

## The Determinants of Gender Inequality in Bindura Rural Area of Zimbabwe: Search for Lasting Solutions

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**Abstract:** The study was undertaken on the basis of mixed methods research approach using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. Stratified sampling was used to select 20 participants and the available sampling technique was used to select eight participants who served as key informants to cater for both quantitative and qualitative research sampling techniques. Closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended interviews were used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative research data were presented and analysed using tables, while qualitative data were presented and analysed narratively using thematic analysis. The determinants of gender inequality in Bindura rural area of Zimbabwe included culture, religion, patrilineal and matrilineal societies, expected societal gender roles based on sex, professions and decision making roles. The researcher concluded that culture oppresses women since it tends to favour men, thereby, creating gender inequalities. Another conclusion from the study was that patriarchal and matriarchal societies dictate situation specific gender inequalities that obtain in Bindura rural area. A third conclusion from the study was that most expected societal gender roles based on sex, professions and decision making roles tend to discriminate men and women in Bindura rural area. The researcher recommends the need for the society to treat men and women equally since Bindura rural area is part of an egalitarian Zimbabwean society. A second recommendation from the study is that the Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education, Labour and Social Welfare, and Gender and Women Empowerment among other government departments need to come up with programmes to inform Zimbabweans about issues of gender equality. There is also need for more research in the area of gender equality needs to spread to other parts of Zimbabwe.

**Keywords:** Gender, gender inequality, gender equality, determinants.

### INTRODUCTION

The determinants of gender inequality obtain differently in different situations. They tend to originate from varied perspectives, periods and backgrounds.

#### Perspectives on gender inequality

According to functionalists, husbands perform instrumental tasks of economic support and decision making, and wives assume expressive tasks of providing affection and emotional support for the family. Conflict analysts suggest that the gendered division of labour within families and the workplace result from patriarchal domination (male control and dominance over women and resources). Although feminist perspectives vary in their analysis of women's subordination, they all advocate social change to eradicate gender inequality [1]. Agricultural and rural development programmes are aimed almost entirely at men often as heads of households. This has led to land holdings to be owned by men which provide the

criteria for credit and other assistance through acting as title deeds [2].

#### Background to gender inequality in Zimbabwe

Gender inequality in Zimbabwe can be traced its roots to a number of issues. The following section highlights key issues which are viewed as roots of gender inequality by a number of authors.

#### Pre-colonial era

Bryson [3] cites Rousseau, the greatest philosopher, who argued that men's and women's nature and abilities were not the same. He further maintained that these biological differences defined their roles in society with men becoming citizens and women wives and mothers. Such a situation has prevailed in Zimbabwe until 1970s, when only men were required to have National Identity Cards. Rousseau further posits that the education of boys and girls must recognize natural differences in ability and inclination. Again the Zimbabwean education system

seemed to subscribe to this directly or indirectly. Boy children used to be accorded more educational opportunities and the curriculum offered was sex-inclined, that is, it was defined as that for males and the other for females. Wollstonecraft in Bryson [3] however, disagreed with Rousseau asserting that weakness, vanity and frivolity were not the natural attributes of women but that they were social constructs which distorted rather than reflected women's true ability. In a similar vein, Macualay and Von Hippel of England and Germany respectively quoted in Bryson [3] insisted that the differences between men and women were a result of education and environment, and not of nature. This appears to mean that men and women are different because they are brought up differently and are exposed to different educational opportunities.

### **Biological background**

Haralambos [4] argues that the major cause of women oppression is noted in the biological differences. Men and women were created differently hence not equally privileged. Because women bear children, they depend on men for support. This produces unequal power relationships and "power psychology" which is the basis for all future stratification systems. Men derive pleasure from their power over women.

Davison [5] challenged Firestone and Cooper [6] view that women's biological makeup should actually make them superior to men. Women's bodies have special functions which men's bodies do not; the harbouring, nurturing and bearing of a child. This appears to be a natural challenge to men who according to Delphy [7] feel threatened by this condition of "naturalising".

