

**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**



**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**AN ASSESSMENT OF THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE  
SEXUAL ABUSE OF DISABLED WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS; THE CASE  
OF BIKITA DISTRICT WARD 3**

**BY**

**Yeukai P.J Mandebvu**

**R121151t**

**DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS OF THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT  
STUDIES HONORS DEGREE**

*Our minds, Our hands, Our Destiny*

**RESEARCH SUPERVISION ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM**

**MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY**

**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**NAME OF STUDENT:** Yeukai Patience Mandebvu

**REG NUMBER:** R121151T

**NAME OF SUPERVISOR:** Mr T Chibanda

**RESEARCH TOPIC:**

**an assessment of factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas; the case of bikita district ward 3**

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Signed..... Date.....

# DECLARATION

I, Yeukai Patience Jinja Mandebvu hereby declare that the work I have submitted resembles my own effort and it has not been submitted anywhere for any degree purposes at any other University. I certify that the information in the Dissertation which is my own has been identified and acknowledged. It is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts in Development Studies Honours Degree at Midlands State University.

Signature..... Date.....

## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother Diana Mugabe for motivating me and being there for me always. She has been a pillar of strength and a voice of encouragement and for that I am truly grateful. The graces of the Almighty bless you forever.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The Research Thesis has the aim of assessing the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas using the case study of Bikita District Ward 3. The study will focus on the plight of disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3, the factors that subject them to sexual abuse as well as the possible response mechanisms that can be implemented in a bid to reduce the rates of the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas. The Researcher was motivated to carry out a research of this nature by the alarming rates of sexual abuse regarding disabled women in rural areas. If sustainable development is to be realised then there is need for attention to shift to the adherence of Human Rights.*

*Qualitative research methodology was used to carry out the research. The Researcher found out that disabled women are the poorest of the poor especially in rural areas. This perhaps is because of their incapability to earn a sustainable living because of socio-economic and cultural dynamics. They depend on caregivers for sustenance. They live in an environment which is characterised by stigmatisation and discrimination which act as social barriers. Indeed their disabilities make them vulnerable to sexual abuse because of the dynamics that are propounded by different disabilities but other factors such as cultural assumptions, social construction, economic considerations as well as poor development initiatives act as catalysts that foster the sexual abuse of disabled women.*

*Therefore it is imperative for the government as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector to collaborate so as to reduce the vulnerability of disabled women in rural areas. Taking such a stance will reduce the sexual abuse of disabled women.*

## ACRONYMS

DPA	Disabled Persons Act
DWSO	Disabled Women’s Support Organisation
LCDZT	Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe Trust
NGOs	Non Governmental Organisations
PWD	Persons with Disability
UNW	United Nations Women
W.H.O	World Health Organisation
WWD	Women with Disabilities
VFU	Victim Friendly Unit
VFS	Victim Friendly System
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Regional and international discourse suggest that there has been a lot of research which was done concerning the sexual abuse of women in general all around the globe, but very few researches have been conducted concerning the sexual abuse of disabled women especially those who reside in rural areas. This gross lack of attention concerning the sexual abuse of disabled women drove my conscience to try and articulate the plight of woman with disabilities and the aspects that render them vulnerable to sexual abuse. Another issue of fundamental importance is the fact that the perpetuation of cases of sexual abuse of handicapped women is continuously accelerating especially in rural areas of less developed countries and this research will be based on the case study of Bikita District Ward 3. Disability is a term used to describe the dynamics of being restricted to do certain tasks because of a condition that can be cognitive, physical or mental. According to World Health Organisation (WHO) (1996), disability is the measurement of certain restrictions which unable one to be as active as other individuals. Zimbabwe Department of Social Services Disability (1982) denotes that when one has a disability, it is mainly caused by physical or mental conditions which in most cases hinders the performance of the individual. The individual will thus fail to actively participate in the society. On the same note, Zimbabwe Government (1996) further points out that those hindrances that come about as a result of physical, cognitive or sensory conditions create socio-cultural barriers thus they inhibit the individual from being socially engaged. It is therefore the reason why disability yields discrimination, exclusion and the exploitation of disabled women especially thus leaving them vulnerable to sexual abuse.

Disabled women are then made vulnerable because they are defenceless at times because of physical, hearing and speech impairments which makes it easy for them to be caught off guard by

perpetrators, and mental retardation makes them the most preferred target by the perpetrators because of the lack of capacity to dictate notions of abuse in most cases. Choruma (2007), points out that disabled women in the rural areas are crippled by the environment itself. This notion is reiterated by the Integrated Ecological Model which seeks to explain the influence of the environment on the sexual abuse of disabled women and will be articulated in the chapters to follow. The case study of Bikita District Ward 3 was able to clearly articulate the contributory factors to the vulnerability of disabled women and why they are prone to sexual abuse. This research is of fundamental importance as it eludes the contributory factors to the sexual abuse of disabled women. This research insights other Development Practitioners as well as other stake holders to try and minimize the phenomenon if development is to be realised.

## **BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

There are a growing number of persons living with disabilities in Zimbabwe. According to the Zimbabwe Inter Censual Demographic Survey of 1997 recorded a total of 218,421 people with disabilities which is approximately about 2% of the population of Zimbabwe, with 56% being male and 44% being female. Again 75% of the disabled people reside in the rural areas. Other statistics have been presented by the Zimbabwe Housing and Population Census of 2002 which denoted that there is a national prevalence of 2, 9% of persons living with disabilities of which 55% are women and 45% are men. This data articulates the dynamics of people living with disabilities. Thus as a result there has generally been the realisation that there is need for the state to take a profound step to try and protect and safeguard the rights of disabled people in the country. The Zimbabwean constitution of 2013 has articles which elude the recognition of disabled people as equals of the rest of the population thus should be treated like wise. Again the state has collaborated with a number of

NGOs in a bid to assist persons living with disabilities especially women. This however followed after the realisation that disability in the country is still being viewed with scepticism. Many disabled women have been the target of all forms of abuse in Zimbabwe.

Regardless of the fact that the state in collaboration with NGOs has the agenda of trying to safeguard women living with disabilities from being abused generally, there is still the continuous rise of cases of sexual abuse on the part of women living with disabilities. The sexual abuse of women with disabilities (WWD) has dug deep in the rural areas of Zimbabwe. The reason behind this is because of factors such as the dynamics of the environment which include poverty, religion and culture as well as the vulnerability that disability posse.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Minority groups such as the disabled are essential in constituting development in the society. Their participation towards driving the development initiatives is key in ensuring that the society progresses for the betterment of its people. The Research has examined the factors contributing to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas. It particularly focused on Ward 3 in Bikita District. Sexual abuse undermines the capacity of women regarding their contribution to development because it undermines the women's self esteem and this puts them on the periphery of development

The research is important because it has unravelled the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women thereby establishing response mechanisms of how best to eradicate the phenomenon. Again the research was able to establish a feedback mechanism since the Researcher corresponded with community members. The Researcher was able to assess factors such as the

influence of the rural environment; the role played by culture, the vulnerability that disability poses as well as dependence on caregivers

## **CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The researcher conceptualised the important terms in the Research thesis such as terms like Disability, Sexual Abuse as well as Women so as to clearly define the Research Topic

### **Disability**

According to United Nations (UN) (1983), the term disability refers to the failure to execute a given activity in a way regarded as normal due to a disability that is caused by certain impairments. WHO (2015) points out that disability is a term used to describe a multiple of aspects ranging from failure to participate in the society, vast limitations as well as poor activity engagement. Zimbabwe Department of Social Services Disability (1982) denotes that when one has a disability it is mainly caused by physical or mental conditions which in most cases hinders the performance of the individual. The individual will thus fail to actively participate in the society. On the same note, Zimbabwe Government (1996) further on mentioned that those hindrances that come about as a result of physical, sensory and cognitive conditions create socio-cultural barriers thus inhibiting the individual from being socially engaged. It is therefore the reason why disability yields discrimination, exclusion and exploitation, especially regarding the women thus living them vulnerable to sexual abuse

### **Sexual Abuse**

According to the American Physiological Association the term sexual abuse is used to describe the situation involving unwanted sexual behaviour that is usually employed by force and coerciveness by perpetrators towards their victims. Threat are usually used and in most cases perpetrators take

advantage of those who cannot give consent because of their age or because they are disabled. In most cases the victim and the perpetrator have an existing relationship. This definition possess a very important variable with regards to the question of the sexual abuse of disabled women, it appears as though most of the women living with disabilities are prone to sexual abuse because of their failure to either recognise abusive tendencies or to give consent.

## **Women**

The term “women” in the topic of research is alluding to females with disabilities ranging from the age of 18 to 40 years. This age group was influenced mainly by the fact that generally women who have disabilities who are being sexually abused in the Bikita area fall under this age group. Again this age group fits perfectly with the issue of concern that is trying to assess the relative contributory factors to the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to women living with disabilities.

With regards to the assessment of factors contributing to the sexual abuse of disabled women, the above concepts were explored.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The Researcher will made use of the Integrated Ecological Theory to best explain and articulate the issue of the sexual abuse of disabled women. The theory was propounded by L Gordon in 2013 in a bid to suggest the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women.

### **Tenants of the Integrated Ecological Paradigm**

1. The theory states that the environment around a disabled woman can subject her to sexual abuse. The environment in this case refers to the place, area or space where the victim and the perpetrator interact. It can be a place of residence in the rural or urban area.

2. According to the theory, cultural dynamics which the disabled women is subjected to may live her vulnerable to sexual abuse. Culture in this sense refers to the norms, beliefs and superstitions that exist in a given community or society
3. The Paradigm states that the individual needs that a disabled woman requires can cause her to fall victim of sexual abuse. Disabled women need secondary assistance because they are unable to do certain things that they require for survival.

This theory is vibrant when it comes to explaining the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas, in the case of those from Bikita District Ward 3. Belsky (1980) points out that the 3 broad categories of factors which are the influence of culture, environment and individual needs explains why and how disabled women are sexually abused. In Bikita, the women were sexually abused because the rural environment and the culture practised there subjected the women to sexual abuse. The needs required by the disabled women make them dependant on caregivers and guardians who in turn sexually exploit them. The dependency of these women upon secondary assistance discourages them from reporting when and if they are sexually abused by their caregivers. This theory thus articulates the realistic factors which contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women.

