

## Discrimination and Oppression of Women: A Social Work Exploration in Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

Women have always been known as the essence of the society; however their discrimination and oppression have narrowed or limited their proficiencies and aptitudes. It is this work's contention to do an exploration on the tyranny and discrimination of women with precise orientation on Zimbabwe. Women have faced discrimination throughout the millenniums and are still facing the same forms of neglect. The paper holds that oppression of women emanates from different angles namely cultural, religious, social, marital and patriarchal as a nature of society. There seems to be a huge metamorphosis between women and men in the Zimbabwean society considering the responsibilities dispensed to women at the expense of men such as housekeeping and rearing of children. There are some top or influential positions only reserved for men hence the discrimination of women in regardless of gender equal rights. Domestic vehemence against women has converted proliferating in Zimbabwe for the past 2 decades which points to the oppression of women as they are defenseless. Religion has and is still frolicking a big role towards women's oppression and discrimination as it instils submission and illegitimacy in women. This work is aimed at providing a scrutinized examination of the issue understudy providing a more panoramic technique of viewing the oppression and discrimination of women in Zimbabwe. There has to be a facilitation of policies to ensure that women are emancipated for positive participation.

**Keywords:** Oppression; Discrimination; Women

### Introduction

The underplay of women in Zimbabwe is being largely ascribed to oppression and discrimination from the larger society as it is a typical patriarchal one. This paper seeks to examine on the rising trends of gender discrimination related to women. The author has made use of desktop research to access some of the critical components of gender inequality and some of the data is based on observation under qualitative research to cement the information. Women discrimination can be basically put as an uneven or unequal treatment of women based on gender differences [1]. Oppression can be put forward as the exercise of authority or power in an unjust manner, in this case related to women [2,3]. The case of gender discrimination and oppression has not yet been adequately articulated or executed. This paper seeks to close the gaps which have been left out by other literatures because most writing put emphasis on cultural and religious aspect only yet there are various forms of oppression and discrimination which stems from different angles. The paper shall point oppression from men as it is the overriding side of gender related issues considering the roles of women in the society where they are supposed to look after children while men have their freelance at the expense of their counterparts.

The paper shall focus on gender discrimination and oppression both at micro and macro levels for an enhanced understanding of the problem's magnitude. The paper enshrines discrimination and oppression in cases of education where many females are being given little attention to further their studies, land ownership under customary law, marriage itself holding inequality and unequal job opportunities. These and other issues are to be discussed in a number of subsequent subtopics. Background of the study through an understanding of discrimination and oppression is first to be provided by the author in order to get the direction of this paper, a historical view of the matter is going to be provided. The article shall also provide information on the conceptualization of discrimination and oppression of women with particular reference to Zimbabwe. Consequently, as the paper makes

steps towards its ends, the author shall propose some recommendations of eliminating gender discrimination and oppression on women.

### An Understanding of Gender Discrimination and Oppression

The subsistence of women has been actively elucidated as of maneuvering trying to sustain a shape out of oppression. Globally, gender discrimination as of women is most common in developing countries. Discrimination can happen in clear and simple ways, for example, the norm or notion that children of a family belong to the father's lineage truly exhibit the universality of the concept [4]. Patriarchal ideologies and philosophies concerning gender rating through the prioritization of males over female's stems the inferiority of women as claimed thus exacerbating discrimination [5]. Oakley [6] argued that the history of women discrimination and oppression emanates from the human formation where women lost points to males because of biological makeup which entails masculinity and femininity. Women in Zimbabwe are subjected to discrimination especially on the issue of masculinity consideration where men are ranked high and opted rather than women especially in the rural areas. The interpretation of gender from the early stages is leading to discrimination as males are seen as assets and they tend to enjoy freedom which caps them with later authority over families with women being at the nethermost.

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In historical thoughtfulness, a son creates joy for the family, whereas a daughter receives a half-hearted reception due to gender future capabilities and competences. Birth of sons is very much welcomed as a future earning member who is expected to support the parents in old age [7]. In appreciation of this side view of the issue, a daughter is reflected as a burden to the family from childhood, a girl becomes fully aware of the fact that her brother is an important asset to the family and she is treated as a non-permanent family member. In the ancient rural Zimbabwean community, it was observed and then recorded that some of fathers refused to see a new born baby if the baby was a daughter due to gender discrimination which influences women's life time [8]. The country's socio-cultural set up even gives blame to the mother if she delivers a daughter whereas this is the fact that naturally a father is responsible whether the child is a boy or girl. Hence, the global existence of gender discrimination has not left Zimbabwe behind which makes it a universal concern. It exists in all corners of the earth including in those economically developed countries like United States of America and Russia in different facets of life in one way or the other.

