in the Huye District. Existing studies, such as the USAID report (2020), Bizimungu (2018), and Anna et al. (2020), highlight the persistence of GBV in Rwanda but fail to adequately capture the specific situation in the Huye District, especially in the Ngoma Sector. GBV not only reflects but also reinforces gender inequality, severely impacting the health, dignity, security, and autonomy of its victims (Bizimungu, 2018).

The present study contributes to the existing body of knowledge likely lies in its local, Rwanda-specific context, it focuses on the effects of Gender-Based Violence on the Social Well-being of Women and its policy implications, development, and intervention strategies.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a mixed approach of both quantitative and qualitative research design. The research is cross-sectional studies that used a survey strategy to reach the objective of the research. The total population of the study was 82 women affected by gender-based violence and 12 administrators in charge of gender-based violence. The study was not only targeting women but also men who are willing to give their point of view on gender-based violence and wellbeing. The study adopted purposive and random sampling procedures. By the use of Simple random sampling, each population had had an equal chance of being selected. Out of 94 populations, a sample of 40 respondents were randomly selected by the use of a random number generator to select 40 unique numbers. The sample size was divided into the following categories: 4 respondents from Ngoma administrative and 36 citizens including 30 women and 6 men living in the Ngoma sector.

The self-administered questionnaires were used to collect primary data from the sampled population. The researchers compiled, edited, and coded the data for quality, accuracy, and completeness. The data were presented by using frequency distribution, percentages distributions, and tables.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic of respondents

The demographic information of all respondents shows that 35% of respondents fell within the age group of 15-25, with 9 females and 5 males participating. The 26-36 age group comprised 22.5% of respondents, with 5 females and 4 males. Similarly, 22.5% of respondents were aged 37-47, with 6 females and 3 males. In the 48-58 age group, which accounted for 10% of respondents, there were 3 females and 1 male. Finally, respondents aged 59 and above constituted another 10%, with an equal split of 2 females and 2 males.

Regarding educational attainment, the study found that 15% of the respondents were classified as illiterate, with 4 females and 2 males while 22.5 % of the respondents completed primary school. Also, 32.5% of respondents had completed secondary school, with 8 females and 5 males. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents had pursued university studies, including 7 females and 5 males. In terms of professionals, 20% of respondents, consisting of 5 females and 3 males, were engaged in farming. Commerce emerged as another prominent sector, with 27.5% of respondents, including 6 females and 5 males, involved in this field. Additionally, 10% of respondents were affiliated with religious vocations, with 3 females and 1 male identified as priests. The largest group, comprising 42.5% of respondents, consisted of students, with 11 females and 6 males pursuing academic endeavors.

The effect of gender-based violence on the social well-being of women living in Ngoma sector and its consequences

The table 1 below presents findings on the prevalence of gender-based violence among women and men residing in Ngoma, revealing significant disparities in experiences.

Table 1. The gender-based violence affected

Responses	Respondents	Frequencies	Percentages
Yes	33	33	82.5%
No	7	7	17.5%
Total	40	40	100%

Sources: Field survey 2024

The findings in the above table 1 show that 82.5% of respondents reported having encountered some form of gender-based violence, including physical, sexual, emotional,

or economic abuse. Conversely, 17.5% of respondents expressed that there is no history of gender-based violence. These statistics underscore the pervasive nature of gender-based violence within the community and emphasize the urgent need for interventions to address its root causes and mitigate its adverse impacts on the social well-being of women.

The types of violence experienced by respondents

The table 2 below outlines different types of gender-based violence experienced by respondents in Ngoma sector, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of such abuse.

Table 2. The forms of violence experienced by respondents

Responses	Respondents	Frequencies	Percentages
Physical	5	5	12.5%
Sexual	19	19	47.5%
Emotional or Psychological	8	8	20%
Economic	8	8	20%
Total	40	40	100%

Source: Field survey 2024

The study findings in the above table 2 indicates that among those who reported in experiencing gender-based violence, the most prevalent form was sexual violence, with 47.5% of respondents acknowledging its occurrence and this was also confirmed by a woman from the Ngoma sector who said that sexual violence is very present. According to Shimba & Magombola (2021) the fact is that many of the women are afraid to talk about GBV, and this results into them being treated at their homes. Since, they find themselves being targeted or maybe if they pass by somewhere in the mall, they start whispering about them, and that makes them feel embarrassed. Additionally, emotional or psychological abuse was reported by 20% of respondents while Economic violence, encompassing financial control or exploitation, was cited by 20% of respondents. Bizimungu (2018) stated that economic violence is considered GBV when individuals, particularly women, are denied access to financial resources, employment opportunities, or economic autonomy based on their gender.

According to Bdier & Mahamid (2021), one way this form of violence manifests is through wage discrimination, where women are paid less than men for the same work, limiting their economic independence and perpetuating a cycle of financial dependence.

Physical violence was reported to a lesser extent, with 12.5% of respondents. Those who were asked about physical violence said that it is mostly done at home, between spouses. They say it is mostly male-dominated, where a man can comeback home drunk and beat his wife and children, because they are weak. One of them said: *"My husband used to hit me many times, and when I was seriously injured and I had to go to the close health center or Hospital."* This statement explains how physical violence is experienced. Dilip & Bates (2021) explains that gender-based violence tends to happen between couples, and he says that some household members may abuse each other without being aware of their act. This is how a woman may be abused,beaten by her husband and keep quiet because of cultural restrictions.

These findings underscore the diverse manifestations of gender-based violence within the community and underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address each form effectively.

