

A 'good' wife? A theological challenge to gender constructs, culture and gender-based violence in the Kore-Kore Zimbabwean society

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The subject matter of gender-based violence (GBV) has been a topical dialogue in a variety of contexts and has received increasing attention as it relates to social activism and women's rights and their dignity. The Zimbabwean context is not exempted from this dialogue. Zimbabwe collectively records a 42% rate of GBV incidences and Zimbabwean women account for the majority of victims of all forms of violence perpetrated predominantly by men. Within this broad context, the focus of this article is on a specific context, namely the Rushinga (Kore-Kore) community, because a very high percentage of GBV occurrences within the range of Zimbabwe's 10 provinces are recorded there. Notwithstanding previous research on this topic, this article considers how gender constructs and culture contribute to GBV in a specific context. This relates to the subtleties of what it means to be a 'good' wife. A womanist-theological perspective was employed to approach this problem and the daily encounters and experiences of black African married and unmarried women who reside in the Rushinga district, by way of in-depth interviews, were considered. Their experiences point to the urgent need to dismantle constructions imbedded in culture and in gender roles, as a necessary response to GBV. Their experiences also point to the role of theology in problematising the notion of what it means to be a 'good' wife.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The article considers culture, gender studies and theology and their intersections in a specific context.

Keywords: culture; gender; patriarchy; gender-based violence; womanism; womanist theology; Zimbabwe.

Introduction: The persistent problem of gender-based violence

One in three Zimbabwean women aged 15 to 49 years has experienced physical violence, and one out of four women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 (UNFPA 2015). According to the statistics presented by the United Nations Population Fund (Zimbabwe) (UNFPA), the rate of physical violence experienced by women in Zimbabwe is worrisome (UNFPA 2015). In addition, data from a Demographic Health Survey (cf. Mukamana, Machakanja & Adjei 2020:113) indicate that 32% of Zimbabwean married women had experienced spousal emotional violence.

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) epidemic further exacerbated the risk of violence against women. Once the lockdown (referring to governmental instructions for their citizens to stay at home) started, gender-based violence (GBV) service providers in Zimbabwe noted an increase in reported GBV cases (Mukamana et al. 2020:113). The National GBV Hotline administered by the Musasa Project (a social organisation that provides relief to survivors of GBV headquartered in the capital city of Zimbabwe) registered 764 cases a month, compared to 500–600 cases a month before COVID-19. Beyond the spike in reporting, service providers have witnessed an increase in the severity of violence. From the start of the lockdown on 30 March 2020 until the end of December 2020, 6832 calls related to GBV were received: 1312 recorded in April, 915 in May, 779 logged in June, 753 in July, 766 registered in August, 629 in September, 546 in October, 567 in November and lastly 565 in December, with an average increase of 40% compared to the pre-lockdown trends (Mukamana et al., 2020:40). About 94% of the calls are from women.

Psychological violence remains the most frequent with 55% of total cases, followed by physical violence at 22% of total cases, economic violence at 15% and sexual violence at 8%. These statistics provide a scary snapshot of the realities of women in Zimbabwe. It indicates that for women in Zimbabwe, living in close quarters with a man can be extremely dangerous.

Regarding Rushinga specifically, Mrewa (2022) has pointed out that Rushinga records the highest percentage of GBV occurrences in the whole nation of Zimbabwe, with a 56% incidence rate. In this regard, police records indicate that women and girls are being abused specifically because of their gender (Mrewa 2022).

This article investigates the underlying problem of these statistics, by way of a critical consideration of cultural constructions of what it means to be a woman, which includes a cultural construction of the notion of 'a good wife' as part of what it means to be 'a good woman'. This relates to the theory of gender performativity, as developed by Judith Butler. According to this theory, if a woman does not perform her gender roles according to the gender constructions (which may include societal, cultural and religious constructions), she is punished (Butler 2009:4). If a married woman does not perform specific duties, does not behave in an expected way, does not dress modestly as expected and does not talk in such a way as expected by society, then she is not a 'good wife'. If a woman is not married, then there is a chance that she may not be regarded as a real woman. This implies that gender performativity and gender constructions are harmful, either way.

