

Master Thesis

Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Interventions Through Trust-Building



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MA Thesis

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Abstract

Gender-based violence remains a widespread issue in Sub-Saharan Africa, influencing survivors' help-seeking behavior. Women often face barriers to accessing support services due to cultural and societal expectations, highlighting the need for effective intervention strategies. Current literature fails to address the complicated relationship between cultural factors and power imbalances in gender-based violence interventions, leaving a significant knowledge gap on how to build trust between survivors and NGOs that help them.

This study fills that gap by examining how local cultural settings interact with international guidelines in combating gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. The study emphasizes the role of trust, as supported by Social Exchange Theory, in shaping organizational initiatives and help-seeking behaviors. The study investigates participants' experiences and perspectives within their respective cultural contexts through in-depth interviews with representatives from eight NGOs in seven Sub-Saharan African countries.

The study highlights three key findings regarding the effectiveness of gender-based violence programs. Firstly, effective gender-based violence programs rely on the building of deep, trusting relationships. Secondly, trust is primarily built through word-of-mouth referrals and survivor advocacy, which encourages more women to seek help. Lastly, integrating culturally appropriate practices, such as community-led support mechanisms and education about gender-based violence, into global strategies improves the efficacy and acceptability of gender-based violence interventions.

This research provides a detailed understanding of trust interactions in gender-based violence interventions, which is crucial for bridging the gap between international standards and local cultural values. It serves as an important step toward developing culturally sensitive and effective gender-based violence interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the need for future research to refine theoretical models and assess the long-term effects of community involvement and empowerment programs.

Keywords: Trust-building, Gender-based violence, Sub-Saharan Africa

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1. Introduction

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have played an essential role in the global movement against gender-based violence, notably intimate partner violence. Over the last decade, increased international attention has resulted in significant policy reforms in many countries, emphasizing the critical role that NGOs play in helping survivors and creating community trust and empowerment initiatives (Palermo et al., 2014). These initiatives, which are deeply rooted in feminist theory, seek to dismantle the structures that enable violence against women.

This study focuses on Sub-Saharan Africa, where the prevalence of gender-based violence points to a systemic problem that persists regardless of major global initiatives (Aboagye et al., 2023). The prevalence and reporting of violence against women differ significantly between Sub-Saharan African and Western countries, which are heavily influenced by socioeconomic and cultural factors. With roughly 33% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank Gender Data Portal, 2022) having experienced intimate partner violence, gender-based violence is extremely prevalent in this region.

When looking for help, the statistics show a clear disparity between Western countries and Sub-Saharan Africa. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women's formal help seeking can be limited by cultural standards and institutionalized obstacles. Many women in this area depend more on unofficial networks—family and community members—than on official support structures. For instance, just 1.9% of Nigerian women who reported intimate partner violence sought help from official sources, compared to 31.3% who sought help from unofficial sources (Aboagye et al., 2023).

The general acceptance of intimate partner violence together with the lower socioeconomic empowerment of women, indicate the widespread violence against women in these countries (Ghose & Yaya, 2019; Uthman et al., 2009). The absence of quality data makes efforts to precisely estimate and handle the scope of this issue even more difficult. Many African governments have shown strong policy commitments and invested in women's education and empowerment projects; yet, deep-rooted cultural norms and attitudes toward gender-based violence imply that the results remain dismal (Ghose & Yaya 2019). The alarming frequency of several kinds of violence directed against women—physical, psychological, and sexual as well as emotional abuse—highlights the systematic character of the issue. Efforts to solve these problems are often complicated by societal attitudes that normalize such violence and by the numerous obstacles women encounter in seeking help, including stigma, shame, and financial restrictions (Aboagye et al., 2023; Mahenge & Stöckl, 2021).

Trust is an important aspect of gender-based violence interventions. It has a significant impact on people's actions and interactions within social systems, particularly in terms of help-seeking behavior among women who have experienced violence (Banda, 2020). Because of historical and socioeconomic contexts, trust processes in Sub-Saharan Africa are particularly complex. Women in Sub-Saharan Africa may distrust formal institutions due

to past experiences of betrayal, stigma, and society's rejection of seeking help (Aboagye et al., 2023).

In gender-based violence interventions, trust can take on several meanings. It addresses trust as both a mental state and a social phenomenon (Delhey & Newton, 2003). Trust is an interactive process that requires both sensitivity and empathy from help providers and beneficiaries (Barker, 2007). Establishing trust is even more imperative in societies characterized by social and gender inequalities, such as many in Sub-Saharan Africa. The primary strategy for social cohesiveness is recommended to consist of a commitment to trust, stressing mutual support and avoiding the exploitation of vulnerability. (Ezirim et al., 2021). This research addresses power disparities in survivors' interactions with support organizations by focusing on the sociological concept of trust, which strengthens social ties.

NGOs trying to help gender-based violence survivors have to address difficult power relations if they are to establish trust. These organizations frequently wield significant power over the survivors they seek to assist, influencing survivors' willingness to collaborate, trust, and reveal sensitive information—all of which are critical components of successful intervention (Goldman and Little, 2015). Furthermore compromising NGOs' values and their responsiveness to local needs are donor needs (Morgan, 2016). Often originating in Northern countries, donor organizations may force their ideas on development projects, resulting in services that reflect international mandates rather than local needs, thereby widening power gaps (Morgan, 2016). This can lead survivors to feel as if they are passive recipients, consequently undermining efforts at empowerment (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012).

Social Exchange Theory emphasizes the need for positive initiatives and their impact on developing trust, a basic element for inspiring survivors to seek help and interact with support systems (Cropanzano et al., 2017). However, this traditional approach may fail to capture the complexities of trust-building in gender-based violence support environments in Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly due to overlooked power disparities. Furthermore, Yodanis (2004) notes that sexual violence results in a pervasive culture of anxiety among women whereby simply being aware of violence against others can control women's behavior and instill fear, independent of their personal experience. Building on this, Hunnicutt (2009) emphasizes the need of advanced feminist theories mapping many forms of patriarchy and the interaction of race, class, and age in the victimization of women. This feminist viewpoint stresses the need of addressing gender inequality and intersecting power relations in creating effective support systems, thereby guiding the policies of NGOs promoting trust and empowerment among survivors.