The effect of gender-based violence on relationships with family members or friends

For many women in Ngoma sector, the pervasive presence of gender-based violence erodes their sense of safety and security, leading to heightened anxiety and fear. They may find themselves constantly on guard, wary of potential threats, and this constant state of vigilance can take a toll on their mental and emotional well-being. Consequently, the ability to form trusting and meaningful relationships becomes increasingly challenging as they grapple with the trauma inflicted by gender-based violence. According to Tabitha (2003), in the familial sphere, the impact of gender-based violence can be particularly profound. Women who have experienced such violence may struggle to trust family members, especially if they perceive them as complicit or indifferent to their suffering. This breakdown in trust can strain familial bonds, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. Furthermore, Hourani et al. (2021) stated that the normalization of gender-based violence within certain family dynamics can perpetuate a cycle of abuse, further exacerbating the social well-being of women. As a result, some women may isolate themselves from family members as a self-protection strategy from further harm, but this withdrawal can also exacerbate feelings of loneliness and depressive consequences.

Anna et al., (2020) added that women who disclose their experiences of violence may face victim-blaming or disbelief from friends, further deepening their sense of isolation. As a result, many women may find themselves withdrawing from social interactions or cutting ties with friends altogether to avoid judgment or re-traumatization. This social withdrawal can have far-reaching consequences, depriving women of vital sources of support and exacerbating feelings of loneliness and despair.

The main causes of gender-based violence in the Ngoma Sector

The section below presents the main causes of gender-based violence in the Ngoma Sector. The data provided in the table below offers insights into perceived causes of gender-based violence within Ngoma Sector.

Table 3. The main causes of gender-based violence in Ngoma Sector

Responses	Respondents	Frequencies	Percentages
Cultural norms and practice	10	10	25%
Socioeconomic factors like poverty, unemployment	8	8	20%
Lack of education and awareness	7	7	17.5%
Power imbalances between genders	9	9	22.5%
Substance abuse like alcohol, drugs	6	6	15%
Total	40	40	100%

Source: Field survey 2024

The study found that cultural norms and practices emerged as the most commonly cited cause, with 25% of respondents attributing gender-based violence to these factors while power imbalances between genders were identified as a significant contributing factor by 22.5% of respondents. Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, were cited by 20% of respondents while lack of education and awareness was acknowledged by 17.5% of respondents. The limited education and awareness about GBV provide harmful stereotypes and misconceptions. Ologede et al. (2020) explained that without proper education on gender equality and respectful relationships, individuals may not recognize abusive behaviors or know how to seek help. The research also found that substance abuse, including alcohol and drugs, was recognized as a contributing factor to GBV by 15% of respondents. These findings underscore the complex and interconnected nature of the root causes of gender-based violence, emphasizing the need for multifaceted interventions that address societal norms, power dynamics, socioeconomic disparities, and education to effectively combat this pervasive issue.

Thus, the respondent’s information states that deep-rooted cultural beliefs and traditions can perpetuate gender inequality and justify violence against women. Norms dictating male dominance and female subservience may normalize abusive behavior, making it more socially acceptable and harder to challenge. Enaifoghe et al (2021) explained that practices such as forced marriages or female genital mutilation (FGM) can further entrench power imbalances and undermine women's autonomy and rights within society.

The strategies to end gender-based violence problems in Ngoma Sector

The table 4 below outlined various strategies proposed by respondents in Ngoma Sector to effectively prevent gender-based violence.

Table 4. Strategies to prevent gender-based violence in Ngoma Sector

Responses	Respondents	Frequencies	Percentages
Increasing education and awareness programs	6	6	15%
Providing support services for victims	9	9	22.5%
Strengthening laws and law enforcement against GBV	13	13	32.5%
Promoting gender equality and women's empowerment	8	8	20%
Engaging men and boys in GBV prevention	4	4	10%
Total	40	40	100%

Source: Field survey 2024

In the above table 4, the study found that among strategies to prevent gender-based violence, the most commonly cited approach was about strengthening laws and law enforcement against gender-based violence, with 32.5% of respondents. The report of USAID, (2020) on gender-based violence in politic stated that Rwanda has made significant strides in enacting legislation to address GBV, effective implementation and

enforcement are key to holding perpetrators accountable and ensuring justice for survivors. Following closely behind was the provision of support services for victims, which garnered support from 22.5% of respondents. Thus, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment was identified as a key strategy to prevent gender-based violence as supported by 20% of respondents. Importantly, the research found that the increase of education level and awareness programs received recognition in fighting against gender-based violence as supported by 15% of respondents. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of prevention efforts, highlighting the importance of comprehensive approaches that encompass legal, social, and cultural dimensions to effectively address gender-based violence in the community.

5. Conclusion and policy implications

The research conducted on gender-based violence (GBV) in the Ngoma sector has shed light on various critical aspects concerning its forms, causes, impact and potential strategies for mitigation. The findings of the study reveal that gender-based violence significantly affects women's social well-being in the Ngoma sector, leading to adverse consequences for them. The study showed the various aspects of women's lives that GBV usually affects, including their physical, emotional, and psychological health, as well as their ability to participate fully in social and economic activities. The study identifies proposed strategies to end gender-based violence problems in the Ngoma sector. These strategies encompass legal reforms, community mobilization, awareness-raising campaigns, education, gender equality, and capacity-building initiatives. These strategies emphasize the importance of multi-sectoral collaboration involving government agencies, civil society organizations, community leaders, and other stakeholders. Thus, by implementing evidence-based interventions informed by research findings and engaging stakeholders in collective action, it is possible to create a safer and more inclusive community where all individuals can live free from violence and discrimination.

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