



# Behind the ‘bruised male ego’ – negotiating women ‘pressures’ in the homes during COVID-19 lockdowns: Congolese and Zimbabwean men in focus

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and the experiences of lockdown measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus led to a range of negative impacts on the mental health of human societies globally. Our societies were characterized by deteriorating mental health, high levels of stress as well as a sharp rise in abusive cases. In most cases of abuse, men have been fingered as culprits behind it all given the eroding of their male ego. Faced with the reality of their inability to provide, most males were stressed up and vented out their frustration on those near them, who in most cases were the vulnerable women and children. While it is indubitably true that women and children have been the most affected groups due to the lockdowns, this has resulted in the neglect of men themselves. In as much as studies have confirmed the violent attitude developed by most men towards women and children in homes during COVID-19 lockdowns, this paper argues that men were also victims in a number of cases due to the pressures coming from women and children to keep providing something on the table despite being barred from attending to their informal/formal jobs due to the imposed COVID-19 restrictions. This paper takes cognizance of the neglect of voices sympathizing with males in the narratives, thus, we argue that behind the ‘bruised male ego’ there is found a woman, hence the woman needs to be talked to as well instead of just seeing her as a victim of abuse in all the cases. The discussion in this paper is largely based on desktop research. This paper sympathizes with the neglected male voices during COVID-19 lockdowns, invites men to voice out their struggles for the wellbeing of their mental health, and invites African society to rethink some of the attributes given to men that condemn them to suffering in the name of masculinity.

**Keywords:** Bruised male ego, COVID-19 lockdowns, gender-based violence, masculinity, women pressures.

## Introduction

COVID-19 as a pandemic affected the entire world in so many sectors. Areas mostly affected by the pandemic in countries included the socio-economic sphere, education, and health care



services. When the COVID-19 restrictions started being declared in the form of lockdowns, this was an unparalleled crisis in countries. In Africa, though COVID-19 had a lower death rate compared to other continents, important sectors were deeply affected leading to a number of negative effects not only in nations at large, but in family settings more precisely (Wamai et al., 2021). This is because the family has to continue surviving and in our African culture/s, men are viewed as the head of the family who is particularly responsible for financially providing for the family (Kiptot, 2015, pp. 11-21). This was reinforced by one of the male interviewees in Hlatywayo (2023)'s study who declared that: Most men are used to being the breadwinners of their families. They are the source of the financial stamina of the families. Loss of this status due to COVID-19 stripped men of that power. In order to reassert that lost power, most men tended to become violent. This resulted in GBV in the family. The men vent their anger on their wives and/or children resulting in very stressful circumstances for the wives and/or children and also the men (Hlatywayo, 2023: 1 ff).

When we talk of gender-based violence in homes, what comes to our mind is that women, girls and children are at the centre of this victimization. This is to a greater extent true, and this is attested by a number of publications (Ochab, 2024; Lindsey 2023; UN News 2023; Kurt & Akin, 2023; Alvarez and Alexis, 2014) and organizations or programs (Africa Exchange Project; Assisi Aid Project; The African Women's Development; The Africa Women's Development Fund; Akina Mama Wa Africa; Moremi Initiative for Women's Leadership in Africa, Women in successful Careers (Philanthropic Circuit, 2021) in support of women and girls that voice out their struggles in homes and in the society at large. COVID-19 lockdowns, many argue (Oxfam, 2021; Yenilmez, 2020, pp. 335-44; Magezi, 2020, pp. 54; Valencia et al., 2021 pp. 7; Ostadtaghizadeh, 2023), came to increase the existing and condemned gender-based violence in homes and once again, women and children were regarded as victims of men whose male ego was bruised by the pressures and challenges, they faced in the name of being the head or source of financial stability of the family. Nevertheless, paying close attention to the dire state in which the COVID-19 lockdowns left the economy of African countries and families, we feel that there is little sympathy and attention given to the male gender who were also affected, hence, victimized in one way or the other as demonstrated in this paper.