Existing literature frequently fails to address cultural elements of the Global South and power imbalances in gender-based violence interventions (Morgan, 2016; Schilke et al., 2015; Minckas et al., 2020; Mannell et al., 2019). By studying how NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa establish trust with gender-based violence survivors, this study aims to close this gap. The study investigates how operational scale, organizational reputation, and service specificity influence the trust-building process by examining the techniques used by various types of NGOs—local, international, and community-based.

This study uses in-depth interviews with representatives of eight NGOs spread throughout seven Sub-Saharan African countries. This qualitative method allows an in-depth study of

participants' experiences, points of view, and particular cultural settings in which these organizations operate. The findings are expected to show that effective gender-based violence interventions require community involvement and deep trust-building relationships. Specific cultural elements are likely to be identified as critical mechanisms for increasing trust and encouraging women to seek help.

Consequently, this research aims to analyze "How does the discourse on gender-based violence within Sub-Saharan African NGOs influence trust-building efforts with women experiencing violence?" The theoretical framework is introduced in Chapter 2 together with discussions of Social Exchange Theory, feminist perspectives on gendered violence, and the idea of trust within organizational strategies. Chapter 3 covers research design including data collecting techniques and data analysis approaches. The results of the qualitative study are presented in Chapter 4 together with important themes including deep trust-building techniques, comparing local values with global norms, and empowerment strategies. These results are covered in Chapter 5 together with theoretical consequences and future directions.

This study aims to grasp the process of trust-building of interventions against gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa, following the subquestion: "How does Social Exchange Theory account for power imbalances in trust-building processes between NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa and women who have experienced violence?" Furthermore, these encounters are significantly influenced by society regarding gender roles and expectations. The relevant sub question here is, "How do gender norms and societal expectations within Sub-Saharan African cultures shape the discourse on gender-based violence and trust in organizational interventions?" A major focus of the research examines the connection between local and global perceptions of gender-based violence. Therefore, the study looks at; "How do NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa bridge between global narratives on gender-based violence and local cultural discourses?"

By addressing these issues, this study aims to add to the larger discourse around feminist activism and gender-based violence, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity and inclusivity in advancing women's rights, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. Theoretical framework

In the context of gender-based violence interventions, trust is a fundamental element that significantly influences the relationship between survivors and the NGOs that support them (Tenkorang et al., 2018). Establishing trust is crucial for encouraging survivors to seek help and engage with support services.

Social Exchange Theory, which focuses on mutual benefit and trust in social interactions, offers a valuable framework for understanding these relationships (Cropanzano et al., 2017). While Social Exchange Theory provides a framework for analyzing these connections, it does not sufficiently handle the nuances of power disparities that could significantly affect relationships, especially between survivors of gender-based violence and support NGOs. These power disparities can distort views of costs and rewards, thereby disempowering survivors or making them too dependent on networks of support (Foucault, 1982). Power differences may cause survivors to be reluctant to interact with support services if they fear secondary victimization or exploitation (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012).

Including power variations in Social Exchange Theory can improve understanding of trust in gender-based violence interventions (Schilke et al., 2015). An expanded framework can help understand the complex nature of these interactions in a broader context. Feminist theories, particularly in the sociocultural context of Sub-Saharan Africa, provide critical new perspectives on gender-based violence interventions. While African feminist theories emphasize communal empowerment and culturally relevant support, Western feminist perspectives focus on personal empowerment and legal reforms. This theoretical section explores how combining these various feminist points of view might improve trust-building initiatives between NGOs and survivors, thus confronting systemic gender inequalities and intersecting power relations.

2.1 Understanding Trust: Theoretical Foundations in Gender-Based Violence

Trust can be characterized as the link that shapes human relations and significantly influences individuals's behaviors and interactions inside society systems, especially when researching the help-seeking behavior of women who have suffered abuse. Two main models help to grasp trust: the psychological model, which regards trust as a mental state, and the sociological model, which sees trust as a social phenomena (Banda, 2020).

The sociological model considers trust part of broader social phenomena like well-being and social capital (Delhey & Newton, 2003). Trust is actually interactive and calls for sensitivity and empathy between beneficiaries and help providers (Barker, 2007). The sociological perspective posits that homogeneous societies promote trust better than those with social and economic inequalities (Ezirim et al., 2021). Social Exchange Theory underrepresents power imbalances in interactions involving vulnerable populations, such as gender-based violence survivors (Minckas et al., 2020; Morgan, 2016; Schilke et al., 2015). This study

focuses on sociological trust to strengthen social ties and address power differences in interactions between survivors and support NGOs.

In the context of interventions addressing gender-based violence, trust is essential. Trust influences whether survivors feel safe and supported enough to seek help from NGOs. Particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa where cultural norms and stigmatizing of gender-based violence may hinder trust-building attempts, effective gender-based violence interventions depend on trust inside both official and informal support systems (Bayu, 2019). In this study, the concept of trust is fundamental since it enables NGOs to create culturally sensitive and power-aware strategies that enable improved support for survivors.

Social Exchange Theory and Trust

Social Exchange Theory states that social behavior results from an exchange process meant to maximize benefits and minimize costs (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This theory emphasizes how important reciprocal behaviors and relationships are for creating and preserving social bonds. Within NGOs, particularly those dedicated to helping women who have experienced violence, Social Exchange theory emphasizes the significance of organizational actors' initial actions and their impact on trust-building efforts (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Positive initiating actions, such as providing organizational support or justice (Christens, 2012; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012), are essential for building a trusting environment. This research seeks to uncover how the organizations interviewed engage in these positive initiating actions, examining their strategies to establish trust and rapport with survivors, consequently extending the literature on building trust with vulnerable populations.