For the sake of the argument of this article, other scholars have indicated the potential harm of gender performativity and related cultural constructions. Rutoro (2015:309–324) argues that there are gender-differentiated spaces in a communitarian society where women are restricted from enjoying autonomy and realise their full potential. Chitando (2019:14) indicates how gender constructions cause domination and oppression, whereby one group is accorded privilege and status over the other. Nani (2011:22) points out that economically, there is a sexual division of labour between men and women which allocates tasks according to gender. Makore (2004:49) argues how the traditional Zimbabwean society focusses on making available resources to the boy, that is, money for education, better food and clothing.

While there is much research carried out on the phenomenon of GBV and culture, this article is focussed on gender constructions and cultural practices towards women in Rushinga, based on the prevalence of GBV in this area. This article represents reworked aspects of PhD-thesis that focuses on the latter context (see acknowledgments).

In the research, which focussed on the cultural construction of a 'good wife' and how this contributes to GBV, a womanist

theoretical framework was utilised to explore the relationship between culture and gender constructions critically. This includes aspects of womanist theology, because of the way culture and religion can reinforce the constructions under discussion (see, for example, Van Wyk 2022:1–8). A womanist perspective was utilised in this article because of the contextual focus, namely Zimbabwe. Womanist theory has as its core a focus on the concerns of women in the Global South. In this case, the application of the model in the Kore-Kore context is a recognition that Zimbabwean women experience countless marginalised statuses at the intersection of their geography, class and gender.

After the introduction, the idea of a 'good' wife is explored from different perspectives. This will be followed by a discussion of the methodology and a brief outline of some findings from the data collection regarding the relationship between culture, gender constructions and GBV in the Rushinga community. This section specifically outlines insights about the attributes of a 'good' wife from the Kore-Kore perspective. The article concludes with findings and recommendations.

A good wife?

When is a woman, a 'good' wife? There are different perspectives from which to answer this question, and some are healthy for women. In her autobiography, 'Unbowed', Maathai (2007) has indicated that there are many expectations for women to be regarded a proper (cf. also Ebila 2015:2). Maathai argues that in many cases, African men wanted to project their African identity, 'through' women (Maathai 2007:110). In this regard, women are carriers of culture, but they are also in a way expected to promote said culture. In this regard, men 'benefit' from culture, while women are exposed to potentially harmful aspects of culture. This places a paradoxical burden on women, which may imply a type of cultural or societal 'punishment' if women do not fulfil these expectations, or 'behave', to articulate it a bit stronger, given the topic of this article. For example, some cultural expectations could imply that a 'good' wife should be hardworking, and others that a 'good' wife should not be too light in complexion because if this is the case, she 'stands out' and may be regarded as a witch or prostitute. The tradition (women as promoters and carriers of culture) that a good wife must be 'this and that' has resulted in an exorbitant focus on women's conduct and appearance – and this makes women vulnerable and susceptible to abuse. Coupled with the worldview of patriarchy, the definition of a good wife could be one that accepts a Christian wife, a modern wife or a traditional one.

When 'attributes' of a good wife are considered (see elsewhere in this article), it is precisely for the purpose of problematising some of these perspectives. The problem of gender performativity and cultural constructions of womanhood is a complex phenomenon and as such, one usually considers several possible contributing factors.

Attributes of a 'good' wife: A brief theological perspective

Within the patriarchal worldview in which Christianity's canon came into existence, the idea of a 'good' wife would have been a prominent cultural phenomenon. What this could be referred to, is for example summarised in Proverbs 31:10–31, where a good wife is designated as one with a noble character and one who brings good and no harm. The 'good wife' is also described as 'the capable wife', 'the wife of many parts' and other designations. She works with willing hands and brings food from afar. The good wife brings dignity to her husband, and her children are adequately provided for. In all, the poem calls upon wives to be industrious and to execute their duties joyously. It underscores the value of married women while restricting them to the domestic sphere. Although the good wife in the poem 'considers a field and buys it' (Pr 31:16), her economic activities are located within the context of household chores (Chitando 2004:154). This is but one example.

In the context in which the scriptures of the Bible were conceived and recorded, it was the expectation that a 'good' wife bear children who will extend the bloodline (see, for example, the novel of Sue Monk-Kidd [2020], who wrote a fictional account of a woman and her husband during the 1st-century AD). A woman who does not bear children is blamed by society and is regarded as committing a crime against well-established community beliefs and practices. The story that matches this description is of Sarah who went on to look for a strategy to get her maid to sleep with Abraham to get an heir because of the pressure she was getting from the society (Mbuwayesango 1997). It was not out of her goodwill to share her husband with her maid, but society was waiting for an heir. Oduyoye notes the treatment of childless women whose grim fate undermines the solidarity of all women and serves to uphold the patriarchal norms (Oduyoye 1995:199). Thus, there are elements of patriarchy from the biblical perspective when it comes to how a 'good' wife is viewed; she must fulfil societal expectations.