To support our argument, we begin by exploring how the female gender has almost been the centre-stage of all COVID-19 sympathies in current publications and the reasons for this scenario will be highlighted as we progress with the discussion. Further, to bolster our argument, we shall look at the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of most African countries. Given that the authors hail from Zimbabwe and the DR Congo, more attention shall be on these given countries due to familiarity. Focusing first on African countries will allow us to have a continental understanding of men in their homes and their struggle to support their families economically during COVID-19 restrictions. Lastly, we shall discuss how the 'pressures' behind the bruised male ego call for attention and not neglect so as to achieve healthy communities. With infectious diseases remaining a great threat to Africa's aspiration to achieve its 2063 developmental blueprint: "Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want" (Nkengasong & Tessema, 2020), we feel that men's mental health should not be sacrificed on the altar of the blanket perception of them as perpetrators of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), lest it remains a time bomb, their health should be of concern as much as we consider that of women.

## **Methodology**

This paper used desktop qualitative research known as a secondary research method that is based on existing data such as peer-reviewed papers, government or private sector databases and datasets, online libraries, academic journals, and meta-analyses (George, 2024). Knowing that desk research can be exploratory or explanatory (George & Merkus, 2023), this paper first



explores the literature about the impact of COVID-19 nexus gender-based violence (GBV), then explains why men ended up as culprits in GBV. It allowed us to understand that behind the male bruised ego, there was the pressure that men went through in their homes during the COVID-19 lockdown and thus, their voices should not be neglected. Data used in this article were mostly the most recent or up-to-date information, from peer-reviewed journals and a few from official governmental and private sector websites in order to maintain the credibility and reliability of the information. The used data was globally sourced from within the continent of Africa since the research focused on two African countries in particular. Data was collected and analyzed by first defining the objective of the paper, choosing reliable sources, gathering information, and cross-referencing the findings with other sources. Data was finally reviewed to ensure the information was relevant to the topic and met the objectives of the study.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This article uses the social conflict perspective of Karl Marx (1818-1833) as the theoretical approach to examine the impact of COVID-19 on men and its role in inciting violence in families. This theory states that society has constant conflict due to competition for power and finite resources. This perspective says that social order is defined by power and dominance rather than conformity and consensus. In the words of Stark (2007, pp18), "Those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless." Conflict theory is based on the idea that individuals and groups in society strive to maximize their own advantages. This paradigm highlights how society benefits a select few while the rest suffer, and how factors like class, colour, age, and gender contribute to inequality. In brief, social conflict theory is primarily concerned with the dominant social group's power over marginalized group interactions (Marevesa, 2023). Therefore, in this work, this theory examines how the social conditions (e.g. job loss) during COVID-19 affected men in their homes leading them to become frustrated, and how the same conditions led the people living under the same roof with men having increased their irritation levels. This way allows us to have a fairer perspective on gender-based violence in homes during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., both men and women were victims during this period in one way or another.

### **Effects of COVID-19 lockdowns on gender-based violence in homes**

The impact of COVID-19 lockdowns did not only leave many homes in economic despair, but it increased violence and abuse in the home mainly as a result of the 'bruised male ego.' For Hlatywayo (2023), most fathers who used to express their masculinity through providing for the family each time they returned home from work found their egos 'bruised' by the lockdowns. What pained them most was the sudden feeling of being reduced to 'ordinary' members of the household, no more *tigashire daddy* 'welcome daddy' from either the wife or kids as it became almost suicidal attempting to step out of the door due to the state-imposed curfews. The lockdowns increased a number of factors that affected violence being perpetrated against women and children as shown by several studies (Ostadtaghizadeh, 2023; Ajayi, 2020). Some of these factors included the decreased access to supportive services, decreased independence, household tensions, a decline in stress relieving activities, gender roles, increased economic burdens and food insecurity, etc. (Usta et al., 2021). Apondi et al., (2021, pp. 53-5) share the same view by emphasizing that in many households, the COVID-19 pandemic created what they identified as "a perfect storm" of social and personal anxiety, economic pressure, stress, social isolation, abusive partners or family members, and a rise in use of alcohol and drugs, resulting in an upsurge in domestic violence. In a study conducted in South Africa, Mahlangu (2021) discovered some of the common drives of violence against women and children at home as observed in several countries. These included food and basic provision, stress of being confined



together at home, failure to occupy children with entertaining activities (Mahlangu, 2021). Fairly speaking, these factors as agents of domestic violence and the pressures they brought were felt by both women and men. Men were not immune to the economic pressure, social isolation, stress, and the frustration of spending most time in homes with their families especially when the family is rightfully expecting them to provide for their households.