Distrust, as explained by Hardin (2001), is characterized by an asymmetry between trust and mistrust, with small shifts in behavior and societal outcomes having significant impacts. For gender-based violence interventions, where survivors are typically hesitant to trust because of past betrayals and the substantial consequences of lost trust, Hardin's (2001) research is particularly relevant. Trust for gender-based violence survivors goes beyond just believing another will not hurt them to include considering possible dangers and benefits from interacting with support NGOs (Tenkorang, 2018). Viewing support NGOs as aligned with disempowering structures distorts survivors' trust calculations. Hardin's (2001) realization that mistrust has a protective role in untrustworthy surroundings emphasizes the need of gender-based violence interventions to not only present themselves as trustworthy but also actively show trustworthiness by consistent, survivor-centered activities. Interventions must actively lower power disparities with survivors. This study seeks to expand on Hardin's theory by exploring how NGOs can actively build trust in contexts marked by significant power imbalances and historical distrust. It will look into how these organizations can demonstrate trustworthiness through their actions and communication strategies. This study will provide empirical insights into how consistent, survivor-centered activities can build genuine trust between NGOs and survivors, resulting in a more refined and contextually appropriate application of Hardin's theory.

Power Dynamics in Gender-Based Violence Interventions

Power is fundamentally a social construct which presents in different forms and is shaped by cultural and organizational settings. Michel Foucault argues that power permeates all aspects of life, subtly shaping norms and behaviors rather than exerting overt coercion (Foucault, 1982). This perspective highlights how organizational power can dominate survivors, who may view these entities as powerful due to their resources and societal roles. Therefore, it is valuable to understand the meaning of power for effective gender-based violence interventions.

Collectivist and individualistic societies have distinct cultural conceptions of power. Whereas individualistic societies link power to personal success, collectivist societies view power as communal. From a cultural standpoint, NGOs may seem even more powerful in Sub-Saharan Africa, potentially overwhelming for survivors who feel excluded (Morgan, 2016). Western countries' emphasis on individual rights and legal systems contrasts with the communal and relational environments most common in Sub-Saharan Africa. This disparity emphasizes the necessity of gender-based violence interventions including culturally sensitive methods (Bayu, 2019).

In gender-based violence cases, power disparities between NGOs and survivors are noticeable. Survivors' past trust violations make them vulnerable, and organizational influence can affect the help provided. If not controlled properly, this power can reproduce the dynamics of control and reliance survivors have gone through, therefore perhaps limiting their sense of agency and causing secondary victimization (Foucault, 1982). Understanding power dynamics is essential to modify Social Exchange Theory for gender-based violence settings (Goldman & Little, 2015). NGOs have to examine closely how they handle situations to make sure they are not unintentionally supporting power disparities. This involves encouraging survivors to have a real influence on the initiatives meant to help them, therefore transcending simple participation (Morgan, 2016).

Donor needs may compromise NGOs' values and their response to local needs (Morgan, 2016). Often rooted in Northern countries, donor groups force their ideas on development projects, producing Global South services reflecting international mandates rather than local needs, hence increasing power inequalities (Morgan, 2016). This can make survivors feel like passive recipients, undermining empowerment (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). This insight had a direct impact on the interview guide, which examined how NGOs receive funding and how it supports their vision. For example, considering how NGOs balance donor expectations with the needs of the local communities they serve. This research aims to uncover the challenges and strategies used by NGOs to maintain their values and empower survivors while adhering to donor constraints. This line of questioning will provide critical insights into the practical realities of funding-dependent NGOs, as well as contribute to a broader understanding of how financial dependencies can shape organizational behavior and effectiveness in gender-based violence interventions.

In the framework of gender-based violence interventions, survivors might view the advantages of interacting with an organization in terms of the support and resources they acquire, weighed against the psychological costs of trust, such as vulnerability and the fear

of betrayal (Cropanzano et al., 2017). NGOs have to thus collaborate closely to build trust by proving reliability, empathy, and sincere care for the welfare of the survivors.

In short, Social Exchange Theory does not account for power disparities, which can have a significant impact on trust processes in interactions with vulnerable populations, such as survivors of gender-based violence (Minckas et al., 2020; Morgan, 2016; Schilke et al., 2015). For NGOs, understanding and addressing these power dynamics is crucial (Morgan, 2016). This study focuses on modifying Social Exchange Theory to include a strong appreciation for the relationships of power and the important role of trust, to provide a reliable understanding of how trust is built within NGOs addressing gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2.2 Discourse in Gender-Based Violence Interventions

Although Social Exchange Theory emphasizes the need of mutual gain and trust in social relationships, the socio-cultural context of Sub-Saharan Africa adds to the complexity. Thus, this section examines how gender norms and society expectations in Sub-Saharan Africa affect trust and project efficacy. Gender-based violence prevention requires trust in institutional and informal support structures, yet society's standards and stigma might limit it. Interventions are challenging due to cultural standards that may promote or excuse domestic violence and marital rape (Bayu, 2019). These norms are shaped by conventional gender roles and society expectations, which support such violence as means of preserving family order. In contrast, recent cultural changes in Western countries have led to the rejection of gender-based violence and the creation of support systems for survivors (Bayu, 2019).

Keith et al. (2023) stress the significance of incorporating community involvement with individual empowerment to raise the quality of gender-based violence interventions. This approach is crucial in places where patriarchal values dominate, and violence against women may be culturally accepted or ignored. Interventions that overlook the patriarchal environment might not gain the trust or acceptance needed for success. Tenkorang et al. (2018) confirm this, noting that mistrust towards official institutions severely constrains help-seeking.

Building trust requires community inclusion in the planning and execution of interventions (Musuya, 2011). Research by Ilika & Ilika (2005) on widowhood customs in Eastern Nigeria found that interventions designed and led by local women familiar with the cultural context were successful in altering harmful behaviors. Keith et al. (2023) also emphasize the importance of social empowerment initiatives, such as community-based seminars, which challenge gender-unequal views and build skills like conflict resolution and communication. These interventions are more successful when they align with the views and values of the local population.