Attributes of a 'good' wife: A brief African perspective

To be a 'good' wife in the African society means one must be well-mannered, generous to others and not be a witch. A 'good' wife for the Africans, entails 'walking' in a straight path while submitting to the man of the house who paid 'lobola', who is the father. A 'good' wife in the African tradition has always been imagined within the context of the family because marriage is assumed to be the end goal for most African women (Ebila 2015). A proper woman puts the family's interest first before even hers. Women are supposed to be seen but not to be heard. In the traditional African imaginary, 'good' wives are expected to be quiet when men speak, respectable by being respectful to men, good mothers of the nation and not to challenge authority in general. This shows that a woman's identity is constituted by the socio-cultural perceptions that define her and how these perceptions eventually force her to conform to socially sanctioned and

acceptable norms of her society. It is therefore clear that for the society or family to continue existing, there must be some form of docility and domestication of women for the family or society to survive (Chitando 2004:154).

Oduyoye agrees with the above-stated, as she narrates that the 'daughters of Anowa' are expected to be supportive and to hide from outsiders their festering wounds. They are supposed to be custodians of all the ancient healing arts and keepers of the secrets that numb pains inflicted by internal aggressors. They are only permitted to look on from afar, 'for their good' (Oduyoye 1995:90). Women are expected to do the impossible while going through torture to show their loyalty and commitment to the marriage, while men are allowed to 'explore the world of women'. Women are nurtured to endure the pain inflicted on them and the community should not know what they are going through. A 'good' wife must be able to hide her problems and pray for them not to fight back against her husband. This is the extent to which our society expects of women – to stay in weeping with no one wiping their tears.

The methodological approach for the theological deconstruction of a 'good' wife

This methodology section addresses how the data were collected, generated and analysed (cf. Polit & Hungler, 2013). The methodology assisted with finding out the current status of the violence and mistreatment of women, whether it is caused by gender constructions and cultural practices only or not. The views of the women who are affected by this GBV and how it has affected the way people live were again considered. As such the methodology that is chosen and the steps followed, have taken into consideration the traditional values which guard and guide the people of Rushinga.

A qualitative approach was more suitable because this involves investigating insights of a particular group of people. This empirical study includes in-depth interviews and secondary sources. The qualitative method employed helped in interacting with the people and getting in touch with the realities that the people in Rushinga face regarding GBV and came up with measures that could be taken to help the victimised souls. In addition, interviews were used in this study to complement the rich findings from the available literature. A sample size of seven people (two men [M], and five women [W]) was selected based on age, gender and how they relate to issues of culture and violence.

What the data (interviews) yielded: A Kore-Kore perspective on what constitutes a 'good' wife

Introductory comments

In the context that is the focus of this article, namely Rushinga in Zimbabwe, the issue of what constitutes a good wife is at the heart of GBV statistics. Gender role expectations linked

with culture are the main reasons for the surging of GBV statistics. It would be a mere lie to say that no one living in Rushinga is untouched by the reality of GBV. Raw statistics or data mentioned earlier, no matter how awful they are, do not give us a proper realisation of the reality of GBV because some issues are not even reported. The next section offers insights from the men and women in Rushinga about their expectations of what a 'good' wife entails, and the relationship between gender constructions, culture and GBV.

Issues of gender constructions, a 'good' wife and gender-based violence

Rushinga's environment and its norms play key roles in encouraging the subordination of women by piling roles and expectations of women to be seen as 'good' wives while not listing any role for a good husband. Rushinga is a patriarchal society with a dominant emphasis on gender role expectations (Mrewa 2022). 'Staying in marriage' is a measuring stick used to qualify or regard a woman as a 'good wife'. Women are considered more restricted compared with men in personal and social life spheres (Ali, McGarry & Maqsood 2022). When GBV erupts, for example, a good wife is expected to sweep this under the carpet and move on because that is the nature of marriages. A good wife must stay strong for the good of her marriage. Thus, societal expectations of a good wife are unfair to women because they are left vulnerable in trying to save their marriages.

