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## NDAU CULTURAL PRACTICES AND THE VIOLATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN ZIMBABWE

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**ABSTRACT**

This study examined the intersection of Ndau cultural practices and women's rights in Zimbabwe, highlighting the cultural norms and traditions that perpetuate violations of women's rights. It reveals a critical need for culturally nuanced interventions to protect the rights and dignity of Ndau women. The Ndau are an ethnic group that inhabits the southeastern Zimbabwean areas, specifically in the districts of Chipinge and Chimanimani, where they are native. According to the 2024 Zimbabwe census statistics, the population of the Ndau people is estimated to be around 558,000. Ndau women play a significant role in agriculture and childcare, but are often excluded from decision-making processes and face various forms of violence and discrimination. A qualitative approach with a phenomenological research design was utilised for this study, where data were collected from a sample of seven Ndau women and three key informants who were selected using purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were used following a guide with key questions on how the Ndau culture contributes to the violation of women's rights. Thematic analysis was used following these steps: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. While acknowledging that Ndau culture, like many others, is multifaceted and encompasses practices like a family court (dare), Ndau dances, and the role of the extended family, which promotes women's rights, the study established that the Ndau cultural practices that violate women's rights include early marriages, male dominance, reparation marriage, preference for a boy child, and limited ownership of land and property by women. Sarah Longwe's gender analysis framework was adopted to frame the discussion. First, the background and context, theoretical framework, and methodology are presented. The paper concludes by presenting the results and discussion, implications for social work, and the conclusion.

**KEY TERMS:** culture, Ndau, social work, violation, women, women's rights, Zimbabwe

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture is a complex construct which comprises beliefs, values, symbols, and rituals that are exhibited and shape the lives of the members of a group. The article interrogates how the Ndau women are affected by the cultural practices against attaining their rights. Sibanda (2024) postulates that the Ndau are a native ethnic group that lives in the regions of Chipinge and Chimanimani in southeast Zimbabwe. They can be found in central Malawi, the Zambezi Valley, central Mozambique to the coast, and portions of Bikita. The Ndau people have a rich cultural heritage, and their practices and traditions have been shaped by their history, geography, and social context. The researchers sought to better grasp the intricate factors influencing the violation of women's rights in this community by looking at Ndau's cultural traditions. Like many other patriarchal communities, the Ndau community maintains cultural customs that violate women's rights and uphold gender inequity. The researchers aimed to identify and draw attention to the unique challenges women in this community experience. As researchers, we are personally interested in learning about the customs and cultural practices of the Ndau people. The United Nations and the African Union established women's rights as basic human rights that apply to everyone on earth. These freedoms include the right to education, to own property, to exercise one's right to vote, and to live free from slavery, violence, and prejudice. education, health, political engagement, economic security, and freedom from violence are only a few examples of the many areas of life that women's rights cover.

## BACKGROUND

The concept of women's rights has been covered by several international, regional and national agreements. The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA) of 1995, and Sustainable Development Goal number 5, which targets gender equality and empowerment for women, recognise women's rights on a global scale. Friedman (2018) emphasises how women's human rights activists have started to realise the strength of the international human rights framework, which gives political demands authority because it is already acknowledged by the majority of states and carries with it established conventions.

The Maputo Protocol, which was endorsed by African Union nations and illustrates the problem of gender inequality and discrimination against women on the African continent, is a Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR), 2018). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development was confirmed by the required two-thirds of member states, and it became effective in 2013 (Kampilipili, 2018). The SADC Protocol on Gender and Development was updated in 2016, and the revamped protocol urges the establishment of rules, regulations, plans, and programs that take into account the needs of both men and women (Kampilipili, 2018).