As Mannell et al. (2019) emphasize, addressing intimate partner violence calls for an innovative approach to intervention design in Sub-Saharan Africa. Traditional approaches fall short by focusing on individual risk factors without considering larger socio-economic settings. This causes interventions to concentrate on the indicators of violence rather than

the causes of it. Programs may focus on risks like drug use, neglecting poverty, lack of education, and gender inequality.

Mannell et al. (2019) state that a revised plan is needed whereby young people participate actively in creating and implementing initiatives. In this sense, one should also consider how their cultural, financial, and social backgrounds shape their behavior and viewpoint. This approach performs better when it considers "distributed agency," a hypothesis examining young women's use of their agency in repressive surroundings. This strategy supports co-developed interventions with active participation from young women. These strategies address young women's genuine needs, improving techniques for managing relationships and finances.

The discourse on gender-based violence exposes a conflict between internationally spread feminist ideas and locally cultural standards, thereby posing opportunities and challenges for NGOs operating in these environments (Breton, 2023). Often anchored in Western ideas, global feminist narratives usually stress individual rights, gender equality, and systematic interventions using legal systems. Bayu (2019) questions these methods for their universalistic tendency, which might not fairly represent the socioeconomic and cultural reality of African countries. Such discourses can place African women mostly as victims inside repressive cultural frameworks, therefore perhaps overshadowing their agency and the vital roles they perform inside their communities. Mabvurira (2020) addresses the gap between the community orientations common in African countries and the Western forms of social work that give individualism first priority. Lack of community support and sustainability combined with gender-based violence treatments lacking resonance locally can result from this imbalance.

Western debates on empowerment sometimes emphasize overcoming victimhood. Policies and programs aimed at "rescuing" women from violence help to reinforce the belief that women require saving. By neglecting more fundamental systemic problems such as economic independence, education, and political representation that support gender inequality and violence, this strategy may undermine actual empowerment. According to Bayu (2019), African feminist theories may stress group empowerment and the way women's rights fit more general society and developmental objectives. These conversations, meanwhile, also run against conventional wisdom that would perceive empowerment as upsetting family roles or social peace. Women's agency is affected by the conditional empowerment observed in both Western and African settings since it limits them inside the bounds of their victim status. For example, programs aimed at equipping women to defend themselves or flee violence could pay less attention to changing the power relations allowing gender-based violence. This can result in programs meant to offer momentary relief without encouraging long-lasting change. Reconciling both the ideas of empowerment and victimhood means moving the emphasis from merely reacting to violence towards establishing settings that naturally empower women without first forcing them to be victims. It means seeing women as complete agents of change instead of recipients of programs meant to "fix" their victim role.

In conclusion, community involvement becomes apparent as a crucial tactic for building trust, particularly in patriarchal environments where violence against women is accepted culturally. Initiatives that include local values and empower communities to question negative

standards show more effectiveness in transforming behavior and building trust. Changing societal standards requires social reassessment and community engagement to tackle gender-based violence. Ignoring the need of culturally sensitive, community-centered interventions in combating gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa (Bayu, 2019; Mabvurira, 2020) runs the danger of lowering trust and efficacy. These realizations directly relate to the construction of the empirical part of this study. Interview questions will explore participants' opinions on community involvement and success of culturally respectful interventions. Interviews will additionally look at ways community individuals and NGOs may develop trust. This method guarantees that the study is based on the reality of the participants' cultural surroundings.

2.3 Gender-based violence Programs: Opportunities and Challenges

The discourse on gender-based violence in NGOs exposes a range of global factors and local community characteristics that affect trust-building initiatives involving women that experienced abuse. Often using broad, uniform standards, global actions were unable to fit the particular local experiences and demands. As Abramowitz and Moran (2012) show in Liberia, international NGO-driven strategies emphasizing just on individual acts of violence can ignore more general structural and societal issues, which local populations view as the main causes of violence. Due to conflicts with ingrained local traditions and beliefs, community members may engage in training programs without integrating the learning into their behavior, therefore rendering interventions ineffective or even counterproductive.

Furthermore, global projects usually face opposition when they stray from the local cultural setting. Hayhurst et al. (2018) observations underline "culture clashes" resulting from the imposition of foreign standards without enough adaptation to local reality. These conflicts often arise as a result of ignorance of how local people view and experience gender-based violence. The 'box ticking' approach prioritizes quantifiable outputs over meaningful outcomes, leading to surface compliance without real integration into local frameworks.

The World Health Organisation (2009) recommendations on changing societal and cultural standards that enable violence offer a strong basis for comprehending and addressing the systematic problems with gender-based violence. However, these rules might not adequately represent the various points of view of African feminist academics and activists stressing the complexity of culture and violence. African feminist critics argue that homogenizing varied cultural experiences may discount non-Western activities as inherently violent without enough contextual knowledge. The WHO's advice to question and modify these policies can seem dismissive without culturally sensitive alternatives. Many Sub-Saharan African groups depend considerably on their customs and beliefs for social cohesiveness and identity (Mabvurira, 2020). The WHO recommendations also give formal education and legislative reforms top priority as main drivers of change. Although they are significant, many Sub-Saharan communities depend on informal community structures and indigenous knowledge systems, which might be overlooked (Ilika & Ilika, 2005). African feminist activists stress the need of including these local knowledge systems and structures into treatments to guarantee their sustainability and effectiveness.

Gender mainstreaming aims to include gender perspectives in every area and level of society regarding policies, initiatives, and activities. Its goal is to treat women's empowerment and equal rights as fundamental issues. Nevertheless, Moser (2012) points out that this strategy has several flaws especially with relation to guaranteeing women's security. Moser (2012) argues that gender mainstreaming may unintentionally undermine initiatives especially aimed at women's problems. Women's specific needs may be neglected when gender concerns are combined with broader programs like family initiatives.