The Rushinga community expects a 'good' wife to become a mother and show loyalty, commitment and moral obligation to her family (Mrewa 2022). There is a high acceptance of violence as a way of ensuring women are controlled and perform their roles effectively as they are considered the property of men and, therefore, expected to be controlled by men. Because of this, women are expected to abide by making compromises that prevent them from competing with men. Voicing their concerns is seen to be disrespectful because women are expected to be only on the receiving end of authority but not to contest. This makes her a good wife.

However, one woman voiced concern regarding this:

'Many people in Rushinga subscribe to the notion that a woman is 'complete' when she is married to some man, no matter how bad the situations in the marriage are. Most mature women are under pressure of getting married because our society says so but most of those married ones are unhappy because they are beaten by their husbands.' (Interview with WA, 08 July 2023)¹

As hard as it is to believe, women in Rushinga suffer at the mercy of gender constructions. It is so unnerving how women are left to do all house chores even if they both go to work, the husband will reach home and sit down to watch soccer while waiting for dinner from the same wife that he was with at work. Cooking, washing, ironing and fetching firewood are women's well-known duties no matter what,

¹The identifiers in the quotes are designated as follows: 'W' refers to woman; 'M' refers to man; A, B, C, D, and so on, designates the order in which these quotes were quoted or utilised in this text.

and men will not compromise on helping out. After all this, a 'good' wife does all this without grumbling. One woman showed frustration with how her husband treats her:

'Truth be said, most men will never understand just how much effort is put into the business of being a 'good' wife; or appreciate that while his work finishes at 5 pm, mine is a 24-hour shift. When I am trying to rest from a busy day, a child runs with homework while he murmurs that dinner is late and yet tomorrow, I am needed so fresh and productive by my boss.' (Interview with WB, 8 July 2023)

More so, much emphasis is placed on the importance of family as an entity, and failure to meet role expectations results in criticism from family members, the community and society, and may result in marital conflict which can then escalate to violence. A good wife in the Rushinga community can have multitasks and even do men's jobs like farming and ploughing with cattle although men cannot do women's duties. These are the pains of being a wife, and women strive to be noticed and appreciated as good wives. An interviewed man said without remorse that this is what women are expected to do and there is nothing sinister in all that:

'Some women can even plough in the fields, or do gardening with children at their backs. After that, all eyes will be on her in the kitchen waiting for dinner from her. A woman needs to be strong and hardworking.' (MA, 8 July 2023)

A 'good' wife does not disclose what happens in her home, either good or dangerous. Against such a background, women are used as door mats, they are supposed to keep silent to maintain the 'good' wife status. When it comes to the question of what a good wife is, most responses look at how a woman must match and fit the gender expectations and how she must strive to please her husband. A 'good' wife does not compete or fight back with her husband even if he does bad things to her, but she fights positively for her marriage. Following is the response from a family man who also was frustrated with how women want to rebel against 'known' gender constructs:

'Good wives should know their positions. If they avoid trying to be men in the home and take their roles as women, they should know that baba vanoteerwa kana vataura. The problem with most women is they want to be kraal heads as well. A good wife must listen to her husband and do whatever he says, full stop.' (Interview with MB, 8 July 2023)

A good woman is a stoic, self-effacing, loyal and biological mother. If a woman behaves in a way that does not conform to and confirms these stereotypes, she is labelled a witch, prostitute and murderer (Vambe 2013:2). The role of society is evident in making role expectations stronger, and, therefore, failure to meet expectations, especially the woman, results in problems (Ali, McGarry & Maqsood 2022: NP7086). Empirical research has shown that hostile sexist attitudes as the basis of preserving men's dominance over women are grounded in traditional gender role expectations (Mastari, Spruyt & Siongers 2019). Gender roles stemming from the concept of masculinity and societal norms are further fixed through

cultural expectations. A lot of cases of GBV stem from men who feel their women are not obedient. Most men who hold traditional views about gender roles are more likely to justify and use GBV when feeling 'neglected', 'not listened to' or 'challenged' (Luke et al. 2007:5–27).

Societal factors and the fact that childcare responsibilities predominantly lie with women also mean that certain gender role expectations are not easy to change (Ali, McGarry & Maqsood, 2022:NP7805) especially in developing African countries like Zimbabwe, and in traditional societies like Rushinga to be precise. The above-stated analysis from Ali, McGarry and Maqsood is correct in that even if married couples in their home want to change, it will take time because the man might also fear what his relatives and society will say if he allows his wife to have freedom and make decisions. In Zimbabwe, they call such a man *akadyiswa* to mean he was given a love potion. Furthermore, because of low literacy levels, a lot of women are content with what they have. Consequently, it will take time for our societies to change because of what society says about gender roles.