Zimbabwe is not spared from the problem of violation of women's rights, hence it is a signatory to the international human rights frameworks for women's rights (Bere, Jerenyama, and Machakanja, 2016). Zimbabwe ratified CEDAW, the BPfA, as well as the 2008 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development, and the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Women's Rights. The Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No. 20) Act 2013 places a strong focus on the value and acknowledgement of women's rights in all walks of life. The Zimbabwean Constitution's Section 17 addresses gender-related issues and directs the government to make it possible for women to participate fully in all areas of society on an equal footing with men. In Zimbabwe, there are also laws and regulations in place to safeguard women against unfair treatment. To ensure the safety of women, laws such as the Domestic Violence Act (Chapter 5:16), the Marriage Act (Chapter 5.11), the Termination of Pregnancy Act (Chapter 15:10), the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Act (Chapter 9:23), the Children's Act (Chapter 5:06) and the National Gender Policy have been enacted.

Msuya (2019) contends that tradition and culture should uphold the principles of equality and human rights to prevent forcing women to choose between their rights and their culture, which would be uncomfortable. The acknowledgement of collective cultural rights is hampered by cultural justifications that excuse human rights abuses and the capture of culture by dominant (male) elites (Xanthaki, 2019). The researchers conducted this research because they wanted to gain an in-depth understanding of the Ndau culture concerning women's rights and to come up with suggestions to promote the full realisation of women's rights.

## LITERATURE

This literature review aims to provide an overview of the existing research on Ndau cultural practices and their impact on women's rights in Zimbabwe. The purpose of this review is to identify the key concepts that inform our understanding of the complex relationship between culture and human rights in the Ndau community. A narrative review of existing literature was conducted using a combination of databases and search engines. Chabaya, Rembe, and Wadesango (2017) postulate that genital mutilation is one of the cultural practices that

violates women's rights. Genital mutilation refers to all procedures that include the partial or complete removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical uses (World Health Organization, 2022). Genital mutilation is a practice that crosses cultures and countries and is widely accepted as a violation of human rights, according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2021:95), but it always shows the low value put on women in society in which it is practised. This deprives young women of their youth, violates their right to bodily autonomy, inhibits them from pursuing an education, and is regularly performed on girls who are in school, all of which are bad for their short- and long-term health.

Mlaba (2022) notes that bridal kidnapping is one of the traditions that violates the rights of women. The term "bride kidnapping" refers to both coercive abductions and voluntarily fleeing couples (Lundberg, 2021). The practice of kidnapping women to force them into marriage is prevalent in several regions of the world. It exists in different parts of Europe and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in East and Central Asia. Bride kidnapping is an infringement on a woman's right to determine her fate (Mlaba, 2022). When people are compelled into successive forced marriages and bride kidnappings, there are more instances of spousal abuse against women (Lundberg, 2021). According to Konyana (2016), women's oppression among the Ndau people is rooted in patriarchy and masculinity, which sustain widespread domestic and intimate partner violence.

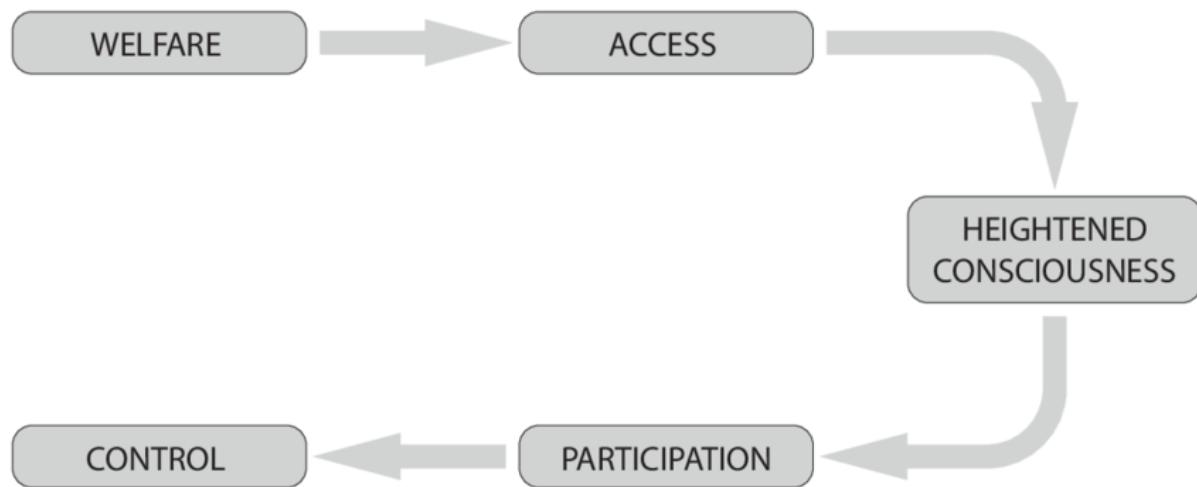
Although child marriage occurs almost everywhere in the globe, the two regions with the highest rates are sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia (Mlaba, 2022). The desire for financial security or hardship, acute gender imbalance in some locations, and acceptance of societal or ethnic practices are the main drivers of child marriage (Mlaba, 2022). Young girls are routinely prevented from attending school, denied the chance to develop, and significantly more likely to endure abuse and health issues (Owen, 2021). Zimbabwe is among the top 20 African countries with the greatest rate of underage marriages (Allix, 2021; Madhomu, 2022:12). Sithole (2019:58) notes that 8000 girls in rural Zimbabwe have been forced into early marriages or used as sex slaves since 2008.