According to Dorsey [8], women are weak socio-economically. Socially due to the socialisation process, women succumb to difficult and unfair practices. They are submissive; they want to please men. Chigudu [9] states that women are easily manipulated because they feel inferior due to history, religion, culture physiology, law, political systems, institutions, social attitudes and economic conditions. The implications of Chigudu [9] statement are that the causes of women oppression are a matrix of deep-rooted multi-dimensional factors. Usually, this multi-dimensional cause for women inferiority manifests itself in the form of economic inferiority. Kabira and Wasamba [10] substantiate the above idea by means of production at national level and family circles which is normally dominated by men.

Due to their inferior status, women are often objects of ridicule as illustrated by the Ghanaian idiom, which goes "Not all men are stupid, some are unmarried". The implications of the above idiom is that getting attached to a women is a sign of stupidity in a

man since women are perceived as burdensome to a men's life due to their dependency syndrome.

### **Biblical version background**

Genesis 1verses 21-25 asserts that God created a man before a woman and a woman is a derivative of a man's body. Thus, it becomes logical for a man to feel superior over a woman. This version is quite popular with most societies; even men who may be non-believers of the Bible still believe in this version and support it. Nzimande [11] in the Southern African Feminist Review (SAFERE) described the Bible as an instrument used by men to oppress women whilst the women find solace in it to remain submissive.

### **The home environment and subordinates' attitudes**

In most homes in a patriarchal state like Zimbabwe, roles are clearly defined as those for boys and men and others for girls and women [12, 13]. Roles that require more physical power like lifting heavy goods, as well as those that require decision-making or more complex reasoning, are spared for men. However, policies appear to have made great strides in changing this scenario at workplaces. Women are being accorded decision making powers at work. Unfortunately homes seem to have maintained gender-based role-playing. Zimunya [13] propounds that male chauvinists believe that women who decide to take up top jobs are bringing a curse upon themselves. Zimunya [13] posits that this is because the woman will still be expected to "...combine the demands of her profession with what previously was once a full time position as the backbone of the family and husband." In other words, women should be prepared to suffer the consequences of meeting the demands of the home and work place.

One may wonder if the males in Zimbabwean society are ready to share these household responsibilities with women in order to enable women to pursue their leadership role more vigorously. In fact, in instances where men are not prepared to change along those lines, most women would dare not pursue their advancement goals for, "...fear of breaking valued relations with family kin," [14]. Perhaps both men and women need to appreciate that, the role of women in society cannot change without men's roles changing also.

### **Culture**

Millings [2], attributes women's inferiority and oppression to the advent of the class society as well as traditional attitude and practices. In the case of Zimbabwe, men pay lobola hence women are considered as private property. The woman remains subservient to men who choose whether to be in polygamous or monogamous marriages. Children belong to the men since Zimbabwe is a patriarchal society. They take the father's name and totem. Inheritance is another traditional practice which subjects women to a state of worthlessness. It is

assumed that all the property belongs to the man even if the woman is lucky to be working. The husband's relatives take everything including the woman when the husband dies. Thus, even professionally, the Zimbabwean media industry may fail to be sensitive to the fact that men are actually domineering leadership posts since male domination is normal traditionally. Further evidence on culture was advanced by, Blanchfield the former president of CZI during a conference on women in power as quoted by Daily News [19], indicated that male colleagues enjoy belittling women by calling them "babe", "sweetie" which she felt was so demeaning.

**Statement of the Problem**

The determinant of gender inequality very according to the kind of society one dwells in, that is, matrilineal or matrilineal society. The purpose of the study was to uncover the determinants of gender inequality in Bindura rural area of Zimbabwe with a view to search for lasting solutions.