Issues of culture, a 'good' wife and gender-based violence

Patriarchy whose norms are embedded through culture contributes the most to constructing attitudes and perceptions that legitimise the classing of women at the last step of the ladder. A good wife is not expected to end her marriage, because of cultural norms that tie them. Those who escape from violent husbands and return to their maiden homes, are forced by their parents to go back to their husbands and endure because the community believes that marriage has its ups and downs. Consequently, such attitude stems from the cultural norms that are rampant in the communities that encourage married women to be tolerant, dependent, enduring and submissive to their husbands.

One divorced woman blamed culture for her divorce because she claimed that her husband was too much into the culture to the extent that he blamed her for barrenness. Culture always blames a woman if there is no child in the marriage. She narrated how her husband refused to go for medical tests claiming he had been taking herbs which boosted his manhood since he was a boy hence there was no way he could be sterile. Instead of seeking help as a family, he pushed on having a second wife:

'I was divorced because my husband blamed me for being barren. This issue of childlessness was a daily talk pushing us to fight almost every day. This cultural mentality has even sunk into other women's minds. His sisters used to scold me also that I was not fertile and that their brother had to marry another wife because he needed an heir.' (Interview with WC, 8 July 2023)

Oduyoye demonstrates that we have been brought up to believe that a woman should be 'owned' by a man, be he father, uncle or husband (Oduyoye 1995:4). She goes on to comment that a 'free woman' spells disaster. An adult

woman, if unmarried, is immediately reckoned to be available for the pleasure of all males and is treated as such. The single woman who manages her affairs successfully without a man is an affront to patriarchy and a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of men who want to 'possess' her. Some women are struggling to be free from this compulsory attachment to the male (Oduyoye 1995:4). One single woman shared her sentiments:

'It is our culture that declares that women are fit only to go to church, to work in kitchens, and to have children. To be a good wife, therefore, means that a woman must not be independent and free. If a woman shows some traits of being independent and self-supporting, automatically she is labelled as a prostitute. I am a single lady, and I have been given names.' (Interview with WD, 8 July 2023)

Another cultural practice that is harsher on women and promotes violence is in terms of infidelity. Society gifted the men with a free pass to have affairs and a 'good' wife is expected to take it in without asking. A man is honest, if he comes clean about his affair, but a woman is seen as characterless. Culture allows a man to have many wives and even cheat on top of that, but none of his wives can stand out to him and reprimand him. Chitando says 'When faced with promiscuous and abusive husbands, women should bear the burden with resoluteness as the gospel of subordination of women asserts' (Chitando 2004:152). He goes on to say women are offered as sacrificial victims by a society that does not place any real value on their activities (Chitando 2004). To please and 'appease' society, women have to take in all this abuse imposed on them by men under the pretext of 'our culture says this'.

The painful thing to note however is that some women work hard to persuade other women that being subordinate to men is natural. Some women also discourage their fellows not to being educated because they think if a woman is too educated, she will chase men away. Women deal with the harmful effects of discrimination and deal with issues of defined gender roles that continue to suppress them in our society. But above all, we are inspired by Maathai who did not allow the talk about how to behave like a proper African woman to deter her from enjoying her success as a woman. She says (Maathai 2007):

At one point it became clear I was being turned into a sacrificial lamb. Anybody who had a grudge against modern, educated, and independent women was being allowed to spit on me. I decided to hold my head high, put my shoulders back, and suffer with dignity: I would give every woman and girl a reason to be proud and never regret being educated, successful, and talented. 'What I have', I told myself, 'is something to celebrate and not to ridicule or dishonour. (n.p.)

Of the interviewed sample, women blamed culture for creating a rift between men and women, thus, violence among these species. Men were against the idea that it is culture but put the blame back on women saying they do not have respect which is why they see themselves being abused.