A feminist view claims that gender discrimination against women has reflect poor development in the patriarchal societies such as Zimbabwe. It creates hindrances in the participation of women in most fundamental spectrums of the society which include social, political and economic activities [3]. Subsequently, even up to date talking about equality, in many developing countries including India and Ghana a lot of gender discrimination activities and gender inequality is still going on in terms of education, health, employment, social values, and customs as well as on the norm of sexual harassment. Discrimination has its many faces in different forms even today whereby educated people have their wrong thinking concerning women that women have nothing to do in their lives except from cooking, house cleaning, and serving the whole family including the husband and children [9]. Women are obliged to social values thus being discriminated from actively participation in community decision making. The land customary law of Zimbabwe gives more access of land to men rather than to women especially in the rural areas. This is a typical form of discrimination which exists in the Zimbabwean context and women end up being idiosyncratic and dependent on their husbands or male counterparts.

More so, an understanding of the oppression of women can date back to the hyperactivities which were recorded in the Middle East, Europe and African nations. It has been principally defined as a burdensome exercise of power or authority against women. In France during the 1800s, men had a lot of rights and privileges over women which heightened the number of women who were being oppressed without any voice to advocate or speak on behalf of them [10]. The granting of equal rights by the international community such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has been challenged by societal existing laws which always coerce women under men. Women in the Zimbabwean society have confronted oppression from domestic violence as men are taking advantage over women's feminism which has led to marital problems. Sexually oriented oppression against women in most developing countries has become frightening or alarming as men are coercing or forcing their women to bed without their consent.

Oppression is argued to have emerged as a result of power struggle during the time men claimed influence for status ranking. Engel [11] argued that women are highly oppressed, of which, it can be possible to brand them as slave of slaves. He further argues that in most European countries oppression emerged during the operationalization of class

societies, that is approximately 6000 year ago. The Marxist noted that oppression stemmed from the above era when the mother rights were overthrown or toppled by males in order for them to acquire all the necessary property which later became a norm of all the time. Hence, it was underlined that oppression of women increased because of property which is a practical fact in Zimbabwe. Inheritance of property such as land is hardly given to women in the Zimbabwean context because they are considered as fragile or incompetent when it comes to the protection of the property. Women only have an option of dancing according to men's tune in respect of men's influence over land issues and even property in general [12]. Men in Zimbabwe benefit out of women's architectures as it is claimed that women work hard to stabilize their homes yet there are little opportunities for them to properly exhibit their potentials which points to oppression. Literature provides that oppression has slightly been considered or effectively recognized by the formal law which is increasing its rate of the phenomenon on a daily basis as it is more subjective.

The marriage institution in the African context is arrow pointing toward the freedom of women during their life time. When people marry in the African community, the men are given full control and authority over the household which includes dictates which points to oppression. Women have little to contribute towards the family's decision making pattern as men are referred to as the leaders of the family, this alone can express the magnitude of the problems faced by women in the society as they are forced to follow even pathways which are unconstructive or dangerous in nature. In Zimbabwe oppression can be drawn from the way men control the behavior of their women for example through the nature of dressing. Women are obliged to wear long and body-free wear for dignity even when it is hot which a huge form of oppression is as it doesn't consider the consenting feeling of the females [13]. The fact that women face tormenting fire when they are caught or alleged of being at the wrong side of marital norms, for instance, through being involved in adulterous activities is a nature of oppression because the woman is straight forwardly divorced yet men are hardly divorced as a result of various considerations. The power and freelance within men in Zimbabwe has prompted some extra exacerbated negative influences on women, men are able to marry as much wives as they can especially under traditional ties yet women are not allowed to do so [14]. Oppression can be exhibited in a number of ways both at micro and macro levels. It is the aim of this paper to explore on the expression of the discrimination and oppression of women pointing to points of interest having being provided with an understanding of the two concepts at a global level narrowing down to its conceptualization in Zimbabwe.