### **Effects of COVID-19 lockdowns on gender-based violence: the case of Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the country was not exempted from the socio-economic consequences orchestrated by the national lockdowns, and the restrictions of the movements of people and commodities. The effects of such justifiable measures were heavily felt by women living in rural areas whom, as clearly indicated by Ndhlovu and Tembo (2020) that in addition to their social reproduction and voluntarily functions to children, the ill, and the elderly, women were responsible for many other responsibilities including ensuring household food security through petty food production, purchase, and meal preparations. They further argued that the COVID-19 preventive measures including social distancing in Zimbabwe and the national lockdowns resulted in increased sexual and gender-based violence, sexual exploitation, forced or early marriages and pregnancies, increased sexual reproduction health risks, poor education outcomes for rural females in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu & Tembo, 2020). Participants who were interviewed confirmed that there was increased incidences of violence against females by men who had the husband's casquette, male partners, guardians, and neighbours. Furthermore, issues of child labour abuse emerged especially to girls to whom patriarchal and cultural norms assign water, firewood fetching, and cooking duties. Households started depending on children for water and collection of firewood as a way of avoiding police brutality since it was believed that children were less likely to be tormented by the security forces deployed by the Zimbabwean government to ensure the measures were followed by the population.

To make matters worse, due to a reduction of power generation, load-shedding in Zimbabwe sometimes lasted for up to 24 hours per day (Nyathi, 2019), thus, making the use of firewood a norm for both rural and urban families. The stress of the livelihood opportunities within households soon ended up into streets where some protests led by women emerged as a form of drawing the government attention to their plight knowing that about 90 % of women lived and survived through informal activities (Small, 2020). During lockdowns in Zimbabwe, a growth in the number of sexual and gender-based violence was also reported as families were forced to live together for most of the time during the day and at night. Women-based organizations had radio and television sessions where they indicated that the number of GBV cases increased by almost 75% in the first six weeks of the lockdown (Gumbo at al., 2020). In an interview with one women-based organization, Olivia Gumbo (2020) found out that the organization could not cope with the number of victims who wanted to access safe shelter services. The official stated that they were unable to accommodate all of the women that phoned their hotlines for safety (United Nations Country Team in Zimbabwe 2020). This was the case for both rural and urban women. Some women indicated that they lived in areas where they do not have access to electricity and where electricity does exist, it was thriftily used because of high charges. This meant that there was no access to radio or television and any form of entertainment for their husbands who were at home most of the time. Constant presence of husbands without entertainment meant more hours of sexual abuse for women and unwanted pregnancies (Gumbo, 2020). During this period, Zimbabwe saw the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) coming up with services and initiatives which could support women who suffered domestic violence and sexual abuse and to promote women rights (UNFPA/Zimbabwe 2020).



According to a report by the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP), more than half of the participants surveyed by the Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (ZIMSTAT) between March and July 2020 indicated that due to lack of resources to obtain food they had to skip meals (ZPP, 2021). One can simply imagine the effects this could cause in homes. Once again, women are considered to have suffered most during this period. This was demonstrated by Mabugu et al., (2023) whose study provided critical statistics to argue in favour of the above view. The study found out that Zimbabwe has two-thirds of the population living in rural areas, and the majority are women. Most household income comes from labour income, 59 % for rural households against 74 % for urban households while 29 % of total labour income goes to rural households, urban households receive more than 70% of all the incomes generated in the economy with 40.1 % of the total labour income coming from skilled male income. In rural households, the income from female workers (10 %) is about half that of male workers (19%).