Kambarami (2006) says the young should be taught from an early age that men and women are equal because biological differences do not mean that the other sex is inferior:

'Honestly, I blame culture on the mistreatment of women because our societal expectation is that a woman's self-worth is dependent upon keeping a man and bearing his name. The shame and stigma attached to women from broken marriages here is usually very high. This is another reason why most women are staying in marriages to protect their identities while self-worthy and dignity are long taken by men.' (WE, 7 July 2023)

A womanist response to 'attributes' of a 'good' wife

In response to the statements made by the interviewees, it is suggested in this article that it could be beneficial to Kore-Kore women to adopt what African Women Theologians advocate for, that is, breaking the rules for 'acceptable' behaviour and not complying with whatever is 'respectable' and polite forms of engagement. African women are able to re-awaken their strength. The contemporary African woman who is kept in the background by the gender roles assigned to her by her culture is likened to the Cushite woman who does not say anything and seems to passively look on as Miriam and Aaron criticise Moses for marrying her (Adamo 2018). Unlike Moses' Cushite wife, a womanist in action knows what to do, she knows that she needs to rise and stand on her two feet, and this is the aim of this section, to give a way forward to women so that they are awakened and realise their God-given potential.

Women need to come out of their comfort zones, move away from being docile to being active and step away from being passive partakers of tradition to being assertive and influential. This is the kind of woman who is created by womanism, a woman who makes her own decisions and says no when she feels she is coerced — a womanist who says no to societal demands and puts herself first instead of others. In most of her writings, Oduyoye gives a voice to African women making it possible for them to speak about the issues that oppress them from their cultural perspectives (Oduyoye 2004:33). Oduyoye identifies multiple scriptures in the African context which she cross-studies concerning Old Testament texts. This, in turn, makes the scriptures alive and accessible to the women in Africa (Oduyoye 2004:33).

With the same view, Masenya re-reads Proverbs 31:10–31, to investigate what ideal womanhood should be for an African, South African woman reader of the Bible (Masenya 2003). This approach is an African woman's liberation reading of the text and would consider the African-ness of an African woman and her attributes. Masenya argues that the text of Proverbs 31:10–31 is liberative for women because it pictures women as being hard workers, independent and powerful who like the virtuous woman can hold their own in the world of men. Likewise, Kore-Kore women can picture themselves in the same way, taking the Proverb positively and not allowing

society and tradition to interpret the Proverb for them. They need to confront scripture with a positive mindset and declare the best out of their lives – for a change.

Furthermore, Masenya re-reads Judges 19 to confront and challenge violence perpetrated against women. Judges 19:24 states:

Here are my virgin daughter and his concubine; let me bring them out now. Ravish them and do whatever you want to them, but against this man do not do such a vile thing.

This text presents an elderly man who is ready to give up his virgin daughter to be used by strangers in exchange for his almost unknown guests. With *Bosadi* hermeneutics, Masenya re-reads this text with a call to women to rise and realise their full potential as people with dignity in the image of God, rather than remain victims (Masenya 2003:108). This is what womanism is denouncing or fighting against – women being abused even by their fathers and brothers. In such a situation as in the above-stated text, a womanist is encouraged to stand up against her father and tell him that she will not be doing what he is asking her to do. A womanist will take necessary measures to make sure the father gets punished for such an act of abuse towards her.

Thus, women today need to use this lens and start taking charge of their lives. Saying no does not mean a person is rebellious, but the person is expressing themselves as well as exercising their rights. This is what our grandmothers and mothers could not do during their time, but now womanism is calling for a positive shift where men and women can live in harmony without stepping on each other's toes. This is women's fair chance to say NO to all forms of oppression by reading it through their lenses and understanding it from their perspective. When this is done, the womanist perspective is achieved.

Findings and recommendations

Despite the devastating evidence for the prevalent nature of GBV, it appeared that it remained a phenomenon that many still choose to disbelieve, ignore or find it acceptable. While people tend to acknowledge GBV in other locations, it is uncommon for people to recognise the occurrence of GBV in their communities. This is one of the reasons the Kore-Kore community and Rushinga were singled out as an example of awareness that needs to be created on the ground level, within communities.

In this regard, the study indicated the impact of culture and society on the definitions of a 'good wife', and this was one of the elements that surfaced during fieldwork. The responses from the study's participants and the literature both pointed to culture having a significant influence on how women were expected to behave and, in a way, cultivated the abuse of women. Despite its good intentions, culture frequently appeared to stand in the way of gender equality, which prevented people, especially women, from realising their full potential and from experiencing their innate dignity as

beings made in God's image. In addition, culture and its usage have frequently been misunderstood and applied selectively. This has resulted in the maintenance of cultural and customary norms that uphold men's dominance over women while diminishing the worth of women, their contributions and their place in society. Men utilise violence under the guise of tradition and culture, this demonstrates the lengths males and society will go to 'preserve' their culture. Therefore, women and girls were abused under the pretext that 'culture says this'.