Virginity testing is one of the cultural practices that infringe on women's rights (Farise, 2019). Virginity examinations often entail inserting two fingers into the vagina, examining the hymen for tears, or measuring the size of the opening, or both (WHO, 2018). Women and girls are regularly subjected to virginity tests for a variety of reasons, such as requests from parents, potential spouses, or even potential employers to establish their readiness for marriage (UN, 2018). Ngubane (2020) points out that those opposed to virginity testing, such as several South African human rights organizations and the South African Human Rights Commission of virginity inspection, are adamant that the practice violates constitutional provisions defending young women's rights to equality, privacy, physical integrity, and sexual autonomy. Virginity testing is viewed by UN agencies as a violation of girls' and women's rights that could be detrimental to their physical, psychological, and social well-being (UN, 2018). Virginity tests have their roots in social norms that place a high value on regulating women's and girls' bodies and sexuality (Straube, 2019). Limited land ownership, heavy domestic chores, constrained educational access and economic marginalisation compound women's poverty (Ingwani, 2021; Mupangwa, 2023; Ndhlovu & Wielenga, 2023).

## THEORETICAL FRAMING

This article is framed around feminist theory, particularly African feminist, which is a postcolonial theory. African feminism situates these experiences of African women within broader social realities such as colonial legacies, economic marginalisation, and political exclusion, recognising that gender oppression cannot be separated from the survival and well-being of families and communities. For Ndau women, cultural practices often perpetuate violations of their rights, making it essential to preserve empowering traditions while challenging harmful ones. African feminism also calls for better access to education, health, and political participation, and recognises the historical and ongoing contributions of women to community development, peacebuilding, and activism. This perspective aligns with Sara Longwe's five-level framework (Figure 1) of women's empowerment, which emphasises welfare (ensuring basic survival needs), access (equitable access to resources such as education, land, and jobs), conscientisation (awareness of gender inequalities and rights), participation (active involvement in decision-making at all levels), and control (having authority over resources and decisions that affect one's life) (Longwe, 1995). Together, these approaches point to a critical need for culturally nuanced interventions that protect the rights and dignity of Ndau women while engaging their communities in transformative change.