### **Effects of COVID-19 lockdowns on gender-based violence: the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

In the DRC, for example, the increase in gender-based violence in homes was also reported. We continued to see the Nobel Peace Prize, Dr. Denis Mukwege, treating women and girls who were victims of violence especially in the Eastern region of the DRC where political conflicts keep ravaging the lives of people. Nigam (2020), reported that Congolese women while drawing lessons from the Ebola outbreak were focusing on preventing domestic violence and were organizing social media campaigns asking community leaders to speak online against abuse. Little, however, has been written about the effects of COVID-19 lockdowns on gender-based violence in DRC, but the lockdowns from a practical standpoint with empirical evidence brought serious economic challenges that led to insecurity in cities like Lubumbashi and Kinshasa. Still, we must note that domestic violence and abuses against children and women cannot be left out of the equation or the consequences which emerged through the lockdowns and the fact that men whose responsibility was to provide for the family, ensure its security in all aspects were deeply affected and victimized in different ways as it shall be discussed later in this paper.

The foregoing analysis has shown that a lot of articles have been written to expose the violence and abuse women and children (girls mostly) have suffered during lockdowns (Ostadtaghizadeh, 2023; Ajayi, 2020; Ndlovu & Tembo, 2020). These publications view COVID-19 lockdowns as an agent of gender-based violence in the homes whereby men as irritated husbands and fathers tended to vent their frustration on wives and children (Gumbo 2020). There does however, exist a dearth of research on what abuse looked like when it was perpetrated against men during the lockdowns. The financial constraints generated by the COVID-19 lockdowns had a significant role in men's frustration at home. Hence, the authors believe it is critical to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the economy of two African countries selected for this study: Zimbabwe and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to gain a better understanding of the problems that men faced at home which led to irritation and taking the form of violence.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on the economy of African countries**

When the coronavirus was declared a pandemic and scientifically renamed as the COVID-19, it hugely influenced the global economy. In Africa, though the spread of the virus was comparatively late and supposedly low, cases were shortly reported in African countries and the contested number of deaths started escalating (African Union, 2020). On a global scale, the pandemic did not result in lots of deaths in Africa, yet as Sia et al., (2023, pp. 417) argue, it had a severe impact on the economy of African countries as it brought huge economic and financial challenges on top of the criticized unstable economic status. Lou (2020), after analysing the impact of the coronavirus on the economy, stated that COVID-19 brought pressure to countries' economic



growth in a short period but its impact will be felt for a long period. Sia et al., (2023, pp. 421) presented interesting statistics of African countries that ended up with the highest debt ratio including Egypt, Kenya, South-Africa, and Zimbabwe. These countries are simply an example of the impact of COVID-19 on the economy. Similarly, Bwire et al., (2022) pointed out that all countries were affected regardless of the level of development and that these effects were more serious for the least developed countries, a condition in which most African countries found themselves.

The African Union (2020) wrote regarding the impact of the COVID-19 on the African economy, that the crisis caused by the pandemic was plunging the world economy to depths unknown since World War II, contributing to the anguishes of an economy that was already suffering. The press statement went further to explain that besides the well-known negative impact of the pandemic on human health, COVID-19 was disrupting the interconnected world economy through what is known as 'global value chains.' Which account for approximately half of global trade, unforeseen falls in commodity prices. Fiscal revenues, foreign exchange receipts, foreign financial flows, travel restrictions, declining tourism and hotels, frozen labour market, and others (African Union Commission, 2020). The AUC (2020) elucidated on why Africa was not exempted to the damaging effects of the pandemic. The main reason was that Africa is open to international trade and migration which happen in two forms: the endogenous and exogenous (AUC, 2020). The exogenous effects are classified as resulting from the direct trade links between affected partner continents like Asia, Europe and the USA; tourism; the deterioration in payments from African Diaspora; Foreign Direct Investment and Official Development Assistance; unlawful financial flows and domestic financial market tightening (AUC, 2020). The endogenous effects happened as a result of the speedy spread of the virus in many African countries leading to illness and mortality and a disruption of economic activities. This, argued by the African Union (AUC, 2020), potentially caused a decrease in domestic demand in tax revenue because of the loss of oil and commodity prices tied to an upsurge in public expenditure to safeguard human health and support economic activities (Africa Union Commission, 2020). Additionally, the African Economic Outlook, in its analysis declared that around 30 million people in Africa were relegated to extreme poverty in 2021 and about 22 million jobs were lost in the same year because of COVID-19 (African Development Bank & African Development Bank Group, 2023). All these men and women who lost their jobs were forced into lockdowns and some developed mental, psychological, and sociological problems which affected their interactions with those living near them.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on the economy of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)**

