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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN COMBATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CHIPOKA VILLAGE, MANGOCHI MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of women's economic empowerment (WEE) in combating gender-based violence (GBV) among women in Chipoka Village, Mangochi District Malawi. Grounded in feminist theories of agency and empowerment, the research explores how increased income independence, job access, and economic resources influence women's vulnerability to violence. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that economic empowerment has the potential to enhance women's independence and bargaining power within households, thereby reducing exposure to violence. However the also study highlights limitations, include persistent patriarchal norms and risk backlash violence. The study contribute to academic discourse and provide evidence based recommendations for policymakers, development practitioners and social work professionals.

KEYWORDS: Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), Gender-Based Violence (GBV), Feminist Theory, Chipoka Village, Malawi, Rural Development, Social Work, Malawi.

INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence remains a pervasive issue globally, with significant consequences for women's health, social relationships, and economic well-being. In Malawi, approximately one in five women aged 15–49 experiences physical or sexual violence. Women's economic empowerment has emerged as a potential strategy to reduce GBV by enhancing autonomy,

decision-making power, and access to resources. This study assesses the relationship between WEE and GBV in Chipoka Village, Mangochi.

Background of the Study

Malawi faces persistent challenges in addressing GBV despite implementing policies such as the National Gender Policy (2015) and the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy (2018). In Mangochi District, 42% of girls marry before age 18, and 25.8% of women are illiterate, limiting economic opportunities. These conditions necessitate examining how WEE can reduce GBV vulnerabilities.

Historical Background

Globally, feminist movements have long emphasized economic empowerment as a pathway to gender equality. In Malawi, historical patriarchal norms and limited access to education have perpetuated women's economic dependence, reinforcing GBV. Recent initiatives by NGOs and government programs aim to challenge these structures, but empirical evidence on their effectiveness remains limited.

General Objective of the Study

To assess the impact of women's economic empowerment on reducing gender-based violence among women in Chipoka Village, Mangochi.

Specific Objectives

To examine the relationship between women's economic empowerment and experiences of GBV.

To identify factors that facilitate or hinder the effectiveness of WEE programs in reducing GBV.

To assess community perceptions of empowered women and GBV in rural settings.

Literature Review

Existing literature highlights empowerment as the expansion of individuals' ability to make strategic life choices (Kabeer, 1999). Economic empowerment reduces dependency and vulnerability to violence (Golla et al., 2011). UN Women (2017) emphasizes equal access to education, employment, and resources as critical to WEE. However, some studies caution that empowerment may initially increase risks of violence as traditional norms are challenged.

Theoretical Review

Feminist theory provides the framework for this study, emphasizing that gender is a central organizing principle in society. It critiques patriarchal structures that perpetuate inequality and violence, advocating for empowerment as a transformative tool.

Research Methodology

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design was adopted, using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture diverse experiences. Non-probability sampling ensured representation from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

Study Population

Women in Chipoka Village, Mangochi, from varied age groups and economic statuses.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, supported by pilot studies to refine instruments.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Response Rate

Table 1. Response rate of participants.

Description	Number	Percentage
Targeted sample	30	100%
Actual respondents'	29	98%
Non responses	1	2%

The study achieved a high response rate, with most participants actively engaging in discussions.

Demographic Data of the Respondents

Table 2, Age Range of Respondents.

Age Range	Frequency	percentage
10 -20	6	23%
21- 29	9	30%
30-45	15	47%
TOTAL	30	100%

Respondents included women aged 18–49, with varying levels of education and economic activity.

An overwhelming 80% majority of the respondents perceived women economic empowerment as an effective strategy for mitigating gender based violence. The respondents explained that access the income reduced financial dependence on the partners, which help them to negotiate household needs more effectively and resist economic control. Many women reported that contributing to the household increase respect and recognition within families. However few individuals or respondents expressed concern that empowerment occasionally led to tension or conflict within household more especially those households where traditionally gender role remains deeply entrenched. This findings highlights the complexity of empowerment process in patriarchal rural contexts.

Perceived influence of women economic empowerment on Gender Based Violence

Table 3,

perception	Frequency	percentage
Agree/strong	24	80%
Neutral	4	13%
Disagree	2	7%
Total	30	100%

Reported from pf gender based Violence Before and After Economic Empowerment

Table 4,

Type of GBV	Before WEE	After WEE
Physical Violence	12	5
Emotional /psychological Violence	5	2
Economic Violence	18	6
Sexual Violence	15	7

The table above shows a noticeable reduction in reported cases of gender based violence following women participation in economic activities. The figure reflect aggregated patterns derived from the qualitative interviews and focus group discussions, summarizing report experience before and after women's engagement in income generating activities. Economic activities shows the most relevant reduction, suggesting financial independence directly reduce men's control over household resources. Physical and emotional abuse also decline as women felt more empowered to voice concerns and assert their right. Although sexual violence decrease more modestly, respondents noted economic independence improve the ability to refuse unwanted sexual advances. This findings confirm that women economic empowerment contributes to reducing or combating multiple forms of GBV, particular those linked to dependency and power imbalance.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study demonstrate that Women's economic empowerment has significant potential to reduce GBV by enhancing autonomy, confidence and decision-making power within the households and communities. Respondants across age groups consistently highlighted that access to income generating opportunities and microfinance initiatives strengthened women bargaining power and reduced dependence on abusive partners. At the same time , the study revealed that empowerment effort can provoke resistance and backlash in contexts where patriarchal norms remains deeply entrenched, underscoring the importance of protective mechanics and community sensitizations.

Building on these insight the recommendations emphasize that, empowerment alone is insufficient to achieve lasting change; comprehensive approaches combining economic support with social and cultural interventions are necessary to challenge harmful gender norms, engage men community leaders and foster collective responsibility for gender equality. By combining financial independence with broader social transformation, empowerment programs can become more sustainable and effective in reducing GBV. This study contributes to policy development and community awareness in Malawi by improving evidence that women economic empowerment, when strategically implemented, can serve as a transformative tool in reducing gender based violence. This also calls for policymakers, social workers professionals and practitioners to adopt holistic strategies that not only expanded women economic opportunities but also reshape culture altitude, thereby advancing both fairness and sustainable rural development.

SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen microfinance and entrepreneurship initiatives to enhance women's economic independence, while ensuring the empowerment programs are integrated into national gender based violence reduction strategies.

Integrate WEE programs into national GBV reduction strategies. However to address the risk of the backlash, interventions must go beyond economic support. At household level programs should actively engage men and boys in awareness campaigns and training sessions that promote share responsibility for household decision making and challenge harmful notions of traditional manhood. This inclusive approach reduce the like hood of male resistance and fosters healthier relationships.

Promote community education to challenge harmful gender norms and ensure protective mechanisms within empowerment programs to mitigate risks of backlash violence and also the policymakers and practitioners should adopt a holistic multi sectoral approach that combines economic empowerment with education, legal reforms and social norms transformation. Continuous monitoring and evaluation of empowerment initiatives will help assess long term or sustain the impact on GBV reduction and ensuring that interventions remains responsive to the needs of the rural women.

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