Figure 1: Sarah Longwe's gender framework



## METHODOLOGY

The study investigated how the Ndau culture contributes to the violation of women's rights in Zimbabwe. A qualitative research approach was employed as it helps to illuminate how the Ndau culture infringes on women's rights. It enables an in-depth exploration of the complex and nuanced relationships between Ndau cultural practices and women's rights. The study used a descriptive phenomenological research design. Understanding social phenomena from the viewpoint of those who experienced them is the aim of phenomenological study design (Ataro, 2020). Purposive sampling was used to select both the primary participants and the key informants. The study had a total sample size of 10 participants. Seven women who were all residents of Chipinge District served as the study's primary participants. One social worker and two Ministry of Women Affairs and Gender representatives who worked with women in the Ndau communities were the key informants. In our study, we achieved data saturation through semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, where themes and patterns started repeating themselves, and no new insights emerged. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from the primary participants and the key informants. The Manicaland province of Zimbabwe is home to Chipinge District, where the research study was carried out. Chipinge District is home to the majority of Ndau speakers with sufficient cultural knowledge. The researchers received permission from Midlands State University, the School of Social Work Ethics Research Committee and the Chipinge Rural District Council before commencing their study. Soon after the study's completion, the researchers gave feedback to the community regarding the results of the study. They also submitted a copy of the results to Chipinge Rural District Council and the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Gender. Thematic data analysis was employed following the six steps by Braun and Clarke. Firstly, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data by listening to interview tapes, transcribing the data, and reading the transcriptions. Secondly, the researchers categorised the data into many units using colour coding. Thirdly, the researchers categorised data from the transcripts that were comparable, which resulted in the creation of themes and sub-themes. Fourthly, the researchers examined themes to ensure that they accurately and appropriately represented the information gathered. Fifthly, the themes were defined and named to make sure they were succinct, sufficiently descriptive, and pertinent to the larger study issue. Lastly, to demonstrate the findings of the investigation, the researchers created a written document.

Table 1: Sociodemographic profile of the primary participants

Pseudonym	Age	Marital Status	Religion	Level of Education	Living with?
Participant 1	54	Widowed	Christian	Degreed	Alone
Participant 2	66	Married	Christian	High School	Husband
Participant 3	21	Single	Christian	Tertiary	Family
Participant 4	30	Married	Christian	Tertiary	Husband
Participant 5	50	Single	Christian	Tertiary	Family
Participant 6	40	Widowed	None	Primary	Alone
Participant 7	18	Single	Christian	Tertiary	Family

Table 2. Sociodemographic profile of the key informants

Participant	Position	Mission of the Organisation	Mandate of the Organisation	Period working with the organisation
Key Informant 1	An employee of a Non-governmental organisation	Supporting young people to break the cycle of poverty by learning skills	Creating independent, influential women	7
Key Informant 2	Employee of a government organisation	Coordination and oversight of the policy on violence against women	To put women's rights on the spotlight	10
Key Informant 3	Employee of a government organisation	Coordination and oversight of the policy on violence against women	To put women's rights on the spotlight	6

## RESULTS

The study's objective was to analyse how the Ndau culture contributes to women's rights violations in Zimbabwe. Understanding the cultural factors that contribute to women's rights violations in Zimbabwe is crucial for developing effective interventions and policies that promote gender equality and protect women's rights. From the study, five sub-themes emerged: early marriages, male dominance, reparation marriages, preference for a boy child, and women's limited ownership of land and property, and these are presented in the following sections.

### Early marriages

Early marriage has been indicated by participants as one of the Ndau cultural practices that contravene women's rights. Most of the participants indicated that women are married off at a very young age among the Ndau. This is noticeable in the following storylines:

*the practice of marrying off women at a young age still exists. Most girls and young women are even married off to men in Mozambique because they have a better socio-economic status. Families marry off women at a young age to get away with poverty in their homes. Some of the young women are even married off to older men or even the apostolic religious leaders (Participant 3).*

*girls are married off as soon as they reach puberty because that is what our elders expect, even if the girls want to stay in school (Participants 5, 6).*

*I have 2 siblings who were married off one after the other. The first one was married at 14 years and the other one at 15 years. People do not report to the police because it is a normal practice in our area (Participant 7).*

A key informant who works with PLAN International also mentioned that early marriage is one of the Ndau cultural practices which violate women's rights. This is what the key informant reiterated:

*Young women have no control in terms of who is going to marry them, as parents and elders of the family override their decision and marry them off at a very young age to improve their socio-economic status (Key Informant 1).*

The study has found that early marriage exists among the Ndau in Chipinge, especially in the rural, remote areas of Chipinge District. From the socio-cultural theory, the right of women to choose whom they want to marry is infringed because the Ndau parents and elders can marry them without their consent. This is supported by the writings of Konyana (2016), who argues that early marriages are a part of the Ndau cultural practices, and they exist in different forms. It is well known that Chipinge is one of the places where women's rights are most frequently violated. This has led to numerous families marrying off their daughters to older men with more financial resources. A minimum age of 18 is required for marriage, and forced marriage is outlawed by Section

78 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe. According to the law, no one may be forced to marry against their will.

### Male dominance

The research conducted revealed that male dominance is one of the Ndau cultural practices that violates women's rights. Most of the participants indicated that the Ndau people are very patriarchal, and this fosters male dominance. This is shown below by Participant 4, who states:

*The surviving eldest male member is the head of the family and takes the lead in family arrangements. He is referred to as "musharukwa", which means the wise old man. . The male dominance in the Ndau culture is indicated by leadership itself, whereby the chief is a male. Most, if not all, of the Chiefs, going down to headmen, headmen's advisors and headmen's eyes (mapurisa amambo) among the Ndau people are males. It is only men who can go abroad or very far away, leaving the wife to take care of the family. Men take the lead in the appeasement of the spirits; our duty as women is just to sing (Participant 4).*

*Women are being beaten up, and this is associated with that cultural norm to say I have married you; I have paid bride price for you, and I need to be in charge of your life... Men tend to say whatever you get from piece jobs should be brought home, and the father or the husband should decide how the money is going to be used... (Participant 2).*

*men are traditionally viewed as heads of households and decision-makers, while women are expected to submit to their authority (Participants 5, 1).*

The key informant supported the evidence presented above by the primary participants that male dominance is one of the Ndau cultural practices which goes against women's rights. The key informant said that:

*...Women are sidelined, especially in decision-making, at the family level, in other important sectors, like at church and other important cultural gatherings. The males take the lead in almost all the sectors of life. Currently, there is marital rape among the Ndau in Chipinge, but it is justified because the society is male-dominated. Sometimes women are forced to engage in some sexual activities within the parameters of marriage, but sometimes they do not even consent to sexual activities. Women cannot say no because they are socialised in a way that they should submit to their husbands (Key informant 1).*

Male dominance has been identified as one of the Ndau cultural practices which infringe on the rights of women among the Ndau. They are patriarchal and believe that the eldest male member is the head of the family. They also think that the role of women is to submit to their husbands. The males are viewed with great respect, and they make the final decisions about family or community matters. Women are not allowed to take part in decision-making even though they have something meaningful to say. In traditional courts among the Ndau, women should just be seen and not be heard. Male dominance is spearheaded because of the patriarchal nature of the Ndau culture.

### Reparation marriage (*kuripa ngozi*)

The study found that reparation marriage is a Ndau cultural practice which goes against women's rights. Reparation marriages are very common, and young women are used as reparation, as indicated by Participant 2 below:

*There is something called "bunha" among the Ndau people in Chipinge. "Bunha" is a young woman who is given as reparation to address the angry spirit known as "ngozi". The name that is given for a vengeful spirit of a person who was killed and returns to exact retribution is called "ngozi". Young women are used to compensate for the crimes committed by their brothers, fathers or even uncles. The Ndau people value reparation marriages because they have the view that until an angry spirit is placated, family members will suffer from sickness and other calamities. (Participant 2).*

*my brother, who is in the rural areas of Chipinge near the border of Mozambique, was suspected of killing his neighbour. The issue was handled by the traditional leaders, and there was no clear evidence that my brother had killed the neighbour. However, our father, who is Ndau and part of the Chief's council, suggested that my cousin was to be offered as compensation to the deceased man's family. My cousin, who is only 20 years old, was married off to compensate for the angry spirit (Participant 4).*

The key informant from Women's Affairs and Gender provided similar information to that of the primary participants. The key informants' view on reparation marriages was:

*...the traditional Ndaу people, especially those in the rural areas, are still strict and hesitant to change in terms of reparation marriages. These types of marriages are very much valued among the Ndaу people as they believe that they are done to compensate the angry spirits. They believe that satisfying the angry spirit will prevent sickness and other calamities (Key Informant 3).*

Reparation marriages have been identified as one of the Ndaу cultural practices that violates women's rights. The study has found that this is a common practice among the Ndaу in Chipinge, especially in the rural areas, because they regard it as a conflict resolution model. The Ndaу believe that "kuripa ngozi" is a kind of peace intervention that helps a family who has lost a family member to murder go progressively from the stage of being locked in mourning to working with their loss. Girls and women are made a socially disadvantaged group by the practice of "kuripa ngozi", which involves forcing them into marriage to satisfy the aggrieved spirit.

### **The preference for a boy child**

Son preference has been stated as a practice among the Ndaу that infringes on the rights of women. The participants indicated that the Ndaу people have a belief that boys are of greater value than girls. This is indicated from the verbatim given by participant 7:

*... those in the rural areas of Chipinge still uphold son preference in terms of access to education. The father can sell his cow so that the son goes to school, but he cannot do that to the girl child. (Participant 7).*

*.... We believe that a girl child has nothing valuable to say but should just sit down and listen to what fathers and sons have to say. In some typical Ndaу areas, girls sit down with both legs (chibondokoto) as a sign of humility of the highest order. (Participant 3).*

*males are more important than the females because they facilitate the continuation of their lineage, and they are also able to protect the family. The male child is given the first preference, especially in terms of access to education and ownership of land and property. The male child is seen as the future father or the head of the family (Key Informant 2).*

The study has shown that son preference is a cultural practice that infringes on women's rights as it suppresses their right to be heard, and the right to education, just to mention a few. In a family set up among the Ndaу in Chipinge, the son is allowed to voice out more than the daughter. They believe that daughters should just remain quiet and listen to what their fathers and sons have to say. Historically, sons have been preferred, and this tendency is still present now due to several economic, cultural, and institutional circumstances. Carranza (2012) emphasises that history has demonstrated that boys are favoured in all spheres of life, including royal succession laws and land inheritance in peasant families. This is very much similar to the son preference among the Ndaу, where sons are given more priority in terms of leadership and land rights.

### **Limited ownership of land and property by women**

Limited ownership of land and property by women has been indicated by participants as one of the cultural practices that violate the rights of women among the Ndaу:

*As women, we are not allowed to own any piece of land. We must work in the fields so that the family will not suffer from hunger. We are even given portions of land which we should work on. The land is owned by the father or the eldest male son in the family". (Participant 4).*

*... the fathers are the head of the family, and hence they own the communal lands instead of women. Our duty as women is to submit to our husbands and respect whatever they say... all the valuable property is owned by the males. The fathers are the ones who own the cattle (Participant 1).*

*In terms of communal land, women only have access to land and are the majority who provide labour. They don't own land, but they work on the land. Inasmuch as there is the issue of recent land allocations, very few women own land. The Ndaу believe that women do not have the power to own and protect land and property (Key Informant 3).*

The Ndaу women have very restricted ownership of land and property, as the men are the ones who own the bigger and valuable properties. They would rather pass the property and land to the male child instead of the female. This is against fundamental human rights agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which states that there should be equal access for women to land and property.

## DISCUSSION

### Cultural practices and gender inequality

The discussion is grounded in African feminism, in particular, Sarah Longwe's framework (Longwe, 1995). The findings of this study reveal a complex web of Ndaу cultural practices that perpetuate the violation of women's rights in Zimbabwe. The prevalence of early marriages, male dominance, reparation marriages, preference for a boy child, and women's limited ownership of land and property are all deeply ingrained in Ndaу culture. These practices not only undermine women's autonomy and agency but also perpetuate their subordination and marginalisation (Ingwani, 2021; Mupangwa, 2023). One of the most striking aspects of these findings is how Ndaу cultural practices reinforce patriarchal norms and values. The emphasis on male dominance, for instance, perpetuates a culture of silence and submission among women, making it difficult for them to assert their rights or challenge abusive relationships. The male domination of societies is preserved by men for the purpose of serving male interests, where women are given most of the work, and men collect most of the rewards (Longwe, 1995). This is evident in the practice of early marriages, where young girls are forced to marry older men, often without their consent. This deprives them of their childhood and education and reinforces their subordinate status within the family and community (Sharper et al., 2025). Furthermore, the preference for a boy child reinforces the notion that women's value lies in their ability to produce male heirs, rather than in their inherent worth and dignity. This has significant implications for women's self-esteem and agency, as they are often judged and valued based on their ability to bear sons. The perpetuation of these patriarchal norms and values also has broader implications for society, as it reinforces a culture of inequality and discrimination against women.

### Intersectional nature of women's oppression

This study highlights the intersectional nature of women's oppression in Ndaу culture. Women's limited ownership of land and property is not only a violation of their economic rights but also perpetuates their dependence on men and reinforces their subordinate status. Antonio (2021) highlighted that thousands of women from Chipinge have urged the Chipinge Rural District Council to put an end to the forced eviction of residents residing on customary land, particularly women and children. The equal access for women to land and property is supported by fundamental human rights agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 1948; United Nations 1966; United Nations, 1979). However, this practice exists because it is usually handled at a family level. This intersectional nature of women's oppression is also evident in the practice of reparation marriages, where a woman is forced to marry a man to appease the spirits. Chivasa (2019) notes that, although handing over a young woman for a reparation marriage is against the law in Zimbabwe, it seems that many girls and women still go through the practice in silence because it is handled at the family level. This not only deprives her of her autonomy but also reinforces her status as a commodity to be exchanged between families. When people are compelled into successive forced marriages and bride kidnappings, there are more instances of spousal abuse against women (Lundberg, 2021). Moreover, the intersectional nature of women's violation in Ndaу culture is also evident in how different forms of oppression compound and intersect. For example, women's limited access to education and economic opportunities not only reinforces their subordinate status but also makes them more vulnerable to domestic violence and other forms of abuse (Konyana, 2016; Mupangwa, 2023; Ndhlovu & Wielenga, 2023). Similarly, the cultural norms and values that perpetuate women's oppression are often reinforced by other forms of oppression, such as poverty and lack of access to healthcare. Obiagu (2023) notes that women's education and economic empowerment are key measures to promoting gender equality and reducing oppression against women, which is one of the indicators of gender equality.

Table 3: Analysis of the Ndau women's situation using Longwe's framework

Aspect	Key findings relating to this aspect	What this means and how the situation of Ndau women can be changed
Welfare	Preference for a boy child	This limits girls' opportunities, reinforces patriarchal norms, and hinders women's empowerment. There is a need to promote inclusive education policies, awareness campaigns, and community programs to conscientise the public on equality.
Access	Limited ownership of land and property by women	This limits economic empowerment, increases vulnerability to poverty, and reinforces dependence on men. This can be changed through advocacy for policy reforms, awareness campaigns, and community programs to promote women's land and property rights.
Conscientisation	i. Early marriages ii. Male dominance iii. Reparation marriages	These practices persist partly because many community members view them as normal or even virtuous traditions. This can be changed through raising consciousness. This involves helping women and communities realise that these practices are not only cultural but also oppressive, and that women have the right to equality and autonomy
Mobilisation	N/A	N/A
Control	i. Male dominance ii. Early marriages iii. Reparation marriage	Male dominance perpetuates patriarchal norms, limits women's autonomy, and increases vulnerability to abuse. This can be changed through promoting community-based initiatives, awareness campaigns, and education programs to challenge patriarchal norms and promote women's empowerment.  Early marriages limit girls' education, increase health risks, and perpetuate cycles of poverty. This can be changed through implementing and enforcing laws prohibiting child marriage, promoting education and awareness programs, and supporting community-based initiatives to prevent early marriage.  Reparation marriages deny women's autonomy, increase vulnerability to abuse, and perpetuate patriarchal norms. There is a need to promote awareness campaigns, community-based initiatives, and policy reforms to challenge and eliminate these practices.