In the DR Congo, on top of the existing internal and external conflicts, economic and political problems, the COVID-19 pandemic amplified the complex living condition of the population (Fonds de Promotion de la Microfinance 2023). The pandemic reduced the livelihoods and strongly disrupted local food markets leading to a decrease in the health status of vulnerable populace (Reliefweb, 2022; Batana et al., 2021). In a research conducted by Izabayo & Gabrielova (2022), it was stated that COVID-19 destroyed around 305 million full-time jobs according to the International Labor Organization (ILO). Unemployment affected many people and men in particular as breadwinners. The USAID organized food distributions for vulnerable people in the DRC (US Agency for International Development, 2021). The region of Shabunda, for instance, tried to overcome this situation by importing food from Bukavu city and North Kivu province, but roads were quickly blocked by the government to prevent the spread of the virus, and this reduced the people's access to food. Consequently, violence increased in this area and people were further afraid to work alone in the fields or farms (Izabayo & Gabrielova, 2022). All this caused frustration among people whose irritation could only be deposed in homes/families.



Batana et al., (2021) conducted impressive research exploring the effects of COVID-19 in the DR Congo through household high-frequency phone surveys in Kinshasa, Kasai, and the Eastern part of the country including cities such as Boma, Bunia, Goma, and Lubero. It was discovered that the COVID-19 pandemic had hostile social and economic effects including the declined labour and non-labour income, the resulting harmful coping strategies, the disruptions in commodities and services markets, health and education (Batana et al., 2021). In the capital city, nearly half of the household heads reported not having work because of the pandemic restrictions and more than 10 % of them lost their jobs by June 2020 (Fonds de Promotion de la Microfinance, 2023). Even the proportion of households receiving payments in Kinshasa and East DRC declined exponentially. More so, the disruption of food and services markets led to inflation with a 2020 cumulative inflation rate of roughly 16% against 4.6% for the previous year leading to a deterioration of the well-being of families and plunging people in poverty (CIFOR-ICRAF, 2024). The same research indicated that the lower income and limited access to markets led to an increase in food insecurity and hunger (Batana et al., 2021). Almost 85% of Kinshasa households reduced food consumption and severe food insecurity remained high in East DRC with a prevalence of 70% at the beginning of 2021 (Batana et al., 2021). Males, as a result of being traditionally associated as providers for their families, were often under constant pressure to provide food for their families. The same would apply to females who assumed the role of a father in female-headed households.

### **Impact of COVID-19 on the economy of the Republic of Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the World Bank (The World Bank's Economic Analysis, 2021) issued an update on the Zimbabwean economy in June 2021. Reading the first statement from the update was shocking. It claimed that the number of extreme poor citizens rose to 7.9 million in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic (The World Bank's Economic Analysis, 2021). The Zimbabwe Economic Update, Overcoming Economic Challenges, Natural Disasters, and the Pandemic: Social and Economic Impacts, cited surveys conducted in 2020 showed that approximately 500 000 Zimbabwean households had at least one member who lost his/her job whether formal or informal. This situation degenerated the plight of the existing poor. Food insecurity increased pushing the poor population seeking for food aid in June 2020. The report also indicated other factors such as the strained public resources causing severe challenges to service delivery health, education, and social protection (World Bank Group, 2021). Another Report by the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP, 2021) on the Impact of COVID-19 on Socio-Economic Rights in Zimbabwe reported that measures which were not fully implemented except for lockdowns, did not successfully mitigate the impact of the pandemic on socio-economic livelihoods and well-being of many people. COVID-19 pandemic affected millions of people dependent on the informal economy and contract and casual workers in the formal sectors (ZPP, 2021). Closure of informal economy businesses, marketplaces and vending sites deprived the population of their sources of livelihoods and incomes, with men being most affected as they were not used to staying at home, doing almost nothing. Men who are not formally employed in Zimbabwe do not just sit idle but are better known for *kukiya-kiya* or *kungwavha-ngwavha*, a slang used by the youths in particular referring to informal hustling (Sibanda & Humbe, 2022) and when this was banned as well, it was tough for the people who were working in this informal sector.