Moreover, inadequate use of gender mainstreaming sometimes compromises its effectiveness. Gender ideas can simply be introduced into policies instead of being deeply rooted in policy frameworks. Since it overlooks the real roots of injustice and violence, this form of superficial integration might compromise attempts to keep women safe. If mainstreaming strategies fail to clearly promote women's rights and autonomy, then goals for gender equality may become less important in relation to other development objectives. To solve these problems, we must take into account the context of every country and strongly include women's rights activists and communities. Gender mainstreaming works best when policies are carefully reviewed and assessed to make sure that gender points of view are not just taken into account but also substantially lead to improved safety and empowerment for women in a range of environments (Britton, 2006).

To connect global initiatives with local contexts, some Western-based NGOs that operate in African countries involve local "translators," who are people or groups skilled in bridging concepts from around the world with local traditions. These translators are essential in adapting global ideas to meet local settings, hence enabling better community-level acceptance and effectiveness of norms (Breton, 2023). These translators help to ensure that gender-based violence interventions recognize that NGOs are actively co-creating the environments in which they work, rather than only following pre-formed concepts.

Smaller or community-based NGOs significantly help to address gender-based violence by extensive community involvement and empowerment approaches. Effective interventions depend on these NGOs initiating change through their tight community ties and victim support. As Ilika & Ilika (2005) underline, a major focus of community-based NGOs is their ability to encourage community empowerment and ownership. Programs led by community members ensure high participation and adherence to norms through local ownership and drive. Addressing the symptoms as well as the systemic inequalities that drive violence, community-based NGOs get insights into the roots of gender-based violence through direct interaction with communities. Despite these advantages, community-based groups generally rely on unpredictable and limited funding from outside sources or government subsidies and face significant challenges with sustainability. Britton (2006) notes that reliance on external resources questions the long-term efficacy of initiatives, as small groups may lack capacity for broader structural changes.

Another strategy that certain NGOs are using increasingly is including men into gender-based violence campaigns because they understand the need for a gender-transformative framework that actively incorporates men in redefining norms about masculinity, femininity, power, and violence. Including men in NGOs usually results in notable beneficial outcomes, such as lower rates of gender-based violence and child

marriages, attributed to improved couples' communication and decreased economic stress (Barker, 2007).

However, the inclusion of men also brings difficulties. This shift can misallocate resources and recenter men in projects where women should lead. Men's participation in interventions offers chances for reframing expectations, but it also carries the risk of depriving programs aimed at women of funds, necessitating a balance between local conditions and global viewpoints with respect to power elements inherent in financing sources and program design (Minckas, Shannon, & Mannell, 2020; Khanam & Meem, 2018).

The study examines how cultural beliefs shape help-seeking behaviors, impacting intervention effectiveness (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; World Health Organization, 2009). Additionally, it explores the differences between global narratives on gender-based violence and local cultural beliefs and practices. The research also addresses the challenges NGOs face in aligning global standards with local norms, particularly in relation to donor funding and organizational autonomy (Moser, 2012; Kumari, 2023). Furthermore, the study focuses on the importance of cultural sensitivity and local engagement by examining community education strategies and collaboration with local leaders (Ilika & Ilika, 2005; Breton, 2023).

2.4 Conclusion of Theoretical Framework

In summary, this theoretical framework integrates Social Exchange Theory, feminist perspectives, and insights on cultural dynamics to explore trust-building in gender-based violence interventions within Sub-Saharan African NGOs. The framework highlights the importance of understanding power imbalances, cultural contexts, and the influence of western perspectives on organizational strategies. This study specifically addresses the gap in understanding how NGOs build trust with women who have experienced gender-based violence. Previous research has often overlooked the complexities of trust-building in contexts where power imbalances and cultural differences are pronounced (Schilke et al., 2015; Tenkorang et al., 2018). These theoretical insights guide the empirical research and interview questions. The interview questions examine how NGOs ensure survivor safety without exploitation. Developing trust is expected to require the ethical engagement of survivors, efficient power imbalance management, and intervention strategies in line with societal values. Reducing power disparities is likely to enhance organizational trust-building efforts. The study additionally predicts that including feminist ideas stressing equality and empowerment will increase efforts at trust-building.

3. Research Design

This study looks at how Sub-Saharan African NGOs develop trust with victims of gender-based violence using qualitative in-depth interviews. This approach helps to better understand the strategies and experiences of these NGOs as well as to represent their work across various cultural settings. The reason to employ qualitative interviews is the need to gather extensive, contextualized data that cannot be acquired using only quantitative methods (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Particularly in sensitive study topics like gender-based violence, researchers using qualitative interviews can explore situations that are often overlooked and provide insights that are not easily apparent.

To address the research question, "How does the discourse on gender-based violence within Sub-Saharan African NGOs influence trust-building efforts with women experiencing violence?" Qualitative in-depth interviews are fitting for this research. This method allows participants' points of view to be analyzed in their own words, therefore providing rich data showing the challenges and processes required in building trust. Feminist research methods, which emphasize the need of realizing how reality is socially produced and listening to underrepresented voices, is in line with this approach (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Furthermore, it is a standard practice in sociological research where it is crucial to understand socio-cultural settings and subjective experiences especially in feminist studies and gender-based violence research (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Ethical considerations were important, and although interviews were with organizational representatives instead of survivors, the research was handled carefully because gender-based violence is a sensitive subject. All participants gave their informed consent, ensuring they were aware of the study's purposes and their rights. The participants' names and the information they shared were kept confidential throughout the research. This approach was informed by guidelines in qualitative research, which emphasize the importance of sensitivity and ethical integrity when dealing with vulnerable populations (Liamputtong, 2006).

Several techniques were used to guarantee validity and dependability. Open-ended questions allowed participants to freely express their ideas and experiences, reducing researcher bias and enabling a complete understanding of the participants' views (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Finally, I reflected on the research by acknowledging my own positionality and any prejudices as a researcher. I considered my experiences, presumptions, and how these would influence the research process in order to lower bias and maintain impartiality (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019). Including these methodological choices, the study aims to provide a reliable knowledge of how trust is created inside NGOs fighting gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa.