## Results

The two broad concepts of discrimination and oppression have been interpreted differently in connection with the context of applicability. This part of the article shall embark on an exploration of discrimination and oppression of women drawing examples and practical applicability from Zimbabwe. Land ownership in Zimbabwe has subjected women to discrimination and oppression especially in the rural areas. In Manicaland province most of the farm lands used for commercial farming activities is owned by men. The fact that women have little access to land ownership clearly paints a picture of their grip in the society whereby they are just treated as strangers [15]. Women struggle to possess land in the traditional set up of which most of the Zimbabwean population is currently observing, men hold land rights as they claim to be the real citizens of the cultural land [16]. Under the Shona customary law, the ability to work on the land for example

through agricultural practice such as farming is given to men since they are associated with masculinity, however the sense of discriminating women by this view has led to the underutilization of resources especially in the rural areas. Bourdillon [8] promulgated that it is rare to find a large number of women who own land in the Zimbabwean society because the environment tends to value men more than women to an extent of secluding them from acquiring basic human acquisitions such as land which clearly excludes women from the society's essence. This increases women's dependence on men even when they have the ideas to shift levels for example in agriculture men end up misusing land due to lack of ideas but because of the verdict that women have nothing to do with land ownership and utilization points to a serious discrimination.

The political arena of the day calls for equal participation of both men and women for shared opinions and directions but the discrimination of women in this sector is of concern. The inferiority claim over women has undermined their participation in politics at micro and macro levels. The number of women in the traditional leadership in Zimbabwe is very little to tell as compared to that of men. Chiefdoms in Zimbabwe's 8 provinces, excluding urban settings of Harare and Bulawayo which make up the country's ten provinces, for example in Manicaland and Matebeleland South provinces most of them are led by men yet women are there. It is argued that women actually provide productive ideas but they still remain at the bottommost of the society's pyramid. A few areas which are led by women are highly open to criticisms and sabotage from men which scope levels of life threatening events. At a macro level, Zimbabwe's political arena is dominated by men who hold much influence than that of women. The country has never had a female president ever since its independence not because there are no potential women but because men always discriminate women by considering them as fragile [17,18]. Gender equality proposed by Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013 is being undermined accounting the number of women in the parliament and the government's top offices. Tracing the political history of Zimbabwe, Joyce Mujuru was the first and only female to reach one of the country's highest positions when she was appointed as the Vice President under the Mugabe regime in 2008 [19]. Since then women have been discriminated as evidenced by the government's standing structure where the President E.D Mnangagwa and the two deputies are males (Table 1).

Consequently, the educational system in Zimbabwe supports gender equality but there is the existence of a latent discrimination when it comes to women and females in general. The discrimination of women in education has its roots from the early stages of development where boys are given more opportunities to education than girls [20]. Through this, a girl progresses endurance and unpretentiousness towards life and usually strive to be a good wife to the male. In rural Zimbabwe most parents opt to send their male children to school while the female is more socialized with house chores. Female schooling is regarded as a waste of money as the population always considers the fact that one day the child will be married out of the family where benefits are not guaranteed hence females are discriminated from attending proper education. In the Marange area, Manicaland province women are only prepared for marriage which minimizes their chance to go to school [21]. A survey conducted by the Ministry of Primary

and Secondary Education on Advanced level students proportion in 2012 pointed to fact that 75% of them were males which explained the true existence of gender discrimination. However, the report was subjected to criticism from the higher and tertiary institutions where the majorities were females [22]. Most schools in Harare and Bulawayo provinces are led by headmasters not headmistresses which are a true reflection of the discrimination of women. Taking into account tertiary institutions like Universities in Zimbabwe, most Vice Chancellors are men with the country's ultimate Chancellor being the President who is also a man hence there is the discrimination of women in the educational sector.

Women are always under the wrath of customary law in Zimbabwe due to their low or less participation in the traditional justice delivery system. This is the informal or non-state justice/law which is used by many African countries but diverges from one context to another. Customary law puts men at the helm or apex of everything especially in patriarchal societies like Zimbabwe and Zambia. According to Mbiti [23] men are highly protected and exalted under the customary law with regards to masculinity and their participation in the formulation and upholding of the law. The traditional justice system justifies undeserved treatment of women by men as they regard them superior thus possessing authority over them. The traditional justice system is usually common in the rural areas such as Buhera, Masvingo and Mt Darwin where traditional patterns are conformed to and it is mostly comprised of a chief or headman with his cabinet for instance Chief Nyashanu in Buhera. The advisors to the chief are usually men, which clearly show that the system is dominated by men. Women have little or nothing to say concerning the resolving of issues as the judiciary system is centred on customary beliefs of authorizing men to participate at the glance. The fact that women's participation is very low in the traditional judicial system which dominates Zimbabwe's population spotlights the discrimination of women in rural areas and this exacerbates problems which they face as a result of their low expression in driving the community. When issues or cases are resolved in the absence of gender representative there are high chances of being suppressed hence the discrimination of women in the rural areas is prompting problems to the females.