**METHODS AND MATERIALS**

The study was undertaken on the basis of mixed methods research approach using an explanatory sequential mixed methods design. The explanatory sequential mixed methods design involves data collection using the quantitative research methods first before embarking on qualitative data generation [15]. The use of explanatory sequential mixed methods design in this study ensured that explanatory sequential mixed methods design both quantitative and qualitative research data strengthened each other in search of more academically convincing research findings. Stratified

sampling was used to select 20 participants and the available sampling technique was used to select eight participants who served as key informants to cater for both quantitative and qualitative research sampling techniques. The research data was first collected quantitatively between 01 September 2017 and 15 September 2017. Qualitative data were later generated between 01 October 2017 and 10 November 2017. The quantitative data collection method was on the basis of a structured questionnaire which had two sections for demographic data and the other one for the actual research data. The questionnaire sought to provide definite participants' data that fitted within set research objective questions [16]. The qualitative research data were generated using an open-ended questionnaire which also had two sections, that is, one for participants' demographic data and the other one for actual research data. The interview guide enabled the researcher to obtain free response narrative and descriptive data from the participants [17]. Quantitative research data were presented and analysed using tables, while qualitative data were presented and analysed narratively using thematic analysis. The discussion and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data was done concurrently in order to provide readers with a vivid picture of the research outputs [18].

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Response rate of subjects**

Table 1 below shows the response rate of the subjects to the questionnaires and the interview. There was a 100% response rate of the subjects.

**Table-1: Response rate of subjects (N=20)**

Tool	Sample size	Answered	Percentage
Questionnaire guide	20	20	100%
Interview guide	8	8	100%

**Demographic data**

The respondents were twenty women who are members of the Bindura Rural area and seven women were the key informants who responded to the interviews.

**Distribution of respondents by age**

The respondents were requested to state their age ranges and as shown by table 4.1 below, 15% of the respondents were under 21-30 range whilst 50 % fell under 31-40, 35% were found on 41+ range and no respondents were under 15-20 range. The information revealed that more women are under the 31-40 which had the highest percentage.

**Table-2: Distribution of respondents by age (N=20)**

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
15 – 20	0	0%
21 – 30	3	15%
31 – 40	10	50%
41+	7	35%
Total	20	100%

The respondents were requested to state their age ranges and as shown by table one above, 15% of the respondents were under 21-30 range whilst 50 % fell under 31-40, 35% were found on 41+ range and no

respondent were on under 15-20 range. The information revealed that more women are under the 31-40 which had the highest percentage.

**Distribution of respondents by marital status**

**Table-3: Distribution of respondents by marital status (N=20)**

Marital status	Number of women	Percentage
Married	15	75%
Widowed	4	20%
Single	1	5%
Total	20	100%

From the study’s findings in Table 3 above, 75% of the respondents were married women. Twenty

percent (20%) were widows and 5% of the respondents which was one woman who was single.

**Distribution of respondents by educational levels**

**Table-5: Distribution of respondents by educational levels**

Level of education	Number of women	Percentage
Primary level	7	35%
Secondary level	13	65%
Tertiary	0	0%
Total	20	100%

The highest level of education attained by respondents was envisaged in the questionnaires. The majority of the women attended secondary education and primary education. Thirty five percent (35%)

attended primary education whilst 65% attended secondary education, as illustrated by Table 4.

**The Actual Research Findings  
Determinants of gender inequality**

**Table-6: Distribution of participants’ perceptions on determinants of gender inequality (N=20)**

Determinant	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Culture	20	100
Religion	20	100
Patrilineal society	14	70
Matrilineal society	11	55
Expected societal gender roles based on sex	17	85
Professions	10	50
Decision making roles	16	80

The respondents in Table 6 were asked whether they know what gender inequality and its determinants in Zimbabwe. The majority of the respondents responding to the quantitative data questions on the questionnaire cited determinants of gender inequality as; culture (100%), religion (100%), expected societal gender roles based on sex (84%), decision making roles (80%), patrilineal society (70%), matrilineal society (55%), and professions (50%).