3.1 Data Collection Methods

The theoretical framework served as a secondary data collection method to gather knowledge about the trust and help-seeking behavior of women who had experienced violence. The theoretical framework overviewed current knowledge, suitable theories, and research gaps on trust between survivors and NGOs, cultural influences on help-seeking behaviors, the role of Social Exchange Theory, and comparative analyses of NGO strategies in building trust with survivors. The theoretical framework also contributed to developing questions for the interviews and placed the research into a larger context to determine the position of the research and create new conclusions (Knopf, 2006). The topic list is included in the appendices.

The qualitative in-depth interviews for this research were conducted online via Microsoft Teams between April and June 2024. To select participants, emails were sent to a variety of NGOs across Sub-Saharan Africa that are actively engaged in fighting gender-based violence. This included larger NGOs operating across different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, and smaller, survivor-centered and trauma-informed NGOs in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. I invited about 100 NGOs to participate in my study. Despite the broad approach, only about 20 NGOs initially expressed interest, and I eventually conducted interviews with representatives from eight NGOs. The biggest problems in recruiting more participants were attributed to these NGOs' busy schedules and insufficient resources to conduct academic research, particularly with students.

The enthusiastic response from the NGOs that did participate was promising; they were positive and passionate about participating in my research. Their willingness to participate may indicate that these NGOs, which have the resources to dedicate time for such interviews, may not represent the entire spectrum, particularly smaller, less-resourced entities. This selection bias could have an impact on study outcomes, perhaps skewing results in favor of larger and possibly better-funded NGOs.

These NGOs were selected for their approaches of empowering survivors and for their adaption of support strategies across many cultural settings. Their participation provided new perspectives on trust-building methods and strategies to promote help-seeking among survivors, complementing the study's main objective. During my research, I deliberately chose NGOs with different sizes as well as scope and global reach. This choice was important since it let me collect several points of view on gender-based violence interventions.

Some NGOs had strong international links and provided a wide range of services. If the organization is bigger they might have more activities such as shelter, psychological help, and community education. Others were smaller, some only visible on Facebook, and usually concentrated on one aspect of gender-based violence support. While smaller NGOs might concentrate especially on one area, such as community outreach or legal aid, big NGOs usually have more extensive service offerings and maybe more structured interventions. The difference in operational style proved to be essential for deepening my knowledge of the topic. Finding these NGOs required internet research to gather data about NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa. It was crucial that the NGOs concentrated on supporting women in

many different ways against gender-based violence. Being a master's student prevented my direct interaction, therefore internet-based research is essential to approach these NGOs and understanding their processes and areas of concentration.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews made a flexible yet targeted discussion on organizational strategies and trust-building initiatives possible. Every interview took thirty to sixty minutes, which allowed enough time for participants to offer their observations without conducting too long of a session. To provide good audio recordings for transcription and analysis, the Teams program recorded the interviews. Through online interviews, this study included a wide range of NGOs dedicated to women's empowerment and well-being.

Profiles of NGOs

This section presents an overview of various NGOs dedicated to addressing gender-based violence and supporting survivors. Eight NGOs are involved in the study. This section provides context for the NGOs and the interviewees. A table is provided to give a clear overview of the NGOs, the countries, and the interviewees. Each profile includes a description of the nature and structure of the organization. The primary countries where the organization operates, the main activities and programs that the organization undertakes to address gender-based violence and helping survivors, the organization's mission and core values, an indication of the organization's scale, including its reach and impact, and the role of the individual interviewed, providing context for their insights and perspectives. The descriptions are broad to make sure that the NGOs stay anonymous, while still providing insights to their context. I also gave the participants fake names to make them anonymous, while still giving them a personal voice.

I decided to use broad role descriptions as a strategic tool to preserve the anonymity of the concerned participants while also offering a clear and insightful view of their functional roles. The first category is executive management. This role description is about senior leadership jobs accountable for the general strategic direction and administrative control of the organization. People in these positions are important in determining organizational policy, getting funds, and guaranteeing the smooth running of all organizational operations. The second category is program management and development. Professionals supervising the development, execution, and assessment of particular projects and initiatives inside NGOs fall under this category. They are essential to guarantee that these initiatives' goals are fulfilled. The third category is advocacy and community engagement. Professionals in this category concentrate on using strategic communication and public relations to increase awareness, shape public opinion, and influence policy about gender-based violence. They are important for the outward presentation of an organization and have connections within communities. The fourth category is direct client interaction. These professionals are directly working with clients in this field to provide necessary services addressing the needs and well-being of individuals impacted by gender-based violence. These positions are essential for providing compassionate, effective, and targeted support to the needs of the women.

Table 1
Profiles of NGOs

Organization	Main operation	Vision	Country	Interviewee role	Fake name interviewee
Organization A	Empowerment, support, advocacy	A community free from violence and fear	Sierra Leone, United States	Executive management, Program Management and Development	Aisha
Organization B	Exit assistance, counseling, education	Reclaim lives from exploitation	Germany, Kenya	Direct Client Interaction	Hana
Organization C	Support, advocacy, policy reform	Society free of gender-based violence	South Africa	Program Management and Development	Maya
Organization D	Legal aid, counseling, advocacy	Society free of gender-based violence	Tanzania	Executive Management	Lila
Organization E	Support services, advocacy, education	Society free of gender-based violence	Nigeria	Advocacy and Community Engagement	Suki
Organization F	Education, empowerment, legal aid	Gender equality, well-being of women	Eswatini	Executive Management	Zara
Organization G	Counseling, vocational training	Empowerment for women	Burkina Faso	Executive Management	Nia
Organization H	Medical care, support, advocacy	Holistic care, justice for women	Nigeria	Program Management and Development, Direct Client Interaction	Tara

3.2 Data Analysis Methods

Eight respondents—from eight different NGOs addressing gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa—have been interviewed. Using thematic analysis, the transcription of the data has been examined and three main themes—with underlying sub-themes—that support the idea of trust and the conversation on gender-based violence at both local and international levels have emerged. This study used thematic analysis because it is flexible and can provide a deep understanding of the participants' perspectives. It also fits well with feminist theories of knowledge, which stress valuing participants' voices and experiences within their context (Wigginton & Lafrance, 2019).