## **OBJECTIVES**

- To assess the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in the Bikita District Ward 3
- To engage with the community in Bikita District Ward 3 so as to get responses based on the community's views and comments regarding the sexual abuse of disabled women.



- To offer possible solutions to assist in the eradication of the sexual abuse phenomenon regarding disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What are the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3?
2. What are the community's perceptions with regards to the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities?
3. What are the possible solutions necessary to eradicate the sexual abuse phenomenon in Bikita District Ward 3?

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study was motivated by a desire of fundamental concern which was the fact that a lot of research was done with regards to the sexual abuse of women in Zimbabwe but very few researches allude on the notion of the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities. This gross lack of attention motivated the Researcher to carry out a research of this nature. According to Brownridge (2006), disabled women are most likely to succumb to sexual and physical abuse in comparison to other women in general. Having this in mind it was of essential need to research on the matter so as to come up with a justified ontology which can be used to try and reduce the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities. The hope and future of young WWD lie in the thriving of a research of this nature since response mechanisms can be propagated to diminish the phenomenon in question. Taking into consideration the development orientation, such a research is fundamental because it articulated the socio-economic and cultural dimensions which contribute to the sexual abuse of

disabled women in rural areas, in particular Bikita District Ward 3. This then informs Development Practitioners on necessary ideals to employ to help develop the rural areas in an ideal manner for the women living with disabilities. There is absolutely no way one can speak of development without addressing the rising issue of the sexual abuse of disabled women.

The Research is also of crucial importance because it acted as a feedback session process. This means that the research was qualitative in nature thus it was more subjective than objective. This made the research immensely equipped in detail concerning the sexual abuse of disabled women. Again the research fostered a baseline for intervention mechanisms. Anyone who takes into account this research will benefit in terms of acquiring precise information that is disaggregated data. Stakeholders as well as the state itself will be able to recognize the loopholes in the society we live in today and as a result a turning point can be constituted. Henceforth the study was well justified.

## **LIMITATIONS**

- A crucial aspect of concern was the fact that this research study required a profound group of experts who could communicate with women that have hearing impairments for example mediators from organisations such as Emerald Hill School of the deaf who are sign language interpreters
- The chosen area for the case study of course yielded the required findings for the assessment but the obvious challenge was the fact that it is very far from the author's place of residence moreover locating the victims of sexual abuse also required an individual who is well versed with the area.
- It was a times difficult to get information from women who have cognitive related disabilities for instance those who are mentally challenged at times failed to respond to the research questions and

in actual fact some women were not in a position to tell their story therefore the author had to rely on secondary information

- Some women found it rather disturbing for them to explain the sexual abuse phenomenon in relation to their disability because of reasons such as feeling ashamed, aspects of fear, intimidations amongst many other reasons

Despite the existence of the above mentioned challenges, the Researcher was able to conduct the desired research thesis.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The Researcher made use of Qualitative analysis as a research method due to the attributes that the methodology possesses in line with the nature of the research topic.

### **Qualitative Research**

According to Benard (1995), Qualitative Research is a research method mostly used in the Social Science forum and it is a form of investigation that;

- a. Seeks answers to certain questions that are propounded by the objectives
- b. Makes use of an existing structure of questions for data collection
- c. Produces results that have not been found already
- d. Collects evidence in a subjective rather than objective way
- e. Takes into account data gathering instruments like questioners, interviews as well as narrations

- f. Largely relies on information that the local population in a given area or in this case information that the people in Bikita District Ward 3 can offer

### **Why the study required qualitative research**

The assessment of the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women required the employment of qualitative analysis as a methodology of gathering research material because it was a very subjective research study. It being subjective meant it propounded for an assessment that is done with the involvement of the community. This means that the information was largely given by the community. Again the Research thesis was also seeking the answers to the sexual abuse phenomenon on the part of the disabled women. Therefore the Research did not begin with a solution or with answers but its ambition was to challenge the existing framework of theories. This is probably one of the most crucial attributes which the Qualitative Research methodology possesses. Another important aspect that needed ridiculing was that the research topic needed to be articulated from an observatory perspective this meant that the nature of research was strongly imbedded in the Researcher's ability to use data gathering instruments such as interviews, questioners amongst many other instruments. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that Qualitative analysis was fully equipped in articulating the required findings of the research topic.

### **Data gathering instruments**

The research study was imbedded upon the use of Qualitative Research Methodology, having this in mind there are certain data gathering instruments that the author utilised so as to make the research profound and highly subjective. The instruments used were highly interactive and they categorised the responses to the questions. According to Denzin (2000), data gathering instruments for a subjective Research topic should be those that help in the articulation of individual experiences and their relationships. This was essential in this study because the women living with disabilities in

Bikita District Ward 3 had to denote their life experiences and relationship with regards to the sexual abuse phenomenon. This is perhaps one of the most crucial stages of the research study because this is the stage where the realities of the study are articulated. The instruments that the researcher used were;

a. Questionnaires

A questionnaire is an important data gathering tool. A questioner simply refers to an ideal question that the researcher poses for the targeted research sample to answer in a bid to meet the demands of the objectives that the researcher has set to execute. In most research studies the Researcher has a list of questions that make up the questionnaires that are employed for collecting data from the targeted responders. Questionnaires attack the general social sphere in terms of serving as guidelines of what the research study is all about.

b. Interviews

Interviews are usually used by Researchers in a bid to create a conversation that insight the Researcher concerning the matter at hand. An interview refers to a dialogue that is based on the assessment of an individual basing on the responses the individual gives after being asked the questions. In this research study, the author used interviews as a data collecting tool because there was need to ask questions and assess the responses that were given by women living with disabilities in Bikita District Ward 3 in connection to sexual abuse. Henceforth depth interviews were fundamental in the articulation of personal history, experiences as well as perspectives.

The author conducted an interview session and was able to interview six disabled women from Bikita District Ward 3. Of the 6 disabled women interviewed; 2 were physically handicapped, 1 was speech impaired, 2 were hearing impaired and the other one has an intellectual condition

c. Desktop research

Desktop or secondary research refers to the use of existing material that has been researched before so that one can confirm the present research. According to the Cambridge dictionary, desktop research is the collection and the examining of information that already existed prior the research being undertaken. In this research study secondary research was utilised for the purpose of comparing and contrasting the current situation in Zimbabwe with that of other African countries with regards to the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities.

## **SAMPLING**

In most cases the propagation of a subjective research study implies the use of sampling. According to Benard (1995), a sample is a term given to a fraction of a given population which becomes the active participants of the research study. Regardless of the fact that it would have been really difficult and would require a lot of time, it was not necessary to collect data from every individual in the community. Choosing a fraction of the population was time saving and improved the quality of the findings. If a research is qualitative in nature thus a sample should be taken to take part in the study. Sampling with regards to this study was justified because the researcher was required to get information from disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3 who experienced or succumbed to sexual abuse, however for fundamental, rigid and quality findings it was of paramount importance for the researcher to work with a sample.

### **Target Population**

The target population of this research study were women with disabilities who experienced sexual abuse of all forms who reside in Bikita District Ward 3. The establishment of the targeted population was constituted by the fact that the framework of the thesis had the agenda of articulating the

contributory factors that lead to the sexual abuse of disabled women. Therefore the women who were in question for this study were those aged between 18 and 40. All form of interactions was between the researcher and the disabled women of the above mentioned criterion. The Researcher used 12 participants from the Ward. Of the 12 disabled women, 4 were mentally retarded, 2 were hearing impaired, 2 were also speech impaired and 3 were physically handicapped. These women thus eluded their experiences in a bid to articulate the reasons why they were sexually abused.

### **Sampling Methods**

The Researcher was entitled to select a sampling method which was suitable for the Research Topic and thus in this Research thesis the Researcher used Purposive Sampling

#### Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a form of sampling which involves using respondents who are directly involved or have an understanding of the research topic. The researcher used purposive sampling because engaging with people who were well versed with the research topic ensured the establishment of quality findings.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The issue of the sexual abuse of women living in rural Africa has become more than propelling. It has become so rife and rampant in most of Sub Saharan Africa, and this is mainly because of the state of being disabled which renders the victims defenceless in the face of sexual abuse. Again the rural environment and poor reporting mechanisms contribute to the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to women residing in rural Africa who are living with different and dynamic disabilities. There is literature evidence which points out that the sexual abuse of women with disabilities exist in most African countries.

## **African literature**

In south Africa, the disabled women especially in the rural area of Kwazulu Natal (KZN) are still being marginalised, discriminated and stigmatised regardless of the fact that the south African constitution of 1996 Chapter 2 advocates for the total inclusion and incorporation of all individuals in the society regardless of ethnicity, culture, beliefs as well as the fact of being disabled. According to Groce N. etal (2013), 90% of women living with disabilities in South Africa have been sexually abused at some point in their life especially those who reside in rural areas, and as a result of this the rate of HIV/AIDS prevalence is very high with regards to women with intellectual disabilities. This reality leads to the realisation that woman with disabilities are attacked because those who have intellectual disabilities can neither give sexual consent nor refute it. Those who are physically handicapped lack the capacity to escape or fight the perpetrators. Those who have hearing impairments or visual impairments cannot hear or see the approach of the perpetrator or will not be able to pin point or identify the perpetrator if asked. This is the vulnerability that disability imparts on individuals. Makho (2009) reiterates that in the Zulu culture, young women are abducted by men and taken to their homes in the name of wanting to marry the women and this is known as (Ukhuthwala). Hanass-Hancock (2009) goes on to state that those women with hearing impairments are the easy targets to abduct because of their disability. Thus one can conclude that culture has a way of contributing to the sexual abuse of disabled women.

In Uganda there was frequent sexual abuse of girls and women who are disabled. The Human Rights Watch report of 2010 denotes that the continuation of conflicts in Uganda which is precipitated by the Lord Resistance army headed by Joseph Kony versus the government has caused the migration of people including disabled women from their rural homestead to refugee camps. It is in these refugee camps where the sexual abuse of disabled women is being fostered by combatants. Therefore



it is justified and logical to claim that the continuation of conflicts in Africa contributes to the sexual abuse phenomenon of women in general as well as the increased targeting of disabled women.