Patriarchal ideology is one such factor which is nurturing discrimination on women in the Zimbabwean society and the African continent at large. It has been uttered as the rule of the father where fathers are ultimately respected in the society or can be observed as the dominance of males in simple terms. Discrimination from the patriarchal ideology comes in a number of ways which undermines the importance of women [20]. The patriarchal ideologies in Zimbabwe value those male children at the expense of females who are given access to societal essentials. Feminists argue that the patriarchal ideology of naming children from the father's family or lineage is a reflection of discrimination because children are made out of two people's activity hence some children have to possess the women's surname which is vague in Zimbabwe. When children possess the father's surname it gives women a limited say upon them which has resulted in a number of cases where women are not being properly taken care of by their off springs because they tend to be controlled by their fathers. Women in Zimbabwe have little involvement when it comes to the family decision making platform as men claim to be the family heads which is a discriminatory act against gender equality. In the Zimbabwean society, family assets and property are only guaranteed to men as males mostly benefit things such as land and cattle as inheritance after the father's death yet women are also humans.

| Gender  | Political participation percentage (%) |
|---------|----------------------------------------|
| Males   | 65%                                    |
| Females | 35%                                    |

Table 1: Comparison between gender participating in politics.

The oppression of women in Zimbabwe has an equestrian literature which tries to express and unravel the true existence of women's low stratum. The marriage institution from a global perspective has subjected women to oppression in different forms which are harmful to them. When women are married they are anticipated to submit under their husbands' authority through giving them their conjugal rights [13]. This belief has led to the oppression of women in the marriage institution as they are not allowed to air out their views concerning issues which affects them, for example, making decisions for their children. Men are oppressing women under the name of marriage as evidenced by the shocking number of marital rapes which have been recorded in the past decade where about 750 of 1000 married women were being raped by their husbands [24]. Men are sleeping with their wives out of their sexual consent especially in the rural areas where women are alleged of not being aware of their rights and where to report such cases. Ncube [16] argues that women are also forced in marriages by their families in expectation of money and valuables in form of bride price or dowry. Oppression of females in Zimbabwe has led to quite a number of child marriages where even families are maltreating children in form of physical abuse which make females of such scenarios more susceptible to marital abuse and oppression as observed in Epworth, a high density suburb at Harare's continuum.

Moreover, the oppression of women is surfacing in a mushrooming mundane from the religious circles which affects human lives on daily basis. Marxists argued that religion fosters oppression of women in a smoothly way which hinders their active consciousness. Religion as a set of beliefs and norms govern human lives through desired ways of conduct which it administers [2]. The participation of women in church activities is limited due to the belief that men are the true leaders. Some Christian churches holds to the fact that their leader who is Jesus Christ was/is a man and most of the iconic figures of the religion such as Moses and Abraham were also males hence it instills submission to women as they pave way for male dominance [25]. The above verdict has led many women who have potential not to join leadership but only to be oppressed by men as they are viewed as inferior when it comes to church leadership. Oppression of women also comes in the way women dress when going to church or even at home especially in the Apostolic sects where they are obliged to wear long dresses against their will. It again fosters much submission to men which is resulting in an increase of gender based violence with religion being there to provide meaning that there is a good life after death hence religion adds much to the oppression of women (Table 2).

| Gender  | Dominance percentage (%) |
|---------|--------------------------|
| Males   | 89%                      |
| Females | 11%                      |

Table 2: Comparison of dominance based on gender.

The oppression of women is also exhibited in the way they access health related services. The compliance of women under men also affects their health seeking behavior considering the control of men over them. According to ZimRights [26] the prevalence of HIV and AIDs is high amongst women and this has been ascribed to the behavior of men outside their marriage of which they sleep with their wives infecting with the pandemic. Kataya [27] and Maliki [25] are of the view that the majority of men in Zimbabwe obstruct their wives from accessing health services which is very oppressive. Based on qualitative research, the majority of women encountered provided that men are restraining them from accessing contraceptives such as family planning pills. Considering the legalization of commercial sex workers in Zimbabwe, they are facing oppression from their male customers, it

is claimed that most of the men neglect the use of condoms during the sexual intercourse which is dangerous to women following the wide spread of diseases in the country for the past three decades [28]. The imposition of personal beliefs by men to their wives have led to quite a large number of women forced to make use of traditional medicine out of their consent especially in the rural areas as well as in many high density suburbs. Subsequently, women have low voices when it comes to advising their husbands to access health services, some men are not willing to visit clinics or hospitals for medical checkups yet the issue affects the wife for example HIV and AIDs which shows the existence of oppression in Zimbabwe.