Another core finding of the study was what constituted a 'good wife' in the African setup. It was noted that wives and husbands had various expectations of one another, and society had expectations of those who lived in society. In addition to cultural and societal standards, gender role attitudes influenced these expectations. Unfulfilled expectations and behaviour that deviated from accepted standards led to marital discord, which then progressed to GBV. A good wife must always obey her husband's wishes and never treat him disrespectfully, haughtily or unfriendly. As a mother, she must attend to the children's needs, including their education. On the other hand, historically, males only had one responsibility: providing for their families. They also had a minimal duty to participate in community social activities. It was evident that women suffered and became vulnerable because of these numerous responsibilities. A 'free woman' was a recipe for trouble. A single woman who effectively ran her affairs without a man was a direct challenge to the so-called masculinity of males who wished to 'possess' her and an affront to patriarchy. Some women were finding it difficult to break free from this forced bond with men. However, the method applied assisted and motivated both men and women to make recommendations about how to establish an equal partnership between men and women in marriage.

These *brief* recommendations of the study are aimed at Christian faith communities, Zimbabwean policymakers and future researchers in this regard.

For the church

Over the years, there have been significant points of dispute on the role played by the Church, particularly on issues affecting women like GBV. For a long time, the Church has frequently observed from the terraces because, in addition to the reality that patriarchy has always controlled society, the Church also held the view that it could not be involved in family and societal matters. Thus, this study recommends that religious organisations demonstrate their disdain for gender violence by conducting information and awareness campaigns aimed at altering cultural aspects that permit gender violence. The campaigns on GBV bring together people from all over the world, allowing them to share their own experiences and learn from others. According to PAHO, the church must introduce Faith-Based Programmes and Services – like religious counselling, support groups, study groups and assistance programmes that can address GBV and

emphasise the importance of peace and tolerance with their participants and worshippers (PAHO 2022:52). One strategy to promote awareness and conversation about GBV that the Church can employ is to frame the issue within religious principles. It might also be a means of locating and helping victims who are uncomfortable speaking with a police officer or medical professional. Religious organisations can use (several) conferences, conventions and agreements to unite in the fight against GBV.

For policymakers

Copious social institutions will be covered here, including Health, Education and Social Services, which again includes the government because almost all of these are public services from the government. On the side, the government should launch welfare institutions and provide national and international organisations that provide social and economic funding to victims of GBV, allowing them to leave violent relationships and abusive partners without fear for their own or their children's well-being. This is so because many married women are stuck in marriages because they are doing it for their children, yet they are not happy. This study recommends that this approach be adopted where perpetrators and victims are all embraced, and there can be a change. When perpetrators are put close to the system, there is a high chance that they can change their ways (in fear or trying to please and not disappoint people) and give the government ideas on dealing with offenders. There is a need for the government to train healthcare providers who will be able to recognise and respond to GBV. This is one of the most important ways of identifying and assisting victims. Policymakers should make sure that the message that violence is unacceptable and can be curbed is conveyed through standard curricula, sex education, school counselling programmes and school health services. Substitute examples of masculinity should be offered, conflict-resolution techniques must be imparted, and kids and teenagers who might be victims or offenders of violence should be supported. To help providers recognise and address this issue, GBV must be included in psychology, sociology, medicine, nursing, law, women's studies, social work and other disciplines. Children will naturally benefit from programmes that tackle masculinities to investigate what 'makes a man' and what constitutes a lady. The main goal is to teach boys that violence (against anyone) is immoral from an early age. The dominant definition of masculinity must be dismantled, and girls must be taught again that despite their physical differences, they have the same rights and opportunities as men.

Future research

The study managed to cover how the intersection of religion, patriarchy and culture affects women's rights and limits their potential. The study challenged the role of culture in expecting women to be 'good wives' amid the GBV they go through in their lives. However, too much emphasis was placed on how a woman was expected to be a 'good wife', and the issues of a girl child were not looked into thoroughly. For example, what can be done to stop or reduce early child

marriages? Other researchers can pursue other related topics to broaden the view on the role of culture, religion and patriarchy in promoting violence against women. This would be important because it would help cement the relevance of a study like this in society and ensure that it gains traction within the academic fraternity.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors' contributions

Both authors, T.M. and T.v.W., contributed to the content and editing of the article. T.v.W. acted as supervisor.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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