The qualitative component of the study has the following participants’ perceptions on the determinants of gender inequality in Bindura rural area:

*Our culture expects men to be above women in every respect (P1)*

Similarly, other five participants advanced the following views in the following manner:

*‘Women remain submissive and subservient to men in our society. This is our tradition we can never run away from. (P2)’*

*Remember that our society we live in is largely a patriarchy. This means that it is a male dominated society. Therefore, you cannot expect to have gender equity obtaining in such a society (P3).*

*Men are always superior to women in all echelons of society. Good examples are in traditional and apostolic churches which do not expect unmarried women to assume leadership positions, yet their unmarried male counterparts undertake such responsibilities without question (P4).*

*The issue of leadership positions in our area a preserve for men. This is one of the most dominant determinants of gender inequality here in Bindura (P5).*

*Women are perceived as second class citizens in a rural set up like ours. They look up to men for everything. Society expects women to be obedient to their husbands all the time, yet husbands are never expected to be obedient to their wives (P6).*

With regards to religion as a determinant of gender inequality in Bindura rural area, participants remarked:

*At our churches, women are never expected to be priests or bishops, even though they may be holders of better academic and professional qualifications for priesthood or bishophood than their male counterparts. In that way, women remain an oppressed and suppressed lot (P2).*

*Sometimes girls are coerced to marry older men in the apostolic churches against their will, all under the guise of religion (P5).*

*Some lustful men hide behind spiritual dreams to marry young girls in the churches. I suspect that they falsely claim that the Holy Spirit has revealed that Mr so and so is supposed to turn girl so and so into a spouse forthwith. Surprisingly, no female prophets or congregants dream about marrying boys or men in the church (P3).*

*My heart bleeds when I think about girls and women who are sexually molested and raped in churches by clergy men. Most of these cases go unreported. In that regard, female church congregants suffer in silence. Some of them have their bright future not only destroyed, but shattered (P1).*

With respect to the patrilineal society as a source of gender inequalities in Bindura rural area, here are some of the participants' expectations:

*Men are in charge of everything in the nuclear and extended families. Women are subordinate to men (P8)*

*It will be an anomaly to find out that women take a lead in families that are supposed to be headed by men. People will be quick to point out that the men are hypnotized (P7).*

*Men marry women. Therefore, they are supposed to control their women. In some homesteads, women are viewed as assets number one (P6).*

In line with the existence of a matrilineal society in Bindura rural area, some informants made the following indications:

*In Bindura, we have some people of Chewa and Chikunda origin from Malawi and Zambia. Their societies are matrilineal in nature. Women are in total control of whatever obtains in such societies (P5).*

*Women can have multiple sexual relationships, while men will be confined to one woman. The is danger that a man can risk looking after children belonging to other men (P4)*

With reference to expected societal roles based on sex, the following informants' observations suffice:

*In some families, men are expected to look after the families, yet the breadwinners would the women (P3).*

*Women are expected to cook, wash clothes, bath children and even wash nappies while the men will be relaxing reading a newspaper or sleeping under a shade, even though both the man and woman will be professional people (P6).*

*Men are looked up to the undertaking of heavy duties such as ploughing, building, chopping wood, roofing huts and houses, even though some women might be better performers than men in executing such roles (P5).*

*Some men and women have a tendency of folding their arms only to watch their otherwise incapable and challenged spouses undertaking roles that they themselves could do better, all in the name of trying to maintain expected societal roles based on sex (P7).*

The issue of professions as a determinant of gender inequality in Bindura rural area had informants giving their own piece of mind in this way:

*People here have a strong feeling that drivers of public transport and other heavy vehicles belong to a profession meant for men (P1).*

*Some people in Bindura rural area have a perception that women make better nurses than men. They even think that in the maternity ward, female nurses attend to pregnant women much better than what male nurses would do (P2).*

*Builders and miners are professions that belong to men, period (P8).*

The final area that informants viewed as a determinant of gender inequality in Bindura was decision making. They aired the following sentiments:

*In some homes, men are in charge of making decisions, while in others, the converse is true (P7).*

*In some families, men even boys are given a higher status to such an extent that they are referred to as 'fathers' to their young and elder sisters, as well as to their aunts, that is, their fathers' sisters. In that way, indecisive boys are expected to make decisions or contribute to the making of key decisions that affect not only families, but societies (P3).*