Women are facing subjugation or tyranny from the larger society due to low access to employment and there are some jobs which they are being undermined of. In the African landmass women are undergoing a problem of being undermined in terms of the salary they earn and Zimbabwe is of no seclusion. Their job security and reliance is very low as equated to those of men because of the high prevalence of sexual harassment at the work from those in authority. Kingston [21] propounded that women are usually employed in the agricultural, mining, forestry and farming and most commonly in the domestic sectors where salaries are relatively low. Men in Zimbabwe habitually or often receive high wages and salaries because they are employed at competitive positions, however even at ordinary loci men are paid more than women which is a real exhibition of women oppression. An element of women oppression is also shown by the number of women who are employed as truck drivers in Zimbabwe. Maliki [25] harangued that women are criticized when they try to maneuver towards truck or even bus driving with a very simple or even more sarcastic reason that it's meant for men yet both have the same capabilities. Therefore, the oppression of women at work places and their hindrance to job activities such as truck driving in Zimbabwe has become a big problem on socio-economic development as women are regarded as the essence of the society (Table 3).

| Gender  | Employment percentage (%) |
|---------|---------------------------|
| Males   | 78%                       |
| Females | 22%                       |

Table 3: Comparison of employment amongst gender.

## Recommendations

The discrimination and oppression of women globally and particularly in Zimbabwe is becoming acute as women are facing hardships in their lives from a number factors. After having embarked on an exploration on gender discrimination and oppression in the country understudy which is Zimbabwe the author seeks to, at this juncture/interval, propose some recommendations or way forward claims to ensure the emancipation and just treatment of women in Zimbabwe which are as follows:

1. Educate women on their rights.
2. Upsurge efforts to equal employment opportunities for women and introduce policies which oblige the public and private sectors to ensure employment for women.
3. Upturn health access to women, embark on awareness campaigns and educate women on refuting oppression for their wellbeing.
4. Reform all discriminatory legislation in conforming to CEDAW and the Maputo protocol.

5. Guarantee the effectiveness of the implementation of criminalizing domestic violence against women and prohibit discriminatory customary practice.
6. Emancipate women for socio-economic development.
7. Introduce gender sensitive policies to achieve equality and transparency on land ownership.
8. Social workers should empower women in communities to circumvent discrimination and oppression.
9. Facilitate the role and participation of women in politics through active annexations.

## Conclusion

The foregoing paper has been cruising high with the aim power of exploring the key concepts which are the discrimination and oppression of women. The paper had a focused lens or apparition of exploration on one African county which is Zimbabwe. The paper was actually aimed at providing a scrutinized view of gender discrimination in Zimbabwe taking into account various forms of discriminations which are being exhibited in the country. The increase of discrimination and oppression cases in Zimbabwe prompted this study to be conducted for enhanced understanding of what is really transpiring in the country. The underplay of women in the traditional settings such as rural areas have worsened the situation of women as they are restrained from owning land under customary law observation. The absence of women in the land's highest offices points to the discrimination of women in Zimbabwe as women constitute only about 15% of the lower parliament house and 24% in the upper house which is the senate. It has been noted that the absence of a female representative as one of the president's deputy also shows a sign of the discrimination of women in the land.

Subsequently, the article conceded the influence of the customary law on participation of women in the traditional justice delivery system as it is only dominated by men. Educational discrimination over women was also noted shedding more light on how the educational sector discriminates females in general and how they're being excluded from top institution offices. The paper also gave a panoramic view on the oppression of women from the marriage institution where they are obliged to submit under their husbands always yet it is oppressive when it comes to domestic violence. Religion has been noted as one of the factors being attributed to the oppression of women drawing the biblical influence on women's participation in the church and even the nature of dressing they put on. The employment of women in Zimbabwe was detected as increasing the oppression of women accounting low salaries. The purpose of the article was to clearly understand gender discrimination and oppression in order to propose possible ways to resolve the problem hence the author went on to propose some claims to protect women from the chaotic lesions. The discrimination and oppression of women can only be extirpated or annihilated by women's advocacy on their rights and the nation's participation to achieve justice and equality.

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