These abusive notions are a serious violation of human rights. No wonder why Joseph Kony is wanted by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

In Kenya, accessing the rights of disabled people is still a pressing challenge. Lack of constructive legal resources in Kenya's rural areas contributes to the sexual abuse of women with disabilities. According to a local documentation called the Wip in Kenya, women with disabilities are at more risk of being sexually abused than their counterparts. Certain unorthodox culture and myths have been established regarding sexuality and women with disabilities. Social constructions such as the issue of having sexual intercourse with a disabled woman in order to cure diseases such as HIV/AIDS, has influenced many infected men in Kenya to sexually abuse disabled women in a bid to cure themselves. This of course does not cure them but instead it has increased the number of people infected by AIDS.

In Tanzania a close relationship was realised between disability and sexual abuse. According to the document called "The Forgotten, HIV and disability in Tanzania", disabled women and girls are three times more at risk of being sexually and physically abused because they are seen as easy targets that cannot defend themselves thus are vulnerable. According to Groce (2004) the myth of virgin rape cleansing which holds the assumption that one can pass their HIV/AIDS on if the person engages in sexual activities or to be precise has sexual intercourse with a virgin has propagated the sexual abuse of women with disabilities in Tanzania. This further supports the notion that culture is one of the biggest impediments to the decrease of sexual abuse in general as well as on the part of women living with disabilities.

In Malawi a number of disabled women have reportedly confirmed that they have been sexually abused in their adulthood. A pilot study was initiated by the Malawian Government in 2006 with the intention of unveiling the issue of sexual abuse of women with disabilities. According to the interview conducted by the government Social Service Department in Malawi, the disabled women who were interviewed have experienced some sort of sexual abuse in their adulthood. According to the Pumed document of 2006 the women mentioned that men came to them proclaiming that they wanted to marry them. The men would continue having sexual intercourse with the hearing impaired victims but in the event that the women got pregnant the men would leave them and never return. This in itself is a form of manipulation that propagates the sexual abuse phenomenon.

### **Zimbabwean Literature**

In Zimbabwe the state has taken a positive stance towards the protection of the Rights of persons with disabilities (PWD). The establishment of the Disabled Person Act, recognition of the Rights of PWD in the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe as well as other legislative policies shows that the state is cautious about the Rights of PWD. Regardless of the Governments efforts, the Zimbabwean status with regards to the existence of the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities is becoming rife with the passage of time especially in rural areas. Most women living with disabilities who reside in the rural areas are sexually abused mainly because of the ever thriving poverty, neglect, discrimination, marginalization as well as stigmatization. According to Choruma (2007), the women living with disabilities in rural Zimbabwe are further disabled by their environment. A non friendly environment which is anti-social and undermines the rights of the disabled women makes them prone to sexual abuse. Again Choruma (2007) points out that at times because of cognitive (intellectual) or mental retardation most of the women are sexually abused without even realizing that they are being abused. In such a scenario the perpetrator is usually a relative, a friend or a

neighbour of the victim in question. This is why perhaps in Zimbabwe it is deemed a punishable crime when a man has sexual intercourse with a woman who is mentally retarded. This has been propounded by Psychiatrists who because of the dawn of a new era in terms of technology can ridicule the thinking capacity of a mentally retarded individual. Currently in Zimbabwe when a case of such nature is reported and is taken to court, the magistrate will ask the victim to get a Psychiatric Assessment so as to denote the level of her thinking capacity.

Another contributory factor to the sexual abuse of disabled women especially in the rural areas in Zimbabwe is the fact that the victims do not have any idea concerning how they should respond in the event that they are or have been sexually abused. The Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe Trust (LCDZT) organization has since initiated a pilot program which has the sole intention of helping disabled women to access justice. Most disabled women in the ten provinces of Zimbabwe lack the adequate information concerning sexual abuse and their vulnerability and that is why the phenomenon continues to thrive in Zimbabwe. Those who reside in remote areas for instance those in Bikita District Ward 3 do not have any knowledge with regards to sexual abuse, so as a result some women are constantly sexually abused and they do nothing about it.

The predominance of culture also forges the exacerbation of the sexual abuse of disabled women. According to Tikiwa (2006), the increased reports of the sexual abuse of disabled women and children are propagated by myths and superstitions. Groce and Trasi (2004) support this notation by stating that the belief of virgin cleansing as a way of passing out diseases is the major reason why young women or children are being sexually abused. It is in the rural areas where these beliefs are taking centre stage. The overall assumption is that disabled women are usually virgins, they are in most cases not bound to become wives in the society and this is because of the existence of discrimination and stigmatisation which reduce the probability of them getting married. This is also

echoed by the integrated ecological model which holds the assumption that disabled women are sexually abused because of the culture that is established in a society. The culture of a society contributes to the nature of the environment which as a result becomes dangerous to women with disabilities.

The sexual abuse of disabled women in Zimbabwe is gradually increasing and this is because of the handicapped, hearing and speech impaired and those who suffer from cognitive problems who need helping hands for their day-in day-out survival. This subjects them to many forms of sexual abuse. An online news paper called “The Zimbabwean” denoted on the 3rd of December in 2013 that most Zimbabwean women who are disabled succumb to abuse because the public services that they use are not user friendly to them. The physically handicapped or the blind women often need assistance to get on or off public transport. Usually men tend to help the women but sometimes touch the women in very indecent ways (aggravated sexual indecency).

The Research has largely complemented other Researches that have been propounded in countries mention above. It is clear that disabled women in Africa are all suffering from the same woes. In the Zimbabwean context the Research has broadened the fundamental aspects of the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas.

## **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Whenever a research study is being undertaken which involves the participation of individuals, ethics should be considered. Ethics refer to principles that should be adhered to in the event that the researcher requires the participation of individuals in the research study. According to the USA Belmont report of 1974, there are 3 principles that a researcher should always have in mind and adhere to during the research study. These principles are:

- Respect for participants
- Beneficence
- Self presentation

### **Respect for participants**

When a researcher is carrying out a research, high levels of respect should be shown. This is important because the people involved in the research study should feel respected and valued so that they will find no reason to refute participating in the research study. In this case, respecting the disabled community is important because signs of respect will show concern and will prompt maximum participation. Again in rural areas, respect is fundamental with regards to culture and morality. The way a researcher asks questions or interviews participants should be dignified thus denoting moral dignity.

### **Beneficial attitude**

When a research study is being propounded, it is of paramount importance for the Researcher to ensure that the participants find it worthwhile to participate in the Thesis. Therefore minimizing the probability of harming or undermining the participants, that is to say to speak cohesively, blaming the victim for being sexually abused or forcing the participant to reveal information she does not want to reveal. The Researcher should instead maximize the benefits, for instance, in this research the researcher should be positive and willing to speak positively about the disabled victims, counselling them if possible and showing appreciation for their participation.

### **Researcher's presentation**

The way a researcher presents him or herself as well as the research itself is a required ethic with regards to the carrying out of a research study. The presentation of the Researcher should be highly

applauded. The Researcher should be friendly, highly accommodative, very understanding and should have good communication skills. The community as well as the participants will judge the Researcher according to their expectations, thus the Researcher has to build cordial relationships with the participants.

# **CHAPTER 1: PLIGHT OF DISABLED WOMEN IN BIKITA DISTRICT**

## **WARD 3**

### **1.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter will largely focus on the analysis of the problems and situations that the disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3 are subjected to. Therefore for such an analysis to be established it is therefore very crucial for the Researcher to take into consideration the day in day out lives of the disabled women in the Bikita District. Again this chapter will also try as much as possible to elude the statistical data that is available regarding the specifications of the target population concerning the issue of sexual abuse. The intervention of the Government and NGOs is also going to be denoted so as to clearly articulate what the Government and NGOs have done in a bid to try and sooth the plight of disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3.

### **1.2 PLIGHT OF DISABLED WOMEN IN BIKITA DISTRICT (WARD 3)**

This section will focus on giving information on the plights of disabled women in Bikita District, Ward 3. The main plights of these women are poverty, social inclusion barriers, reliance on secondary assistance, absence of resources, poor protection, lack of participatory development, and violation of their human rights.

#### **1.2.1 Poverty**

Bikita is one of Zimbabwe's rural areas where productivity is very low in terms of agriculture and thus immense poverty exists in the District. There is always little for consumption and the day in day out lifestyle denotes rampant poverty. Such a reality is frustrating for ordinary villagers but it is even more frustrating and unbearable for a woman living with a disability. Women of such nature

hence suffer the consequences of an economy which can do nothing to sustain them and their different needs. According to the Disability Awareness in Action Resource Article 6, disabled women who reside in the rural areas of third world countries suffer more because it is rather difficult for a disabled woman to be employed or to engage in societal activities. This is true in the case of disabled women who reside in the Bikita District because most of them are either handicapped or have cognitive disabilities which due to societal expectations are not acceptable therefore contributing to the sidelining of these women. A caregiver of a disabled woman alluded that her step daughter was shunned and shuttered by the community such that she could not get employed in the local area because she was regarded incompetent because she is hearing impaired.

The Disability Awareness Action Resource Article 6 also states that about 52% of disabled women in Zimbabwe live in rampant poverty. This is supported by Marongwe and Mate (2007) who state that disabled women in the Masvingo Province are poor because they lack financial capital, physical capital as well as social capital. Financially they do not have the resources to sustain them because of being uneducated and unemployed. Physical capital is the state of being disabled which forces them to rely on secondary assistance. Social capital relates to the networks that can help boost a person's opportunity in terms of sustainability and frankly speaking disabled women are not socially connected.

Another knock on effect of poverty is that disabled women as a result will fail to access medication or other facilities that they require for day to day survival. An example can be taken from some mentally challenged women in Bikita who cannot afford to travel to Harare Hospital for constant psychiatric assessments and to get medication. In some instances those who are hearing impaired can also not afford to access hearing aids. Thus as a result of poverty disabled women are left to suffer in the arms of an economy which does little to sooth the situation. That is why perhaps the



disabled women are regarded as the vulnerable of the vulnerable. They cannot sustain themselves because of the fact of being disabled neither can they get financial assistance because of the fact that the economy is in a state of being crippled as well.