*In other families where women are in control, women are responsible for making key decisions. They decide what to buy, farm, eat or who to marry their children to (P5).*

*Some women decide the dowry of their daughters during marriage (P2).*

Regarding search for lasting solutions to gender inequality in Bindura rural area, participants accentuated:

*Education is a key pathway to eradicate gender inequality (P1).*

*Men and women should attend clubs and societies where they inform each other on how best to overcome gender inequality (P6).*

*The press should play its part in educating the Zimbabwean masses on the dangers of gender inequality (P8).*

*All people should be seen as equal in the eyes of not only God, but society (P7).*

## DISCUSSION

Information obtained from the key informants highlighted that the roots of gender inequality in Zimbabwe are traced back to the bible and also cultural background and this information is complimented by the argument from Nzimande [11] quoted in the Southern African Feminist Review (SAFERE) who described the Bible as an instrument used by men to oppress women whilst the women find solace in it to remain submissive. One key informant gave an example of the “Vapostori” sector in Zimbabwe who stresses that women were created weaker than men and they are not allowed to stand in front of men and teach. Cultural practices mentioned by the key informants included wife inheritance which supports that women cannot stand alone after death of her husband. According to Dorsey [8], women are weak socio-economically. Socially due to the socialisation process, women succumb to difficult and unfair practices. They are submissive; they want to please men. Chigudu [9] states that women are easily manipulated because they feel inferior due to history, religion, culture physiology, law, political systems, institutions, social attitudes and economic conditions. The implications of Chigudu [9] statement are that the causes of women oppression are a matrix of deep-rooted multi-dimensional factors.

Regarding expected societal roles based on sex, Davison [5] challenged Firestone and Cooper [6] view that women’s biological makeup should actually make them superior to men. Women’s bodies have special functions which men’s bodies do not; the harbouring, nurturing and bearing of a child. This appears to be a natural challenge to men who according to Delphy [7] feel threatened by this condition of “naturalising”. The researcher is of the opinion that married people whether in a patriarchy or matriarchy should perform most roles other than natural roles together as equals.

In line with professions undertaken by men and women, in most homes in a patriarchal state like Zimbabwe, roles are clearly defined as those for boys and men and others for girls and women [12, 13]. Roles that require more physical power like lifting heavy goods, as well as those that require decision-making or more complex reasoning, are spared for men. However, policies appear to have made great strides in changing this scenario at workplaces. Women are being accorded decision making powers at work. Unfortunately, homes seem to have maintained gender-based role-playing. Zimunya [13] propounds that male chauvinists believe that women who decide to take up top jobs are bringing a curse upon themselves. Zimunya [13] posits that this is because the woman will still be expected to “...combine the demands of her profession with what previously was once a full time position as the backbone of the family and husband.” In other words, women should be prepared to suffer the consequences of meeting the demands of the home and work place. On the basis of these findings, the researcher feels that there should be no profession that should be reserved for either men or women only. Anybody who feels like pursuing a profession of his/her liking should freely do so without being worried about what the society would say.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The determinants of gender inequality in Bindura rural area of Zimbabwe were found to be diverse. They included culture, religion, patrilineal and matrilineal societies, expected societal gender roles based on sex, professions and decision making roles. In the light of the foregoing findings, the researcher makes four conclusions. First, culture oppresses women since it tends to favour men, thereby, creating gender inequalities. Second, religion undermines the status of women in society. Third, patriarchal and matriachical societies dictate situation specific gender inequalities that obtain in Bindura rural area. Fourth, most expected societal gender roles based on sex, professions and decision making roles tend to discriminate men and women in Bindura rural area.

In view of the afore-stated conclusions, three recommendations emerge. First, there is need for the society to treat men and women equally since Bindura rural area is part of an egalitarian Zimbabwean society. Second, The Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education, Labour and Social Welfare, and Gender and Women Empowerment among other government departments need to come up with programmes to inform Zimbabweans about issues of gender equality. Third, more research in the area of gender equality needs to spread to other parts of Zimbabwe.

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