I first transcribed the interview recordings using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework for thematic analysis to familiarize myself with the data. For the interview data analysis, I used Atlas.ti. Next, I generated initial codes from the data, focusing on meaningful segments related to trust-building, organizational strategies, and cultural contexts. I used a mixed-coding approach as the analysis progressed, combining deductive coding based on predefined theoretical concepts (Social Exchange Theory and related literature on gender-based violence interventions) with inductive coding to remain open to new themes that emerged directly from the data. I then looked over the codes and arranged them into more general categories. Three main themes emerged from this process: Shifting Gender-based Violence perceptions, Unraveling Gender Norms, and Building Trust. I refined and clarified these topics to accurately reflect the viewpoints and experiences of the participants as well as some theoretical perspectives.

In my research, I used job descriptions to classify and explain the roles of different people inside NGOs. This strategy was selected to keep the participants anonymous while also offering clear understanding of their responsibilities and the impact of their work. Under broad categories as "Executive Management," "Program Management and Development," and "Advocacy and Community Engagement," I was able to outline the positions in a general yet instructive manner by grouping like job duties. From strategic decision-making to direct client engagement and community activism, this classification helped emphasize the several purposes inside NGOs. It also guaranteed that the study honored the participants' privacy, which is a fundamental ethical issue particularly in sensitive subjects like gender-based violence and should be given much thought.

3.3 Limitations and ethical concerns

The sampling method of non-random, purposive sampling had the obvious limitation of subjectivity. Vaus (2001) states that purposive sampling is sensitive to selection bias and uncontrollable, outside factors. This was countered when the invitations for interviews were sent to NGOs from various countries and backgrounds to provide different perspectives and insights. Moreover, this type of sampling is frequently used in social research and research involving sensitive topics (Etikan et al., 2016).

One key disadvantage of my approach was that it relied on NGOs with an online presence, which most likely eliminated very small grassroots NGOs that operate outside the scope of web-based searches. This process of selection preferred more formally established or

technologically advanced NGOs. As a result, the sample may not accurately reflect grassroots practices in the struggle against gender-based violence..

Focusing largely on small to medium-sized NGOs that were available online meant missing out on ideas from small grassroots NGOs, which frequently operate in distinct circumstances and may use different approaches in their interventions. However, the interviewed NGOs frequently had connections with these smaller NGOs and gave information about their interactions. Reflecting on this, future research may investigate techniques to actively connect with these important but less visible individuals in the field in order to capture a greater range of actions and their effects.

In undertaking research regarding the topic of violence against women in Sub-Saharan Africa, the fundamental consideration was respect for the topic and the research population, including the NGOs that work with these women. There is a growing commitment to invest in research aimed at understanding effective strategies to prevent and address violence (Keith et al., 2023). When conducting interviews with NGOs instead of survivors of gender-based violence, the issues related to sensitivity, safety, and confidentiality were less pronounced.

The primary goal of these interviews was to ensure the anonymity of the NGOs involved while upholding a professional level of confidentiality that respects the privacy of both the NGOs and any individuals they may mention. NGOs were required to exercise caution and refrain from disclosing identifiable details of survivors' cases. This method enabled the research to continue with the awareness that, although the topic required respectful and ethical treatment, the degree of direct sensitivity and safety measures needed were considerably different from those necessary in interviews with the survivors directly. This approach emphasized a dedication to ethical research methods while recognizing the distinctive features of gathering data from organizational viewpoints rather than individual ones. The objective was to make a meaningful contribution to the formulation of policies and implementation strategies that have a positive impact on the lives of women who have experienced violence (GUIDE, 2009). Based on my prior experience researching NGOs dealing with sensitive subjects, including in my bachelor's thesis on NGOs supporting sex workers, I have developed a broad understanding of the processes needed in conducting such research.

4. Results

Women's fear of seeking help and the high occurrence of gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa emphasize how critically important NGOs are in offering support. In this regard, there are serious trust problems inside official systems, consequently trust is a significant consideration in linking survivors and NGOs.

This study's results chapter looks at the ideas and strategies participants offered to address gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa. Three main themes—Shifting Gender-based Violence Perceptions, Unraveling Gender Norms, and Building Trust—form the framework of this chapter. These issues directly relate to the sub-research questions and offer an overall picture of the policies and difficulties NGOs in this area experience. The overview of the NGOs and the function of the interviewees inside them is presented in the research design. Neither the NGOs nor the real name of the responders are mentioned to guarantee confidentiality. This chapter shows the rational development from realizing the need of cultural adaptation and trust-building to using community assistance and enabling survivors to take charge of their life.

4.1 Shifting Gender-based Violence Perceptions

Global standards provide a legal and moral precedence for operations, consequently forming the foundation of worldwide efforts against gender-based violence. This section examines how these universal standards are embraced and modified in the various cultural settings of Sub-Saharan Africa, where regional norms and social conventions present both opportunities and problems. NGOs are important in this process of adaptation since they operate as mediators that fit worldwide standards to local reality.

Internationally, gender-based violence is addressed through frameworks set by universal human rights standards, emphasizing that abuse in all its forms is unacceptable and unlawful international agreements such as the World Health Organization define these standards (World Health Organization, 2009). These guidelines support legal systems, survivor protection, and educational programs aimed at preventing various forms of abuse.

By contrast, local cultural beliefs and customs in many Sub-Saharan African countries typically show a quite different picture. "The governments acknowledge that there is a problem, but on a cultural mindset, in smaller villages, they still are lacking the education to change it." Aisha noted. Longstanding cultural and social beliefs affect local norms, which may have different boundaries for what qualifies as abuse. For example, some kinds of household discipline, marital rights or psychological abuse might be accepted and even justified in these societies. Traditional customs and gender norms that see men as dominating and women as subordinate help to define this normalcy. Nia underlined this problem, pointing out, "Girls are raised to accept violence and believe that husbands have all rights over them." Consequently, actions deemed harmful by international norms could be

seen as reasonable or even required in the local setting. Maya underlined, "They don't sometimes understand that it's violence to see it as violence."