### **1.2.2 Social Inclusion Barriers (Stigmatization and Discrimination)**

The usual reaction of the society towards people with disabilities is that which is associated with stigmatisation as well as discrimination. The general society construction is that disabled people do not have a place in the society since they are rendered useless. Choruma (2007) points out that the rural environment contributes greatly to the treatment that is given to disabled people. And it is that attitude that fosters sexual abuse with regards to disabled women. Disabled women are seen as a curse in the Bikita District, they can never be the so called wife material neither are they allowed to conceive children because of the fear of replicating the same disability within the child. These women are seen as a shame from an African culture perspective hence they are excluded from all societal engagements.

According to the Disability Awareness in Action Resource Article 6, women are already marginalised and suffer drastic discrimination and stigmatisation because of merely being women in a society that is largely patriarchal in nature. Having this in mind a disabled woman faces double marginalisation because of gender as well as the fact of being disabled. Disability hence increases the vulnerability that exists with regards to the fact of one being merely a woman. Stigmatisation and discrimination foster societal barriers that eliminate the participation of disabled women. It is hence the existence of these social barriers which contributes to the sexual abuse of disabled women in Bikita Ward 3 since the general assumption established denotes that disabled women are valueless thus they are easy prey to be devoured by perpetrators.

### **1.2.3 Reliance on secondary assistance**

The most frustrating aspect of being disabled could be the mere fact that one cannot totally rely on oneself for day in day out survival. Therefore for the disabled women in Bikita, especially those who are physically handicapped need assistance to ensure that they perform normal day to day activities. An online document called 'Kubatana' points out that a physically handicapped woman from Mucheke village in Bikita is unable to do simple tasks such as washing her body, doing her laundry and cooking for herself. It is then up to the caregivers to ensure that such responsibilities are met. In some instances as stated in the Kubatana online document, handicapped women tend to rely even on male caregivers to perform duties such as changing a handicapped female her under garments or changing sanitary wear when the women are menstruating. Such kind of assistance is needed of course but however in the absence of female caregivers male caregiver might assist or might actually sexually abuse or assault the handicapped women. This then brings into motion the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to disabled women.

### **1.2.4 Absence of friendly Public Resources**

Disabled people in general often need fundamental public resources that will make it easy for them to socially engage themselves. Such facilities include disability sensitive infrastructure, social services such as health centres and public transport. It is no secret that many facilities in the social stratum are not disability sensitive. Article 6 of the Disability Awareness in Action Resource claims that it is difficult for hearing impaired, visual impaired as well as the handicapped women to access basic public services. In Bikita, medical centres are a distance from the villages in Ward 3. The location of the grocery stores is strenuous for those who are handicapped. The roads are not properly constructed such that mobility for those who use wheelchairs extremely difficult. As for protection, the police station is located far from the Ward and thus as a result of this when these women are

sexually abused they cannot report in earnest because of the distance factor. A disability sensitive environment should be created so as to make life easier for the disabled as well as to promote social inclusion. This is after realising that disabled women are less mobile and less engaged in social issues because they would rather stay at their villages than to exhaust themselves whilst trying to travel from one point to the other.

### **1.2.5 Poor protection and reporting mechanisms**

Protection of disabled women in rural Zimbabwe is still an elusive goal. This was pointed out by a hearing impaired victim of sexual abuse who claimed that she feels that disabled women are not protected in their community thus they are subjected to sexual abuse. The issue of lack of essential reporting mechanisms is also a well noted problem especially with regard to women with disabilities. Evidence of lack of protection is realised as cases of offences against women with disabilities are being promulgated constantly. According to the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013 disabled people are to be treated as equals of able bodied people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity as well as religion. Although such a law was put in place in a bid to try and safeguard people with disabilities, there is poor enforcement mechanisms especially in rural areas such as Bikita where the villagers there still hold on to cultural beliefs which undermine disabled people. Women are thus especially vulnerable to many abusive tendencies because of the lack of protection in the different societies. It should be noted that in most cases the law applies to those who have the knowledge about it and for many rural disabled women, such laws do not exist because either they genuinely have not heard about it or because of cognitive disabilities they are not capable of understanding the law.

When disabled women are abused or offended in general, it is difficult for them or for their caregivers to report the matter to the police. This is because of the fact that disabled women or their

caregivers sometimes do not take reporting very seriously. Therefore they end up trying to settle the disputes themselves for example they might take the case to the Village Head (Sabhuku) and claim that they should be paid for the crime committed against the victim. This according to the Zimbabwean Law is not righteous. A sexual abuse report for example should be taken to the nearest Police station and the matter should be taken to court and not otherwise. Although this is the law, women who suffer from sensory and cognitive disabilities might fail to give evidence of the reported incident because of their disabilities. This is why as we speak crimes against disabled people especially women continue to thrive. Therefore a system of reporting such cases in the rural areas should be established so as to help eradicate the issue of abuse against women with disabilities. If possible legitimate Sign Language interpreters should be consulted when it comes to cases to do with hearing and speech impaired victims.

### **1.2.6 Lack of participatory development**

It is no secret that the participation of disabled people in national issues is very low and even worse for women with disabilities who reside in rural areas. This is evidenced by the fact that out of the 18 women with disabilities that the Researcher was able to relate with, all confirmed that they seldom participate in community activities. One of them mentioned that she does not even go to church with other Congregationalists. At village level, most villages in Bikita do not even acknowledge the existence of the disabled people and their input with regards to community development. They are seen as people who lack the reasoning capacity to participate in community development issues. Stigmatisation and discrimination of disabled people has influenced their non participation in matters that affect them. Dube (2005) points out that participation of disabled women in Zimbabwe and in South Africa is very low. In Zimbabwe the government enacted the DPA in 1992 but little has been done to foster participation of the disabled community. Dube (2005) further mentioned that

the reason behind the minute participation of disabled women is imbedded on the fact that there are very few policies which are being implemented with regards to the participation WWD issues. This perhaps is because of the fact that the donor ship that Zimbabwe and South Africa receive is very low and is maximised for advocacy and Human Rights campaigns. Therefore the participation of disabled women in rural areas is still more of a dream. This gross lack of participation has also contributed to the undermining of disabled women. Therefore the sidelining of women with disabilities hinders the establishment of Millennium Goals. In Bikita district disabled people are discouraged and lack motivation to actively participate in the society.

### **1.2.7 Violation of Human Rights**

WWD have experienced a lot of suffering at the hands of a society which believes that disabled women are less important; do not have a place in the society, should be discriminated, marginalised and exploited. Most disabled women are not educated and are jobless. Those who reside in rural areas such as in the Bikita District travel to big cities so that they can beg for money. Choruma (2007) states that in the rural environment the Rights of disabled women are immensely violated, they do not get the same opportunities that their counterparts get such as acquiring an education, getting employment amongst other factors. They are often sexually abused and it is very difficult for them to access justice especially in the rural areas. The failure to adhere to the statutes of the Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013 which denotes the equality of all Zimbabweans regardless of race, gender, disability, ethnicity and religion has left disabled women prone to all sorts of abuse. The question then is how then can the nation seek to be democratic when the violation of Human Rights of close to 10% of the state's population is becoming rampant?

## **1.3 INTERVENTION OF THE GOVERNMENT AND NGOs**

Efforts made by the government and NGOs towards the betterment of the livelihoods of the disabled women in Bikita are examined in detail in this section.

### **1.3.1 The intervention of the Government (Legislation and Policies)**

Interventions made by the government towards the improvement of the livelihoods of people living with disabilities include formulation of the Disabled Persons Act (DPA), Constitution of Zimbabwe Section 23, and the establishment of the protocol on the Multi-Sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse.

#### 1.3.1.1 Disabled Persons Act

The realisation that disabled people in Zimbabwe needed structured policies and legislation to protect them and shutter out social barriers led to the establishment of the DPA of 1992. The DPA had the sole intention of enabling disabled people to acquire education and accommodation as well as creating a platform for disabled people to be part and parcel of decision making in the communities. However, the DPA has loopholes. The Act lacks the provision for affirmative action and does not facilitate for the wider participation of people living with disabilities. Again the Act is not gender sensitive as it concludes that disabled women and men face equal stigmatisation and discrimination. It appears as though regardless of the fact that DPA was enacted, disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3 are not well versed with what the Act is about thus they cannot relate to it.

#### 1.3.1.2 Constitution of Zimbabwe Section 23

The Zimbabwe Constitution of 2013 section 23 stipulates on the Rights of people with disabilities. It points out that disabled people should be treated as equals of their counterparts. This entails that disabled people should be given the equal opportunity in the socio-economic arena. The step taken

by the government was crucial as a measure to counter stigma and discrimination tendencies. However Choruma (2007) argues that the enforcement of such legislation has not taken place as yet. It should be noted however that the inclusion of disabled people in the Constitution is a positive step towards upholding the Rights of disabled people nationwide but the women in Bikita District confirm that they have not realised the benefits of the legislation. One caregiver of a handicapped women claimed that the legislation was beneficial to those in urban areas where Human Rights were adhered to. This hence suggests that disabled women in rural areas precisely lack the adequate information to stand for their Rights because it appears as though legislation is poorly enforced in rural areas

Other important policies to mention include the Mental Health Policy of 2004 which has the aim of assisting mentally challenged people and the Education Policy number 36 which provides for the education of disabled people. Zimbabwe has adopted the United Nations Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UNSREOPD) and is also a signatory of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These steps taken by the government suggests its realisation for the need to assist persons with Disabilities

#### 1.3.1.3 Protocol on the Multi-Sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse

The protocol was established for the purpose of creating a holistic and integrated approach to combat the sexual abuse of girls and women with or without disabilities. The structure of the protocol again calls for the uniting of the Government and other Stakeholders which include Private Organisations as well as NGO's. The establishment of the Victim Friendly Unit (VFU) and the Victim Friendly System (VFS) has assisted with cases of sexual abuse and this has contributed to the prosecution of perpetrators against persons with disabilities. This approach is subjective as it

shows that the symbiotic relationship between the Government and Stakeholders is fundamental for combating the Sexual Abuse Phenomenon.

The Multi-Sectoral Management of Sexual Abuse has been a resolute idea as women in Bikita District admit that it has brought to life NGO activities in their society in collaboration with the government. A handicapped woman pointed out that she was happy because of the establishment of the VFU as it propagated the prosecution of the person who sexually abused her.

### **1.3.2 The intervention of NGO's**

In Zimbabwe the government has collaborated with NGOs a bid to try and assist people living with disabilities. According to UN (2007), there is absolutely no way development can be realised if and when the needs of disabled people are ignored. An issue that has risen to fame in Zimbabwe recently is the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to women with disabilities. This has called for global attention thus NGOs have been brought to life by donor funding with the sole aim of eradicating the sexual abuse phenomenon as well as to assist disabled women who have been sexually abused. The belief behind the abuse of disabled women is largely as a result of social exclusion which is fostered by stigmatisation, discrimination and marginalisation especially in rural areas such as in the Bikita District. It is therefore important to assess the contribution NGOs in a bid to uphold the Rights of women with disabilities.

#### 1.3.2.1 Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe Trust (LCDZT)

LCDZT is a non profit organisation with the mission to create equal opportunities for people especially women and children with disabilities. The organisation is part of the Leonard Cheshire Global alliance and it began its programmes in Zimbabwe in 1981. To this date the organisation is undertaking several programmes to assist disabled people from all walks of life in Zimbabwe.



a. United Nations Women (UNW)

The programme called UNW is being funded by United Nations itself. The LCDZT website states that such a programme has received funding after the realisation that sexually abused disabled women are lacking the Access to Justice. Therefore the thrust of the programme is to assist those women to access justice in a society where it seems impossible. The programme facilitates for all required logistics for disabled victims to seek legal assistance in the event that they are sexually abused. Those who are mentally retarded need psychiatric assessments before their cases can be taken to court. Disabled women from Bikita District have been assisted through the VFU which collaborated with the Project Managers of the UN programme. The programming of such a programme includes the provision of Sign Language Interpreters to assist the women to explain their sexual abuse encounter and to give evidence were necessary. These efforts have contributed to the arrest of perpetrators from the Bikita District. This positive contribution can help uphold the Rights of disabled women.

b. Access to Livelihoods

The programming of this programme came into existence after the realisation that many disabled women especially in the rural areas cannot sustain themselves. The main objective of this programme is to try and curb the poverty heights of disabled women by involving them in small projects which generate income for their sustenance. Some of the projects include floor polish making, electronic engineering tutorials and agricultural based subjects. The programme also provides counselling sessions and wheelchairs for the physically handicapped. Women have developed skills that can help relieve the poverty in rural areas. This also aids the social inclusion of the women with disabilities and exposes them less to sexual abuse tendencies.

The programme has played a role in Bikita District as it is realised that the Social Workers who are executing the programme have managed to engage a number of disabled women in the provisions of the programme. The disabled women in Bikita especially have mentioned that the programme has enhanced their skill capability.

#### 1.3.2.2 Disabled Women Support Organisation (DWSO)

The Organisation was founded on the basis of the desire to physically and economically empower women with disabilities all over Zimbabwe by women with disabilities such as Gladys Charowa. The organisational profile stipulates that women with disabilities are generally subjected to sexual abuse because they are marginalised and taken advantaged of because of lack of empowerment. Therefore the emancipation of disabled women lies in the efforts of such organisations.

WWD who reside in Bikita District generally have a low self esteem and believe that they are worthless in the society. That is why those who are sexually abused do not even take it to heart to report when they are sexually abused. The physical empowerment entails the physical involvement of these disabled women in societal affairs. The attitude of being outspoken and the pervasion from suppressing one's self. The economic empowerment that the organisation is mostly interested is that which does away from dependence. Some disabled women in Bikita have spoken of dependence financially as the main cause of sexual abuse. Those who provide for them tend to ask for sexual favours in return for providing for needs such as food and shelter. Therefore physical and economic empowerment will enable disabled women in Bikita to stand up for their rights as well as to economically sustain their needs. The organisation has been concerned with women from Masvingo Province where sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas is taking centre stage.

#### 1.3.2.3 Nzeve Organisation

Nzeve is an organisation that has the main objective of enhancing the hearing capacity of hearing impaired people. The mission of the organisation is to ensure that hearing impaired people are assisted to improve their hearing. Rural women who are hearing impaired cannot afford hearing aids due to poverty. The organisation then offers hearing tests and then gives hearing aids to those who need them. The aim of the organisation is to create a community which is sensitive to those who are hearing impaired and to help the hearing impaired to cope with little reliance on caregivers.

Hanass-Hancock (2009) points out that women who are hearing impaired are the most targeted sexual abuse victims. He further argues that hearing impairment increases the vulnerability of women due to the fact that the perpetrators are motivated to sexually abuse the women because of their disability. Having this in mind, Nzeve organisation seeks to constitute a turning point in the lives of the hearing impaired women. Two women from Bikita District Ward 3 have received hearing aids upon being tested. The women have proclaimed that since they received the hearing aids their hearing capacity has improved immensely. This hence has resulted in them depending on themselves more as opposed to their caregivers.

The organisation has been in existence for years and has managed to support those who are hearing impaired all over Zimbabwe. The organisation has also partnered with other organisations such as Leonard Cheshire Disability Zimbabwe Trust in a bid to collaborate and reach out to all those who are hearing impaired.

#### 1.3.2.4 Jairos Jiri Association

The Jairos Jiri association was established decades ago and the organisation has championed issues to do with disability. The association was inspired by the desire to improve the lives of disabled

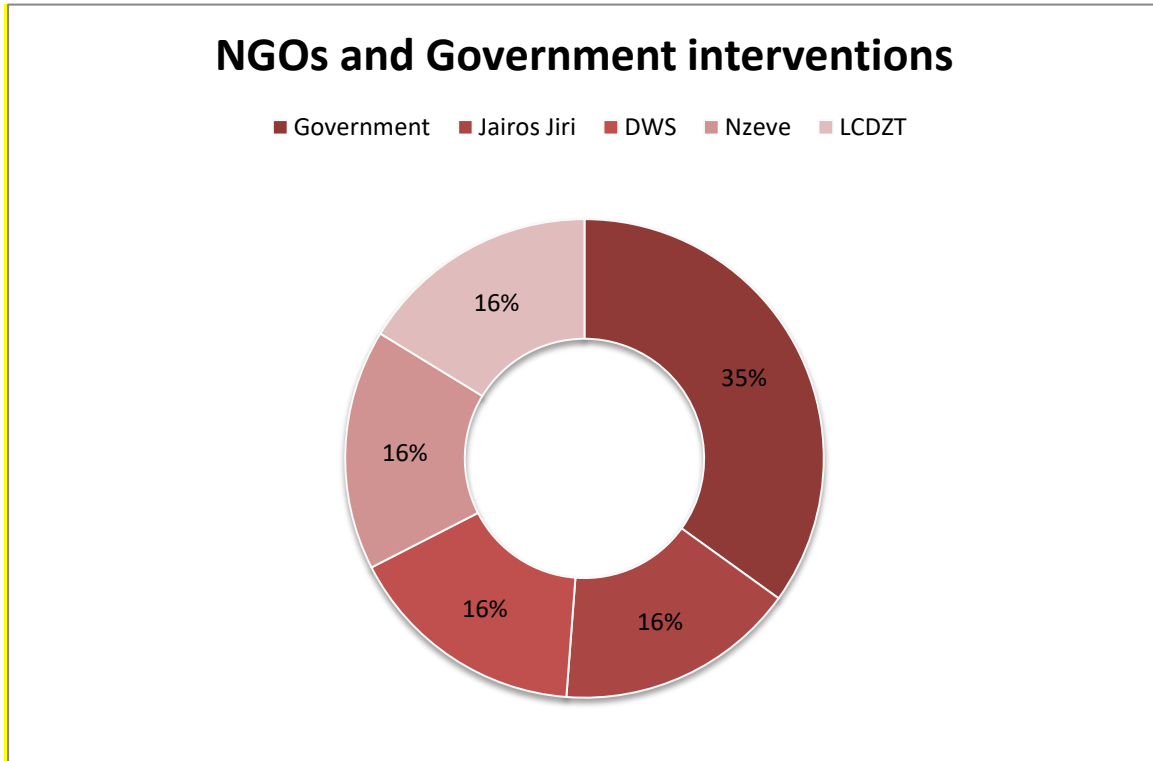
people all over the ten provinces of Zimbabwe. The aims of the association include improving the literacy rate of adults and children, offering rehabilitation and facilitating medical provisions.

Jairos Jiri Association in Masvingo has been applauded for constituting a turning point for people with disabilities in the Masvingo Province. Bikita being the District of concern has witnessed the emancipation of 3 women from Ward 3. According to reports from LCDZT, Jairos Jiri Association in Masvingo has assisted disabled women in Bikita who were sexually abused to get medical attention to ensure that they do not contract diseases. The women later on received rehabilitation since they were physically handicapped. To this day these women have grown less dependent on their wheelchairs and caregivers. Such an intervention might appear to be of little importance but the actual fact is matters to do with people with disabilities are profound but they begin with minute contributions.

It should be noted however that amongst many other NGOs who have committed themselves to assist disabled women in Bikita District, there are challenges that impede the Organisations from executing their objectives. Factors such as inadequate funding required by NGOs for programming hinder their performance.

Fig. 1.1 visually depicts statistical information on the intervention by the government and NGOs mentioned above. NGOs complement Government efforts in a bid to assist women with disabilities. NGO activities are more profound than those of the Government largely because the Government lacks the financial muscle to steer the intended ambitions. However the Government should be applauded for its actions towards formulating policies for the protection and well being of people living with disabilities. Fig 1.1 provides a sketch of NGOs and Government interventions basing on

the information above.



**Fig. 1.1:** *Source: Field Research*

## **CHAPTER 2: CAUSES OF SEXUAL ABUSE OF DISABLED WOMEN IN BIKITA DISTRICT WARD 3**

### **2.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter is the core and thrust of the Research Study. The chapter will progress by articulating and analysing the factors which contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas, specifically in Bikita District Ward 3. The chapter will again focus on specific disabilities and how they increase vulnerability with regards to disabled women. It is important to carry out such an analysis because the contributory factors to the sexual abuse of disabled women are fundamental for the foundation of response mechanisms. Much detail will be relayed by the disabled women who have experienced the sexual abuse phenomenon.

### **2.2 FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF DISABLED WOMEN**

The fact of merely being disabilities poses many loopholes that create opportunities for perpetrators to sexually abuse disabled women. The characteristics of disabled women such as being hearing and speech impaired, physically handicapped and mentally retarded increases the probability of them being victims of sexual abuse and this is because of the factors bellow.

#### **2.2.1 Low intellectual capabilities**

Women who are mentally retarded are often targets of sexual abuse because their reasoning capacity is very low. This is because being mentally challenged denotes the incapability of one to think and make well thought decision. This definition brings to light the reason why disabled women fail to

give consent to sexual issues. According to Sobsey & Doe (1991), women with intellectual disabilities are at the highest risk of being sexually abused. This is because of their disability which hinders them from dictating unwanted sexual tendencies.

The women in Bikita District Ward 3 who are mentally retarded have fallen victims of sexual abuse because they do not have any knowledge pertaining to issues to do with sexual abuse. They do not know that they have been abused. A woman from a village in Bikita District Ward 3 is said to have failed to relay her story before village Heads after other villagers had reported that a man from the nearby village had dragged the woman and sexually abused her in the maize field. The inability of these women to articulate themselves has created social constructions for example the fact that they are viewed as liars, retards, confused and incapable of being victims of sexual abuse. Elman (1997) points out that it is rare for disabled women to be believed when they claim that they have been sexually abused. In most cases women who have intellectual disabilities do not even report if and when they are sexually abused, making it easy for the perpetrator not only successful in abusing the woman but to continue abusing others of such nature. Sobsey and Varnhagen (1989) further points out that most women with mental related disabilities are usually sexually abused but the cases are rarely noticed. This entails that it is very rare for the victims to report the perpetrators thus the cases are never heard of.

In most cases people will only realise that a woman with a cognitive disability has indulged in sexual intercourse when she gets pregnant. It is only at this stage when questions start being brought forward in a bid to understand how and when the victim was sexually active. In Bikita District, a woman who is mentally retarded has now given birth to two Children in a space of two and half years. This is evidence of sexual abuse. Sobsey (1994) states that women with intellectual

disabilities are often referred for birth control after realising that they constantly get pregnant because of being sexually abused.

### **2.2.2 Reliance on caregivers (Secondary Assistance)**

Women with disabilities are usually sexually abused by either caregivers or close relatives. A situation of such nature is created because of the fact that generally disabled people need caregivers or secondary assistance for their day to day survival. Sobsey (1994) points out that disabled women are sexually abused by their caregivers and their close relatives. This is also echoed by the Integrated Ecological theory which is sustained on the premise that the socio-economic needs of disabled women create dependency on caregivers. When they are sexually assaulted by these caregivers they would rather keep in silence than to report those who provide their everyday needs. Women with disabilities for example those who are physically handicapped at times need help when bathing and changing of menstrual pads amongst many other things. A young woman from Mucheke village in Bikita is physically handicapped and she has advanced mental retardation. She relies on her wheelchair for mobility. Her parents are never really present and she gets aid from her so called 'brothers'. She has been sexually abused and rumours are that her brothers could be the perpetrators. In such a situation the woman is vulnerable because these men have the capability and excuse of touching her even in the most indecent ways.

In rural areas poverty has become the order of everyday life. Having this in mind disabled women are jobless and lack the required skills to perform simple tasks such as doing ordinary chores to earn a living. This fosters a situation whereby the cared for depends entirely on the caregiver. According to Davis (2015), disabled women depend on other individuals for almost all their needs such that this makes them vulnerable because when they are sexually abused they feel obliged not to report the matter even if they can. They would rather tolerate the abuse. In remote rural areas such



scenarios are never suspected and can go on for a long time. The in capabilities of these women at times lives them vulnerable and in the above mentioned scenario the victim would rather get food on the table in exchange even if it means being sexually abused.

### **2.2.3 Misconceptions of Disability**

Another aspect present in the society today is the fact that there are a lot of misconceptions that are associated with disability and sexuality. This has contributed to the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities. Biggs (2013) stipulates that there are many misconceptions that are present in the society with regards to the fact of being disabled especially when it comes to sexual related issues. He further points out that women with disabilities are regarded as individuals who are not interested in sex related matters, they are perceived as unattractive therefore they can never be sexually assaulted or have sexual relations. This however is not the actual fact. Women with disabilities are just like their female counterparts. Biggs (2013) points out that disabled women have the same biological make up just like other women. Therefore they can have sexual attractions and indulge in sexual activities

Having this in mind, women with disabilities especially in rural areas are subjected to such mistaken belief. In Bikita District Ward 3, the 2 speech impaired women interviewed by the Researcher were vocal when the aspect of misconceptions was mentioned. They mentioned that such beliefs are taken serious earning them no place in the community. In the end no one intends to marry women living with disabilities but instead they are taken advantage of. They are not fit for the role of being a mother and a wife. Men in the village target them and sexually assault them. According to Hanass–Hancock (2009) that at times men in rural areas tend to have sexual affairs with disabled women only to leave them if they fall pregnant. Kempton and Gochros (1986) echoes this sentiment by denoting that women with Mental related disabilities are highly affectionate thus perpetrators

misunderstand this and instead take this as a sign of sexual attraction. Sexual relations begin to surface and these women are then sidelined when they get pregnant. Again because of the misconceptions that have cemented today's society disabled women are seldom believed and trusted if they report that they have been sexually abuse. Disabled women are sexually abused because 'disability' in the rural setup means the segregation and misunderstanding of women with disabilities living them vulnerable to sexual abuse.

#### **2.2.4 Inability to Access information and Justice**

The sexual abuse of WWD in rural Zimbabwe is also being fuelled by the inability of disabled women to access justice. Women with disabilities do not have any means of protecting themselves because the perpetrators have realised that these women do not know how to respond, who to go to and how to get assistance when they have been sexually assaulted. This is evidenced by the fact that a sister of a mentally retarded woman pointed out that to them, justice did not exist. She stated that most people in her village did not understand the issue of Human Rights and they also did not know the best way to respond when her sister was sexually abused 'The Zimbabwean', an online newspaper also reiterates on this thought as it mentioned that disabled women in Zimbabwe continue to be victims of sexual abuse because they do not know how to respond, who to tell and how to get immediate assistance. This is supported by the Sarsyc online report which points out that disabled women are marginalised by stigmatisation and discrimination. This fosters social exclusion hence the end result is that disabled women are in the world of their own. They lack the information concerning how best to deal with issues related to sexual abuse. Furthermore there are poor support systems to help women with disabilities to access justice. According to the Disability Awareness in Action Resource Kit, disabled women do not have access to justice, communication as well as information especially those who have hearing, visual as well as speech impairments in developing

countries . This entails that disabled women have no idea about what to do or who to turn to when they have been sexually abused.

Moreover, poor support systems make it difficult to access justice. Very few public workers who work in public institutions such as health care personnel, police officers or court officials are able to assist WWD that are sexually abused because of factors such as language barriers. These personnel are usually incapable of using sign language or communicate with slurred speech victims. Thus at the courts, hospitals or police station the victim faces expression problems. Again because of stigmatisation and discrimination other public service personnel might disregard the disabled women and their cases and thus refuse assisting them.

In some cases sexually abused disabled women might find logistical challenges to actually go to report their case to the police station, at times get psychiatric assessments done and even attend court cases where necessary. This hinders them from accessing justice. A casing point is that of women who reside in Bikita rural area that need psychiatric assessments done travel as far as Harare to get the assessment report and they have to attend court cases at Masvingo Regional Court. These women, because of poverty cannot afford these logistics. Thus as a result the women would rather leave with the vengeance in their hearts than to go out of their way and try to ensure that they get the justice entitled to them. This hence fosters the continuation of sexual abuse with regards to women with disabilities because perpetrators walk scot-free and thus they continue to foster the sexual abuse in the society. They do not receive the punishment they deserve and so other perpetrators are encouraged by this. No wonder why the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to women with disabilities in rural areas continues to occur at an alarming rate.

### **2.2.5 Myths and Cultural Beliefs**

Cultural beliefs and myths have contributed to the sexual abuse of disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3. Societal attitudes such as stigmatisation and discrimination of women with disabilities have stemmed from the cultural beliefs that have existed since time immemorial in Zimbabwe. This was brought to life a handicapped woman who stated that she thinks that cultural beliefs fosters the creation of an environment which is anti-disability. Therefore such an environment will suspend disabled women in the society, living them vulnerable to sexual abuse. The woman also claimed that when she was sexually abused she was viewed with lot of scepticism as most people said that she was a liar and that she brought the sexual abuse upon herself.

The Integrated Ecological school of thought is also based on the same premise that the negative culture that a disabled woman is subjected to has a footprint in the personification of the woman thus this may lead to the sexual abuse of those women. The culture is part of a system which formulates the system of relations that the disabled women will have. Pritchard (1963) denotes that people with disabilities have always been undermined and disapproved of. Peters and Chimedza (2000) supports this view by stating that disability is perceived as a form of castigation and a bother by the ancestral spirits in the African Setup. Such belief take centre stage in the rural areas and this has emerged to be a contributory factor to the sexual abuse of disabled women. This is so because the segregation of these disabled women that is fostered by culture creates social exclusion. According to Choruma (2007), social exclusion creates sanctions against marrying women with disabilities henceforth subjecting them to sexual exploitation because of the manipulation of different men with the hope of getting married.

Cultural beliefs also justify the marginalisation of WWD by equating disability to inability. Disabled women are regarded as individuals who do not have Sexual Rights. The assumption is that they are

unable to have sex related feelings. The end result is that these women are sexually abused and are not believed when they report their cases in the rural areas. They are said to be crazy and do not know what they speak of. This has greatly acted as a justification for most perpetrators especially when the victim has intellectual, hearing, visual and speech impairments.

Myths associated with disability foster the sexual abuse of WWD. A mentally retarded woman in Bikita District Ward 3 is said to have been sexually abused because the perpetrator mentioned in Court that he wanted to relieve himself from HIV/AIDS as well as to pursue his quest for wealth. According to Choruma (2007), myths that are associated with curing HIV/AIDS have led to the sexual abuse of disabled women. Groce and Trasi (2004) mentioned that this myth is called 'Virgins Cleansing'. The assumption is that HIV/AIDS infected perpetrators believe that one can be virus free if they have sexual intercourse with a virgin, and thus most people perceive disabled women as virgins and so sexually abuse them. Tikiwa (2006) highlighted that the acceleration of cases concerning the sexual abuse of handicapped women is because of the superstition that is associated with the curing of HIV/AIDS. This has largely contributed to the rates of HIV infected disabled women in Zimbabwe.

## **2.2.6 Rural Environment**

Disabled women in Rural Zimbabwe are subjected to intense sexual abuse. This is because the environment that is in the rural areas in specific that of Bikita District posses factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women. These factors will be discussed below.

### **2.2.6.1 Underdevelopment of Rural Areas**

Zimbabwe is still far from being regarded a developed country and this is even worse for its rural areas. It is no secret that the majority of rural population are women, nor is it a debatable issue that

women are the poorest in the rural areas. Arguments have been raised by Modernization theorists who denote that the failure to modernize will cause stagnation in development and impacts of such a situation will be mostly experienced in rural setups. This argument perhaps best explains the situation in Zimbabwe and sheds light on the reason why rural areas create an environment which fosters the sexual abuse of disabled women.

Due to under development, rural areas for example in the Bikita District are characterised by poor building and road infrastructure. Residential areas are sparsely populated and issues like water supply and lightning are still a major problem. African World Bank (2008) points out that in Sub Saharan Africa less than 10% of the rural population has access to electricity this is so in Bikita. A loophole thus exists. A speech impaired woman was of the notion that disabled women often fall victims of sexual abuse because they are caught unaware when they travel quite a distance to fetch water or firewood, and thus are dragged into bushes and then sexually abused. This is even worse for those who are hearing impaired because they cannot hear the approach of the perpetrator.

#### 2.2.6.2 Location of Rural Homesteads.

In most cases rural areas are remote in nature. This entails that apart from the villages being sparsely distributed; they are usually far away from Police stations and Growth Points which are located in central places where minor development has taken place. Having this in mind disabled women become victims of sexual abuse because they are seldom able to report their cases to the police station in time to preserve the needed evidence against the perpetrator. Even in a situation whereby the victim is able to report in time, police personnel at times take long to assess the victim's complaint at her homestead as well as arresting the perpetrator because of under staffing of police personnel in rural areas. A physically impaired woman pointed out that she reported her case to the police after months because she was not keen to travel long distances in a bid to report her case and

access justice because she resides in a remote village. Again because of the fact that most villages are in remote areas there are communication barriers that inhibit the police personnel to get in contact with the victim making the case very difficult to follow up on.

### 2.2.6.3 Interdependence of Villagers in Rural Areas

It is the usual case in most African rural setups that villagers tend to depend on each other because of socio-economic hardships. Relationships are hence formed as a result of the co-existence that exists. These relationships make it appear as though the rural set up is safe and that everyone wants what is best for the next individual. This however is not the actual fact on the ground. Choruma (2007) points out that the existence of such relationships though required for survival at times contributes to the sexual abuse of disabled women because perpetrators usually get comfortable and are well versed with day to day proceedings of the victim's whereabouts such that they actually make a plan of how they will attack their victim.

This has transpired in Bikita District Ward 3. A physically handicapped woman was sexually abused by a man she called '*uncle*'. After investigations were carried out it was realised that the man who was referred to as uncle was not even related to the victim but he was a regular visitor to the victims homestead such that he was aware that during the day time the victim was left home alone. The so called uncle was a builder who had offered to rebuild the granary which had been destroyed by heavy rainfall. One then questions the authenticity of the man when he offered to assist the guardians of the victim.

# **CHAPTER 3: RECOMMENDATIONS OF ERADICATING THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF DISABLED WOMEN**

## **3.1 CHAPTER OVERVIEW**

This chapter will focus on the possible solutions that can be initiated by the government as well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector in a bid to reduce the occurrence of the Sexual Abuse Phenomenon regarding women living with disabilities residing in Bikita District Ward 3. Henceforth this section will establish response mechanisms that are necessary for combating the mentioned Phenomenon. There are socio-cultural and economic interventions that can be implemented to reduce the vulnerability that is associated with disability

## **3.2 PLIGHT OF WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES (SUMMARY)**

Disabled women all over Zimbabwe bear the same problems which not only make them vulnerable but subject them to all kinds of abuse. Such problems include the existence of a poverty and underdeveloped environment, poor protection and reporting mechanisms, misconception of disability, existence of myths and superstitions as well as dependence on caregivers just to mention a few. Having this in mind a stance should be taken so as to constitute a reverse of the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas in particular those in Bikita District Ward 3

## **3.3 METHODS TO REDUCE THE SEXUAL ABUSE OF WWD**

There are Socio-economic interventions that can be executed in a bid to provide solutions to diminish the sexual abuse of women living with disabilities. This entails that the Government as



well as the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector have a part to play for the betterment of women with disabilities as well as to reduce the vulnerability of WWD

### **3.3.1 Political Interventions**

Political interventions are in most cases initiated by the Government because policy formulation is constituted by Policy makers who have the realm of decision making. Thus they control the levers of political change.

#### 3.3.1.1 Policy Formulation

There is need for the establishment of specific legislation in Zimbabwe which attacks the sexual abuse of disabled women. Of course the Government has ratified the Convention of the Rights of Disabled Persons, it has enshrined the Disabled Persons Act and it has also included the Rights of disabled people under section 23 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe but this generalisation of legislation does little to help fight against the sexual abuse of disabled women. Again in Zimbabwe sexual abuse of disabled women especially those who suffer from intellectual disabilities is a punishable offence but there is need for specific legislation in relation to disability and sexual abuse

The establishment of sexual abuse related legislation with regards to women with disabilities will resemble the immediate desire and the concern that the nation has concerning the diminishing of the sexual abuse of disabled women in Bikita District as well as nationwide. The leadership of a nation is held in the arms of policy makers who can either lead the nation astray or rebuild the nation on social justice. It is up to the government to try and solidify its policies and legislation which can help protect vulnerable women from unacceptable sexual violence. The foundation of direct sexual related policies will again act as a benchmark of what is for or against the law and this will help bring perpetrators to book

### 3.3.1.2 Enforcement of Policies and Legislature

It is one thing to establish policies and legislature and it is completely another to ensure that the policies and legislative measures are effective. This then denotes that there is need for vibrant enforcement mechanisms to monitor the existence of legislation and policies. The Government through the call for a Multi-Sectoral engagement has fostered the establishment of the VFU which is a Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) department which deals with issues concerning sexual abuse. This is a good initiative but What about women who are disabled? Is the VFU for their advantage? How will women who are hearing and speech impaired communicate with the Police Officers? All these questions pose the existence of loopholes in the enforcement of policies and legislation. There is need for example Sign Language Interpreters located at police station so as to assist disabled women. Communication barriers impede the progression of sexual abuse cases hence making the policies and legislation ineffective.

### 3.3.1.3 Rigid Prison Sentences

The prison sentence that is given to perpetrators of sexual abuse in relation to disabled women should be rigid in nature. The thinking behind this suggestion is that, disabled women should not be taken advantage of. If anything disabled people should be understood and protected by the community as a whole, therefore perpetrators of such crimes should be given inflexible decrees. This perhaps will reduce the occurrence of sexual abuse incidences. If perpetrators are given short prison sentences then the whole point of trying to bring them to book will be nullified. It is most likely the end result that those perpetrators will victimise other disabled women again

### **3.3.2 Socio-economic Interventions**

The current socio-economic status of most rural areas including Bikita District rural areas is unfortunately underdeveloped and this has contributed to the sexual abuse of especially disabled

women who have been made even more vulnerable by the rural environment. Therefore there is need for a holistic approach to help develop rural Zimbabwe

#### 3.3.2.1 Poverty Eradication

Poverty is almost always associated with rural setups in Zimbabwe. It appears as though the existence of poverty is the underlying cause of sexual abuse in general. In most cases people who reside in rural areas are not employed and if they are not they are probably self employed. Having this in thought the Researcher has observed that the lack of legitimate employment in rural areas often contributes to high crime rates. Often male perpetrators loiter around homestead and thus they get tempted to attack disabled home alone women.

It is also important to mention that the desire to eradicate poverty itself has contributed to the sexual abuse of disabled. Poverty has influenced people to do all they can to become wealthy. Thus as a result people tend to believe in nonexistent ideologies such as the assumption that if one rapes a virgin he can become rich or if one has sexual intercourse with a mentally retarded woman he can become wealthy. This has subjected disabled women to sexual abuse in Bikita. Therefore it is important for the government to initiate economic empowerment and development in collaboration with NGO programming so as to reduce the alarming rates of poverty.

#### 3.3.2.2 Development of Rural Areas

The underdevelopment of rural areas creates an environment which fosters the sexual abuse of disabled women. In Bikita District Ward 3, most households do not have electricity thus they depend on fire wood. Mobility is made difficult because of the non existence of proper constructed roads. Villagers depend on illegitimate roads that they have established. As for water supply, many villagers still travel long distances to fetch water required for sustaining the households. All these

circumstances make it easier for disabled women to fall as victims of sexual abuse because they are either attacked by perpetrators on their way to fetch water and firewood or they are left home by caregivers and thus are sexually abused in their absence.

Some caregivers of disabled young women in Bikita have confirmed that hearing and Speech impaired women are often caught off guard when they go to fetch water and they are usually dragged into nearby bushes and then they are sexually abused. In some instances because of poor lighting perpetrators usually wait for dawn and then sexually assault the disabled women. These may appear as minor dynamics of causes of sexual abuse but these factors create an environment in which sexual abuse thrives.

Development initiations should be taken on board to try and counter the existence of an environment which cultivates sexual abuse. Objectives such as rural electrification, construction of roads and provision of decentralised water saucers should be top priorities on the National Development Agenda.

#### 3.3.2.3 Mainstreaming and Sensitisation of Disability related issues.

Mainstreaming and Sensitisation of disability issues can challenge the existing social order which is characterised by the stigmatisation and discrimination of especially women with disabilities. Such an order has contributed to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas. Disabled people are by social construction worthless and deserve to be marginalised. That is why disabled women always find themselves at the bottom of every social order. This permissible state of society should be distorted. NGOs in collaboration with Government Ministries should attack the private sphere during their programming and initiate the mainstreaming of disability related matters. Rural villagers should be educated, for instance they should know what it means to be disabled, the

challenges that disabled women face and their cry for social justice. Sexual abuse of disabled women should be discussed and its consequences especially for the disabled victim should be brought to light. The community should be both sensitive to gender and sensitive to disability. Whilst mainstreaming entails the involvement of disabled women in society structures this does not mean that perceptions of disabled women are more vital than those of their counterparts. It just does away with the marginalisation of disabled women.

Once the majority of rural residences have been cautioned about disability and the importance of socially including disabled women in the community has been in acted then this gives birth to a new social order. A social order which upholds the Rights of everyone regardless of the fact that some are disabled and others are not. The change of perceptions towards disabled women will act as a conscience against sexually abusing women with disabilities. Disabled women can thus be protected by the community as a whole such that occurrence of the victimisation of disabled women will be on a down fall. It is importance to mention that removal of social barriers alternatively means the foundation of social justice. The existence of social justice entails the adherence to Human Rights. The adherence to Human Rights eliminates all prospects of sexual abuse. Therefore it is thus elementary to initiate mainstream and sensitive disability ideals.

#### 3.3.2.4 Educating Disabled women

Most disabled women were either denied the chance or could not afford to acquire a basis standard education. This has dynamic impacts on most disabled women as it not only contributes to their marginalisation but it entails that they are not fit to get employment. They are sexually abused because they do not know how to respond to sexual abuse tendencies, they do not realise that they have Rights just like their counterparts and again most of them have poor communication skills. All

these aspects render them vulnerable to society domain and to sexual abuse. Measures should thus be taken to try and reverse the fate of disabled women.

a. Training skills

Disability does not entail inability. Though disabled women at times might be physically handicapped, this does not mean they have to do nothing for the betterment of their lives. Disabled women in rural areas should be given the opportunity to be a part of vocational training groups. They should be trained to carry out projects which can sustain their livelihoods. NGO programming should assist disabled women to acquire skills for example being trained to make floor polish, jewellery, and baskets amongst other possible projects. This will reduce the dependence that disabled women have on caregivers who in some instances sexually abuse them because they provide for them.

b. Sexual Abuse based Education

Disabled women are frequently sexually abused at times because they do not know how to dictate sexual abuse tendencies and when they are sexually abused they do not know how to respond to the matter. This is so because despite the fact that dissemination of social justice norms in rural set ups is poor disabled women lack the knowledge concerning sexual abuse related matters. Of course women who have intellectual disabilities might not necessarily benefit from being taught about sexual abuse but those who can benefit should be taught. Awareness campaigns should be done, attacking the private sphere where disabled women are often found with the sole ambition of teaching them about their rights and the best procedures to be taken when one has been sexually abused. Disabled women are usually left out of such activities but they are the most vulnerable of

the vulnerable. This kind of empowerment can go a long way in protecting them from a chaotic environment.

c. Sign Language Training

Women with disabilities especially those who have speech and hearing impairments are vulnerable to sexual abuse because perpetrators are under the assumption that those with hearing and speech impairments have language barriers hence reporting is not an alternative. Therefore it is important to empower such women and give them a voice to defend themselves. This can be achieved if these women are trained the standard sign language. If they are educated they are able to communicate and as a consequence they can report their case to the police and give evidence in court. Communication is important and the failure of disabled women to articulate themselves has made it difficult to imprison perpetrators of sexual abuse on the basis of lack of adequate victim coordination.

### **3.3.3 Cultural Intervention**

Culture is a factor that is contributing to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas hence cultural interventions should be stabled to reduce the sexual abuse of disabled women

#### 3.3.3.1 Delegitimizing of myths and superstitions (cultural beliefs)

The surviving and thriving of myths, superstitions and cultural beliefs should be diminished in an effort to reduce the occurrence of sexual abuse related to disabled women in rural areas. Myths and superstitions make up cultural beliefs which foster the sexual abuse of disabled women. The Village Heads and chiefs should undermine myths such as the belief that AIDS can be cured by having intercourse with disabled women or virgins or the myth that poverty is eradicated if one has sexual intercourse with a virgin. These assumptions that are propagated especially in rural set ups subject

disabled women to sexual abuse. These cultural beliefs should be disapproved of so as to protect not only women in general but to decrease the spread of diseases such as AIDS.

#### 3.3.3.2 Access to Justice

Disabled women are often denied the opportunity to access justice based on socio-cultural considerations. When they have been sexually assaulted the matter is taken to Village Heads or Chiefs who at times disregard the importance of reporting the case to the police but rather favour settling the matter at the Village Court. In most situations, if the perpetrator is found guilty he has to pay compensation in the form of money or livestock. This does not solve the underlying problem. The victim neither benefits from the compensation nor will it reverse her drastic experience. If anything perhaps the caregivers are manipulated by the compensation and thus disregard taking the matter to the police station. The victim deserves some form of justice. Justice can only prevail if the matter is handled in court. Therefore cultural considerations such as settling the matter in the village only protects the perpetrator and does nothing to bring him to book. The least that the victim deserves is the access to justice.

### **3.4 CONCLUSION**

The discussion established in the research thesis has the sole aim of articulating and assessing the factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in Bikita District Ward 3. The desire is to create response mechanisms so as to eradicate the unwanted phenomenon. Development can also thrive if issues such as sexual abuse of innocent civilians are dealt with.

The objectives of the Research Study are basically the assessment of factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women, possible solutions that can eradicate the phenomenon and to engage with the Bikita District Ward 3 community. These objectives are the mirror of the Research



Study. Hence they are the trust of the research questions that are encompassed in the research. Disabled women who reside in rural areas face a multiple of challenges that affect their day to day survival. They are often the poorest of the community because of their so called incompetence to make a living for themselves. They depend on caregivers and guardians for provisions. They live in a society which depicts disability as inability. Social inclusion barriers such as stigmatisation and discrimination marginalise and undermine disabled women. Cultural beliefs also catalyse the undermining of disabled women. The retarded development in rural areas makes it difficult for disabled women to protect themselves against abuse tendencies.

It is important to denote that disabled women are vulnerable to sexual abuse subjectively because dynamic disabilities have different impacts on the capacity of the individual. Intellectual disabilities are complex and they affect the mental capacity of the individual thus making profound and legit decisions is difficult to achieve. Women with mental retardation are often vulnerable to sexual abuse because they are unable to depict sexual abuse tendencies as well as to report the matter to the police. Those who are physically handicapped usually lack the capacity to fight and escape the wrath of sexual abuse perpetrators because of the inability to fight coercion. Women who are speech and hearing impaired in Bikita have mentioned that they are taken advantage of because of their incapability to speak or hear thus making it effortless for the perpetrator to sexually abuse them. Other factors which need mentioning are the lack of Access to information and justice which makes disabled victims powerless in the society with nowhere to turn to. Misconceptions associated with disability also work against disabled victims of sexual abuse because of the social construction that are stated when a disabled victim reports that she has been sexually abused such as the notion that “she is crazy”.

It is therefore imperative to formulate response mechanisms that can reduce the rate of the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas. Such responses should be holistic and integrated in nature. The Government and the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector should initiate political, socio-economic and cultural interventions which can help eradicate the sexual abuse phenomenon with regards to disabled women. Political interventions include Policy formulation and enforcement. Socio-economic interventions include, development of the rural areas, disability mainstreaming and sensitisation, educating disabled women by training them to engage in projects, teaching them sign language as well as engaging them in sexual rights campaigns. Cultural interventions should delegitimize myths superstitions and cultural norms which foster the sexual abuse of disabled women. This Research study can be beneficial to not only academic scholars but it can constitute a turning point in the current social dimensions in relation to disabled women, not only in Bikita District but in all rural areas of Zimbabwe.

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## **Appendices**

My name is Yeukai Patience Mandebvu (R121151T) and I am a student at Midlands State University. I am currently studying a Bachelor of Arts Honours Degree in Development Studies. As per the requirements of my Degree Programme, I am carrying out a Research Thesis on the assessment of factors that contribute to the sexual abuse of disabled women in rural areas and my case study is Bikita District Ward 3. This questionnaire was proposed for the purposes of collecting data with regards to the above mentioned Research Topic. The data collected will be used for academic purposes only. Your support will be earnestly appreciated.

# Appendix A

## Questionnaires

Please mark the appropriate answers with a tick where necessary.

1. What is your disability? Specify if other.

M.R       P. H       S.I       H.I       Other

.....

2. As a woman, do you feel stigmatised and discriminated against because you are disabled?

.....

.....

3. What is your relation to the person who sexually abused you?

.....

4. Do you think that your disability exposes you to sexual abuse?

.....

.....

5. Can you briefly explain your encounter?

.....

.....

.....

.....  
.....

6. Did you tell anyone about your sexual abuse encounter? If not state why

Yes  No

.....  
.....

7. Was the matter reported to the police? If so what action was taken?

.....  
.....

8. When you spoke out how did your family and the society react?

.....  
.....

9. Do you regret speaking out?

.....  
.....

10. Do you think that the rural setup and culture subject you to sexual abuse?

.....  
.....

Thank You



## **Appendix B**

### Interview Guide

1. What is your disability?
2. As a woman, do you feel stigmatised and discriminated against because of your disability?
3. How does the society react to the fact that you are disabled?
4. Do you think being disabled subjects you to sexual abuse?
5. Have you ever been sexually abused?
6. What is your relation to the person who sexually abused you?
7. Did you tell anyone about your encounter?
8. What action did that person take?
9. How did your family and society react when you spoke out?
10. Do you regret speaking out?
11. Do you think residing in the rural areas subject you to sexual abuse?
12. What do you think should be done to reduce the sexual abuse of disabled women in your area?