The application of Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework proved useful in analysing the Ndau cultural practices that violate women's rights, particularly through the aspects of welfare, access, conscientisation, and control. The framework effectively illuminated how cultural norms restrict women's access to resources, decision-making, and self-determination. However, the aspect of mobilisation was less applicable, as the study context revealed limited evidence of collective action among women to challenge these practices. While the framework adequately captures the structural dimensions of gender inequality, it could be improved by integrating a stronger cultural or intersectional lens to account for the influence of deeply rooted traditions and local power dynamics. This would enhance its applicability in contexts where gender oppression is sustained primarily through cultural and customary practices.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Given the limitations of our sample size, our findings should be seen as a foundation for further research on Ndau cultural practices and women's rights. Nevertheless, they offer some insights that may be useful for social workers and policymakers seeking to address the aspect of culture and women's rights. The study revealed that the cultural practices and beliefs that violate women's rights include early marriage, male dominance, reparation marriages, son preference, and women's limited access to land and property ownership. These findings may have implications for social work in general as well as for women's rights policy and practice. Women's rights are crucial from the standpoint of developmental social work since they aim to bring about social change and advance equality in

society.

*“No nation in the world can rise to the height of glory unless women are side by side with you.”* (Mukhtar & Islam, 2014). The findings of this study highlight the necessity for culturally sensitive interventions to address violations of women's rights within Ndau culture. Feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and cultural competence theory provide valuable insights into the complex factors contributing to these violations. Additionally, African theories such as Ubuntu, African womanism, and postcolonial theory can play an important role in this context. Empowerment-based practices, community-based participatory research, and trauma-informed care are promising models that can be utilised to develop effective interventions. Social workers have a crucial role in addressing women's rights violations in the Ndau culture. To do this effectively, they should receive training on harmful cultural practices and their impacts on women's rights. This training should be developed in collaboration with community leaders and women's groups.

Social workers should adopt empowerment-based practice approaches to prioritise the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Ndau women. Furthermore, they should establish community-based support services, such as counselling and advocacy programs, to assist Ndau women who have experienced human rights violations. Additional research is necessary to gain a better understanding of the complex factors contributing to women's rights violations in the Ndau culture. This research should focus on developing culturally sensitive and effective interventions. It is also essential to employ community-based participatory research methods to collaborate with Ndau community leaders and women's groups in formulating research questions, methodologies, and interventions. Future research should examine the intersection of Ndau cultural practices with other forms of oppression, such as poverty, racism, and classism.

Addressing women's rights violations in Ndau culture requires a fundamental shift in power dynamics that prioritises the empowerment and well-being of Ndau women. By collaborating with Ndau women, community leaders, and women's groups, and by focusing on the development of culturally sensitive and effective interventions, we can aspire to create a brighter future characterised by equality, justice, and human rights for Ndau women. Ultimately, it is our responsibility to ensure that the rights and dignity of Ndau women are respected and protected. Let us meet this challenge and work toward a better future for everyone.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the Ndau cultural practices in Zimbabwe that contribute to the violation of women's rights. The findings highlight the urgent need to address harmful cultural practices such as early marriages, male dominance, reparation marriages, son preference, and limited access to land and property for women. These practices not only perpetuate the subordination and marginalisation of women but also undermine their fundamental human rights. The study emphasises the importance of cultural transformation and the need for a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between culture, power, and gender. Efforts to address the violation of women's rights in Ndau culture must be multidimensional, involving not only policy and legislative reforms but also community-based initiatives aimed at challenging and transforming harmful cultural norms and practices. Ultimately, achieving women's rights in Ndau culture will require a fundamental shift in power dynamics that prioritises the empowerment and agency of women. As we move forward, it is essential to centre the voices, experiences, and perspectives of Ndau women and to collaborate with community leaders and stakeholders to develop context-specific solutions that promote gender equality, justice, and human rights.

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