There are various reasons why this discrepancy between local and global standards is concerning. First of all, underreporting of abuse is a serious issue. Women might not disclose abuse since they do not define it as such or fear victim-blaming. Tara clarified, "When we started, there was a lot of disbelief around the issue of rape and sexual assault. People didn't believe such things were happening because of the stigma surrounding them." Social expectations that keep women from questioning their partners or relatives worsen this stigma.

Second, one of the main issues is the absence of help for survivors. Communities fail to offer the required support for survivors without realizing the mistreatment. Women who come forward about abuse sometimes experience secondary trauma from law police and community members. Zara illustrated this by stating, "They repeatedly asked, 'Why did she do that? Why did she wear that?'" This secondary trauma keeps women in the cycle of abuse and prevents them from getting help.

Cultural standards supporting or normalizing violence help to preserve these behaviors over several generations. "The way the global north thinks of gender-based violence and the way the global south experiences it is totally different," Maya said. Moreover, the kinds of trauma women in Sub-Saharan Africa go through can vary greatly from those in Western settings. Less prevalent in Western countries, women in these regions sometimes suffer types of trauma including forced marriages, female genital mutilation, and social exclusion. Hana observed, "I would not say that we can compare like women who experienced forced marriages, forced circumcision to those things. I think that's the kind of trauma people in European countries, you don't have to go through." These particular kinds of trauma require specific strategies and knowledge, which complicates the application of worldwide standards even more.

Agents of change

By bridging the gap between international norms and local views on gender-based violence, NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa become important agents of cultural change. These NGOs help connect local cultural norms with international human rights values, therefore acting as providers of services and drivers of social transformation. Drawing from Britton (2006) on South African NGOs' role in redefining norms, this study expands on how local NGOs drive cultural transformation. Likewise, the research draws on the efforts of Hayhurst et al. (2018), which shows how community-based initiatives provide forums for starting important conversations.

NGOs address gender-based violence by starting dialogues and collaborating with national institutions and agencies. Some respondents said that their NGOs work with government agencies to affect policy-making and support the development of strong safeguards for women. As Nia notes "We also work closely with (name project), which aims to use the voices of women and girls in advocating for their rights. This project has been instrumental in

driving policy changes and raising awareness at both the local and national levels.” They help to make the invisible visible by presenting data and stating, “This is what's happening in our community, we need to do something about it,” (Tara) therefore stressing the frequency and seriousness of gender-based violence. This strategy not only increases awareness but also motivates action, thereby providing a setting for dialogues including public officials, legislators, and community leaders as well as policymakers.

Teaching women and girls about their rights is fundamental in the work of these NGOs. Zara stressed: “We teach women and girls about their rights since the reality is, if a woman doesn't know her rights, she won't be able to exercise them.” This education empowers women to question and modify repressive norms and practices. Understanding their rights helps women to take action against mistreatment, therefore promoting a society based on respect and responsibility. Lila underlined this thought: “Our cultural norms bind us, and there are significant differences between our practices and those in the West. Our duty now is to teach gender equality and gender roles, showing couples they are equal partners.”

A major first step toward long-term cultural transformation is this shift in shared consciousness. Tara said, “It's not perfect yet, but we are making progress. People now understand that they can get some respite without feeling ashamed.” Educational initiatives go beyond personal empowerment, making people more receptive and understanding the societal benefits. Greater acceptance and understanding resulting from awareness and education helps to inspire more community involvement and support for projects meant to eliminate gender-based violence through this ripple effect.

Safe spaces

NGOs hold a significant role in creating safe environments for women in an environment where abuse is common and systematic problems hinder its prevention. These safe places symbolize hope and change where gender-based violence is accepted and underreported. Symbolic Interactionism provides a perspective of how continuous social interactions impact individual perceptions of safe spaces and the meanings they generate (Foucault, 1982). This idea holds that survivors are inclined to view new projects, like safe spaces, with mistrust if their usual contacts within their community have often dismissed their experiences or blamed them. They must reframe safety and support in new situations.

Unlike Western countries where the existence and advantages of support centers might be more easily acknowledged, participants noted that in their countries, skepticism first surrounded such initiatives. “When we started out, people didn't even believe that such a place existed. They wondered how they would find a place where they could be heard, believed, and not stigmatized or blamed for what had happened,” Tara recalled. Zara underlined this thought; “This lack of trust makes it very difficult for women to open up and report cases of abuse, allowing them to continue living with the perpetrators within their communities.” As these centers became established, women saw them as safe havens for care without fear of judgment. This significant change emphasizes the need for trust in situations where it is rare and the cultural change that these centers reflect. “Oh, trust is very important in a society like ours where we are. Well, if they don't trust you, they're not going to

seek help," noted Suki. Establishing these safe places helps question and change the dominant silence and stigma. These NGOs show survivors their right to be heard and helped by offering a visible, easily accessible place for support.

To summarize, NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa play an important role in bridging the gap between global norms and local views surrounding gender-based violence. They play a valuable role in creating safe spaces that promote mutual trust and provide essential support to survivors. These efforts not only meet urgent needs, but also contribute to long-term cultural development by questioning and changing deeply held societal attitudes and behaviors related to gender-based violence.

4.2 Unraveling Gender Norms

Gender-based violence continues to exist in Sub-Saharan Africa because of established gender norms. These norms define men's and women's roles and influence reactions to gender-based violence. This is reflective of the cultural and societal frameworks that have historically perpetuated these practices (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012; Bayu, 2019). Feminist ideas argue that changing gender roles is necessary to solve gender-based violence, but the adaptation to local settings is difficult (Bayu, 2019; Breton, 2023).

NGOs addressing gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa sometimes have significant trouble working with funding initiatives. Often arriving with pre-packed solutions, including "training manuals they will come with," (Maya) funders may not be appropriate for the complex social realities of local communities. Participants stress the need of customizing these outside inputs to guarantee they fit local reality without sacrificing the values of the NGOs. Considering this, