

An Investigation of Economic and Verbal Abuse as Forms of Gender-Based Violence Against Men: A Case Study of Survivors at Mwangaza GBV Rescue Centre, Meru-Kenya

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Abstract: This study investigated economic and verbal violence as forms of gender-based violence (GBV) against men, a topic often neglected in mainstream discourse. Guided by social learning theory, the research adopted a qualitative design to explore the lived experiences of male GBV survivors. The target population comprised men who had reported GBV cases at Mwangaza GBV Rescue Centre. Using Cochran's formula, a purposive sample of 40 participants was selected for focused group discussions. Thematic analysis was applied to interpret the data, allowing for the identification of recurring patterns and meanings in the participants' narratives. Results revealed that verbal abuse was characterized by persistent insults, threats, ridicule, and public humiliation, while economic abuse manifested through restricted access to financial resources, sabotage of income-generating activities, and denial of basic needs. The study concluded that these forms of violence cause significant emotional and psychological harm to male victims and remain largely unrecognized. The findings highlight the need for more inclusive GBV policies and support mechanisms that acknowledge and address the experiences of men.

Keywords: Gender-Based Violence, Male Victims, Verbal Abuse and Economic Abuse.

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) against men has remained largely overlooked in global discourse, despite increasing evidence that men, too, are subjected to serious forms of abuse, including economic and verbal violations. Research by Sivakumaran (2007) illustrated how GBV against men, particularly in war zones, often manifested through non-physical means such as enforced economic deprivation and verbal humiliation, contributing to long-term psychological harm. In Africa, multiple studies have revealed how economic and verbal abuse impact male survivors, especially in post-conflict societies. Johnson et al. (2010) highlighted how men in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were subjected to public insults and financial disempowerment, undermining their social identity. Similarly, Glass et al. (2011) found that such abuse was frequently justified through rigid gender norms, often leaving men without support or recognition. In another

DRC-based study, Rybarczyk et al. (2011) documented a lack of response mechanisms for male victims facing non-physical abuse, which deepened their sense of marginalization. In Rwanda, Zraly and Nyirazinyoye (2010) noted that verbal abuse, often through ridicule and stigma, and economic exclusion were used to punish male genocide survivors, effectively silencing them. Within Kenya, although data remains limited, Waweru, Kabiru, and Mbithi (2023) reported that some men had experienced verbal degradation and financial manipulation from intimate partners, revealing that GBV against men exists locally, even though cultural silence often conceals it. These findings collectively underscore the urgency of recognizing economic and verbal abuse as significant forms of GBV that affect men across global, regional, and local contexts.

A. Review of Literature

Gender-based violence (GBV) against men has increasingly gained scholarly attention as a significant yet underreported global phenomenon. Although men have traditionally been positioned as perpetrators in GBV discourse, studies have demonstrated that men also experience various forms of abuse, including economic and verbal, particularly within intimate or conflict-driven contexts. Sivakumaran (2007) emphasized that male victims of GBV, especially in situations of armed conflict, suffer not only physical harm but also psychological torment through non-physical abuses such as humiliation and coercive control. These forms of abuse often go unrecognized due to gender norms and societal perceptions of masculinity that discourage disclosure. The global literature underscores the need to challenge patriarchal narratives that render male experiences of GBV invisible.

Within the African continent, evidence from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has shed light on the devastating impacts of economic and verbal abuse on male survivors of GBV. Johnson et al. (2010) found that men subjected to verbal threats, economic deprivation, and humiliation during and after conflict exhibited severe psychological trauma, highlighting the

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long-term mental health implications of such abuses. The study pointed out that verbal abuse was not merely a psychological assault but was weaponized to emasculate and degrade victims, making recovery more difficult.

Further research by Glass *et al.* (2011) emphasized the intersection of poverty, gender dynamics, and power relations in post-conflict communities in the DRC. Through participatory action research, the study revealed that men often faced economic abuse in the form of denial of access to livelihoods and systemic marginalization, which deepened their vulnerability to other forms of violence. This abuse was often justified under prevailing gender ideologies that failed to recognize men as potential victims.

Rybarczyk *et al.* (2011) conducted an evaluation of post-conflict medical care in eastern DRC and observed that essential resources to address male-specific GBV, particularly non-physical forms like verbal humiliation and economic disenfranchisement, were largely absent. The lack of infrastructure and trained personnel contributed to the silence surrounding male victimization, perpetuating a gender-blind approach to GBV interventions. Verbal abuse in this context was not only a direct form of violence but also a tool used to reinforce systemic exclusion.

Zrally and Nyirazinyoye (2010), in their ethnographic study in Rwanda, described how genocide-rape survivors, including men, built resilience despite facing persistent verbal degradation and socioeconomic isolation. They found that verbal abuse through insults, shaming, and public ridicule—was used to reinforce social stigma, while economic abuse manifested through deliberate denial of employment or access to communal resources. These findings illustrated how cultural and historical contexts shaped the manifestation of GBV in non-physical but deeply injurious ways for men.

At the local level, evidence from Kenya has begun to reveal similar patterns in the manifestation of GBV against men. Waweru, Kabiru, and Mbithi (2023) found that men reported experiencing both economic and verbal abuse in intimate relationships, though such experiences were rarely acknowledged due to cultural expectations surrounding male stoicism. Economic abuse often entailed restricted access to family income, exclusion from financial decision-making, or intentional impoverishment by partners. Verbal abuse was expressed through constant belittling, public humiliation, and threats, leaving emotional scars that were rarely addressed by support systems. These findings call for greater attention to GBV interventions that recognize and respond to the nuanced ways in which men experience abuse.

B. Study Objectives

The main objective of the study was to examine economic abuse and verbal abuse as specific forms of gender-based violence experienced by men in Mwangaza GBV Rescue centre.

2. Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was employed to identify participants for the study. This approach was suitable given the

study's focus on a specific subgroup man who had experienced and reported gender-based violence in the form of economic or verbal abuse. The selection criteria included adult men who had formally reported their cases at the Mwangaza GBV Rescue Centre within the past two years. The use of the Cochran formula helped determine the minimum number of participants required to ensure representativeness while accounting for non-responses or data saturation. Priority was given to participants who were willing to engage in focus group discussions and who could articulate their experiences openly.

A. Sample size

The study focused on male survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) who had reported cases of either economic or verbal abuse at the Mwangaza GBV Rescue Centre. The target population consisted of all men who had formally reported such cases at the centre within the past two years. To determine an appropriate and statistically reliable sample size for qualitative engagement through focus group discussions, Cochran's (1977) sample size formula for proportions was employed. The formula is given as:

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p (1 - p)}{e^2}$$

Where:

- n_0 = required sample size
- Z = Z-score at 95% confidence level = 1.96
- p = estimated proportion of the population with the characteristic (assumed as 0.5 for maximum variability)
- e = desired level of precision or margin of error (0.1)

$$n_0 = \frac{(1.96)^2 \cdot 0.5 \cdot (1 - 0.5)}{(0.1)^2}$$

$$n_0 = 96.04$$

Given the relatively small total number of male GBV survivors available at the centre ($N = 50$), the sample size was adjusted using the finite population correction formula:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}}$$

Substitute $n_0 = 96.04$ and $N = 50$:

$$n = \frac{96.04}{1 + \frac{96.04 - 1}{50}}$$

$$n \approx 33.1$$

After rounding and considering the need to accommodate for possible dropouts and to ensure diversity in participant experiences, a total sample size of 40 men was selected for the focus group discussions. This number allowed for manageable

Table 1
FGD Analysis of GBV against men (Verbal and economic abuse)

Theme	Frequency (n=40)	Sample Respondent Quote
1. Insults and belittling	12	"She always called me useless, even in front of my children."
2. Public humiliation	9	"She insulted me in front of my friends and told them I was impotent."
3. Constant blame and accusations	7	"Every problem was my fault, even when I was not involved."
4. Shouting and threats	6	"She shouted and threatened to burn my clothes if I didn't obey her."
5. Ridicule of masculinity	6	"She said I was not a man because I lost my job."
6. Control over income	11	"I earned money but never touched it. She took it all."
7. Denial of basic needs	8	"Even after giving her money, she denied me food and locked me outside."
8. Restriction from working	7	"She said I was embarrassing and forced me to stop working."
9. Destruction or sabotage of economic activity	5	"She destroyed my stock and told me to stay home like a woman."
10. Exploitation of income	3	"She used my salary to support her family but gave me nothing."

group sizes while ensuring adequate representation of various demographic and abuse-related profiles.

B. Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the focus group discussions were analyzed thematically. The transcripts were first transcribed verbatim, followed by a careful reading to identify recurring patterns, categories, and emerging themes related to economic and verbal abuse. Coding was done both manually and with the aid of NVivo software to enhance accuracy and manageability. Thematic analysis was guided by the principles of Social Learning Theory, allowing the researcher to interpret how learned behaviors, cultural norms, and exposure to certain environments may have influenced both the perpetration and experience of abuse among men. The analysis aimed to uncover the underlying social and psychological factors shaping the manifestation of economic and verbal abuse in male survivors.

3. Results and Discussion

Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions revealed that verbal abuse among men manifested in several distinct ways. One of the most reported forms was insults and name-calling, cited by 12 out of the 40 participants. Respondent A explained, Mwekuru okwa andumaga irumi inya mbere ya aana bakwaa, translated as *"She always called me useless, even in front of my children."* This statement illustrates how verbal abuse stripped the respondent of dignity, particularly in the presence of dependents. This finding aligns with the work of Thobejane et al. (2018), who noted that verbal degradation undermines male self-esteem and reinforces silence among victims. However, this contrasts with the observations made by Lien and Lorentzen (2019), who suggested that such verbal aggression was less prevalent compared to physical forms in Western contexts.

Another common form of verbal abuse was public humiliation, with nine men indicating that their partners embarrassed them in social settings. Respondent B shared, mwekuru okwa eerire antu kaniseene ndii murio kiriwee translated as *"She told everyone in church that I was a burden."* This illustrates the social weaponization of words and the use of public platforms to erode a man's social image. These experiences were consistent with Seun's (2019) findings, which emphasized the psychological consequences of public shaming for male survivors.

Constant blame was the third most cited form of verbal abuse. Seven participants described a recurring pattern where

they were blamed for nearly everything. Respondent C remarked, mantu yathukaa akauga ni uuni translated as *"Every time something went wrong, she blamed me."* This statement echoes the emotional manipulation often involved in GBV, reinforcing a cycle of guilt and self-doubt. Similar dynamics were reported by Tshoane et al. (2024), who found that emotional scapegoating was a control tactic used by abusive female partners.

Six respondents reported shouting and threats as a dominant form of verbal abuse. Respondent D stated, ambondokaira ya mwana translated as *"She would shout at me like a child, even threaten to throw me out."* Such aggressive verbal interactions diminish the autonomy of men in relationships and instill fear of social or physical displacement. This aligns with Mphatheni's (2024) research, which documented threats and yelling as common tactics used by female perpetrators to intimidate their male partners.

Another group of six men reported ridicule of masculinity, a unique but deeply wounding form of verbal abuse. Respondent E recalled, inkuriikana anthekeleeree na aambira nti ntomurumee translated as *"She laughed and said I was not a real man."* This form of emasculation strikes at the heart of societal gender roles and expectations. Thobejane et al. (2018) noted that questioning a man's masculinity is one of the most psychologically damaging forms of verbal GBV, as it isolates victims from seeking support.

On the aspect of economic abuse, one of the most common forms experienced by 11 participants was control over finances. Respondent F lamented, ntiona bwa kuuwa musaarene yokwa, ankariire buruu translated as *"I had no say over my salary; she took everything."* This reflects a pattern of financial disempowerment whereby men lose access to their own income. These results support Fox et al. (2002), who established that control over financial resources was a key indicator of domestic abuse.

Denial of basic needs, such as food or shelter, was reported by eight respondents. Respondent G shared, mwekuru okwa naregere buruu kuura biakuria inya muthaaniitie mbecha translated as *"She refused to buy food or pay rent, though I gave her money."* This suggests a deliberate effort to deprive the male partner of essential needs as a means of exerting control. These findings are consistent with Benson and Fox (2003), who found that economic deprivation is both a form and consequence of intimate partner violence. However, Paat (2014) argued that such deprivation was more frequently reported by immigrant women, implying underreporting among male victims.

Seven respondents discussed restriction from employment. Respondent H revealed, mwekuru ambirire ndekane na ngugi inkumuaibisha translated as “*She told me to stop working because I was embarrassing her.*” This indicates a reversal of the stereotypical breadwinner narrative, with men being discouraged or blocked from employment. Such findings mirror those of Macmillan and Gartner (1999), who noted that limiting a partner’s economic independence often served as a mechanism of dominance.

Another form of economic abuse was business sabotage, experienced by five men. Respondent I disclosed, athukangirie ngugi ambira nkarae mucii translated as “*She destroyed my stock and told me to stay home.*” This points to deliberate acts to ruin sources of income and create dependency. This finding agrees with Nwanna and Kunnuji (2016), who reported similar strategies among female abusers in Nigeria.

Lastly, exploitation of income was cited by three respondents who noted that their partners used their money without consent and offered no accountability. Respondent J said, atumagiira mbecha ciakwa na atienda ndichiurira kinya kantu karikuu translated as “*She used my income but never allowed me to buy anything for myself.*” This economic exploitation reflects financial control masked as partnership. The results are consistent with Lien and Lorentzen (2019), who described emotional and economic interdependence as being manipulated by abusive partners.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that male victims of gender-based violence experienced significant forms of verbal and economic abuse that negatively impacted their emotional well-being, social standing, and financial independence. Verbal abuse manifested through name-calling, public humiliation, and emasculation, while economic abuse took the form of income control, business sabotage, and denial of basic needs. These experiences reflect a muted but real dimension of intimate partner violence against men, often overlooked in mainstream discourse. The testimonies shared by the respondents highlight the urgent need to incorporate male perspectives in GBV policies and support systems. In line with literature such as Thobejane *et al.* (2018) and Tshoane *et al.* (2024), the results underscore the importance of recognizing male victimhood as a legitimate and serious concern, while also revealing regional variations that contrast with findings from studies like Lien and Lorentzen (2019) and Jewkes (2002). These insights contribute to the broader understanding of GBV as a gender-inclusive issue and call for responsive, context-specific interventions.

A. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical research standards. Informed consent was obtained from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point, and the measures taken to protect their confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used in all discussions to safeguard the identity of the respondents. All data were securely stored and were only accessible to the researcher. Ethical

approval was sought and obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to the commencement of the research. Special sensitivity was exercised during focus group discussions, considering the emotional and social risks associated with disclosing personal experiences of abuse.

B. Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study—including anonymized transcripts of focus group discussions and thematic analysis notes—are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of participants, data sharing is subject to institutional guidelines and ethical restrictions. Researchers who wish to access the data will be required to provide a formal request outlining their intended use and agree to maintain the anonymity and privacy of all respondents.

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