Also, vendors and small-scale food producers reported disruptions in the supply chains, low sales, high rates of produce leftovers which threatened profits, and a decrease in the number of customers visiting informal markets (Zimbabwe Peace Project, 2021). Reported high job losses in retail and other service sectors, and the reduction of wages for most contract and casual workers were not exempted (World Bank Group, 2021). Food consumption was equally affected



and nutrition security as households lost incomes, and food prices exacerbated because of the inflationary shocks brought by the pandemic during lockdowns which cruelly undermined the right to food and food security (ZPP, 2021).

### **Negotiating women ‘pressures’ in the homes during COVID-19 lockdowns: Congolese and Zimbabwean men in focus**

Based on the above-discussed state of affairs which prevailed in most African countries, and in particular, Zimbabwe and the DR Congo following the onset of the COVID-19 virus on African soil, one can at least begin to appreciate and understand the context in which the ‘bruised male ego’ is coming from. While we do not seek to legitimize their violent actions nor to put aside the evidence showing the victimization of women during the COVID-19 pandemic, a frank assessment of the circumstances around them leads us to acknowledge their victimization as well in some instances during the same period. They too battled with mental health in inconspicuous ways and this needs to be acknowledged to attain healthy communities. The following section is a look at how men were victims also of gendered violence in various unnoticeable ways.

#### **Behind the ‘bruised male ego’**

The increase in gender-based violence in homes during COVID-19 lockdowns both in Zimbabwe and the DRC emerged from several factors. Most of those factors are highlighted in the previous discussions. Discarding those factors or looking at them from one single side has led so many people to conclude that women and children were the only groups of people who were affected by the pandemic lockdowns imposed in these countries. This is unbalanced in the sense that while it is globally attested by studies (Wale, 2024; Ezeugwu & Ojedokun, 2020; Etienne, 2019) that men, particularly in Africa, culturally and religiously enjoy the privilege of being the heads of their households. The so-called privilege comes with a lot of responsibilities. Failure to live up to the expectations not only affects people who are supposed to be taken care of but mostly those responsible for protecting and caring for their families. In this regard, it is without doubt that during COVID-19 lockdowns, men lost their male ego because they could no longer take care of their families as expected. Studies (United Nations University, 2023; Postel et al., 2021; Yu, 2024; Chronic Poverty Advisory Network 2022) have shown that people lost their jobs and a decline in incomes was a painful pill to swallow. The male ego was bruised since, in most cases, men could not provide sufficient support to their family. In African culture(s), one of the attributes of a man is that person who is financially steady or at least can provide sufficient economic support to their families. Now, finding themselves relegated into the corner of the house and being unable to care for their families could cause more stress, frustration and anger. If one were to associate this experience of no more *tigashire* daddy (welcome daddy) with environs whereby males find themselves at the receiving end of abuse then one can really understand the gravity of bruises experienced by some men during the lockdowns.

The existence of male abuse in marriages is an indubitable fact to reckon with in the history of human societies (Idriss, 2021; Perryman & Appleton, 2016);. Abuse by definition, knows no gender, it is a weapon that can be used by either the man or woman in marriage. It is unfortunate, however, that almost across all societies, men are often expected to silently endure abuse at the hands of their wives, otherwise it would be interpreted as weakness if they try to speak up. A study done in the United Kingdom (UK) by Westmarland et al. (2021) shows that some men experienced various types of violence from their sexual partners and this ranged from physical, sexual, financial, coercive control to emotional violence during the COVID-19 lockdown periods. The physical forms of abuse included being scratched, punched in the face, pushed and shoved down stairs, kicked in the groin, grabbed by the throat, being strangled and being threatened with knives (Westmarland et al., 2021). Financially, the study reveals a male victim who was told he





was useless and worthless by his partner because she felt he was not earning as much money as others after a downturn in his job caused by Covid-19. As a result of such ridicule and being belittled over their failure to adequately support the family financially, some men felt like 'sacks of rubbish.' What happened to men in the UK can justifiably be assumed to have taken place anywhere there are men, including Zimbabwe and DR Congo, it is just that men do not speak up and that the media and academic platforms are inundated by voices raising alarm of the escalating violence against women alone during the given period. It is a fact that the pandemic left some males more economically trapped than ever and this depravity was weaponized by their spouses to inflict pain on their character and mental health. One can hardly be wrong to assume that the ravaging effects of the pandemic as well as the new experience of lockdown measures to curtail COVID-19 must have worsened these mental health problems in some cases, leaving a number of men more stressed, anxious and even more isolated. As this violence ravaged our communities, it is unfortunate that we barely heard of programmes which were put in place to support men in their dealing of the psychological and emotional trauma and even if such programs existed, were they supported like we saw with programs designed to support women and children? The answer is NO!

Consequently, most men failed to cope with their stress and frustration, some men found alcohol as their remedy, some others became aggressive towards those next to them, leading up to abusive behaviours in homes (Goredema & Muwanzi, 2023; Marevesa, 2023) and other issues already discussed in this paper. One interesting area of domestic violence, according to several research (Chavula et al., 2023; Uzobo & Ayinmoro, 2023; Kwinana and Adeniyi, 2023; Randa et al., 2023), was sexuality. In this aspect, women are portrayed as victims who were sexually abused and as one female respondent in Gumbo's study in Zimbabwe said that since her husband had all the time in the world to be indoors due to lockdowns, he forced her into sexual activities and if she tried to refuse, she would have been beaten up (Gumbo, 2020, pp. 797-814).

However, we can equally argue that men could also be victims of sexual harassment in homes because they spent a lot time with their wives. As further testified in the study by Westmarland et al. (2021:15), one male caller complained: "Sometimes I can feel down and she wants sex and if she doesn't get it the words that come out of her mouth are just vile." Others complained that despite initially having said no to sex, they woke up only to find their spouses in their pants putting the dick in their mouth (Westmarland et al., 2021). In Africa, it is almost a crime and inconceivable to see a man coming out that he was sexually harassed. African men feel embarrassed, ashamed and often are reluctant to share such experiences with other men since this is stereotypically perceived as highly emasculating (Anugwom, 2024; Muiruri, 2023). There appears an affirmation that almost the world over, influential ideas about masculinity in society such as the pressure to be invulnerable, unemotional, never to show weakness and other masculine traits, often place a substantial barrier on coming forward for abused men (Huntley et al., 2010). We can deduce from this and say that during lockdowns, some Zimbabwean and DR Congolese men were also victims but could not voice out their struggles in family private matters.

A social experiment was conducted by some certain Youtubers (Tuko 2017; [https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/2fufft9/very\\_interesting\\_social\\_experiment\\_on\\_domestic/?rdt=61655](https://www.reddit.com/r/videos/comments/2fufft9/very_interesting_social_experiment_on_domestic/?rdt=61655)), the experiment was divided into two scenes, the first one involved a man harassing a lady publicly, the reaction from the public was impressive to see that people wanted to beat the man and call the police. In the second scene, however, the role was reversed and it was the lady who was holding the man in his clothes and harassing him, without any surprise no one intervened to rescue the man, in fact, people started laughing. This is the reality of our society that whenever a female says something, it is more likely to be trusted and believed, thus pushing



men to live with their problems even when they are the victims because they may instead end up being considered as perpetrators of violence. Hence, even during lockdowns, it is more likely that men were also victims but they could not speak out because our society wants to see men who are bold, strong, and who cannot complain when they are victims especially when women are in the picture.

## Conclusion

The COVID-19 lockdowns affected all groups of people in our society. In households, they contributed to food insecurity, sexual reproduction, health risks, domestic violence, poverty, and so on with women and children emerging as the most affected victims. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that men were also to an extent victims in many cases, but their voices have not been heard. The above argument is not a rejection to the fact that women, girls, and children were the most affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns, rather it is an invitation to acknowledge that we have not heard from the men's side regarding what they went through during this period and how they coped with all the pressures faced on a daily basis. There was a range of negative impacts of COVID-19 on men's lives which included financial issues, being 'locked down' with someone who was causing them harm or simply the claustrophobia of being with someone 'bruising' them for weeks and not knowing when it would end. A number of men in abusive households felt completely stuck and powerless as they could not manage to escape anywhere. Therefore, behind the bruised male ego, we should reckon that men were also victims in homes and we call all to sympathize with the neglected male voices during the COVID-19 lockdowns as well as all others adversely affected.

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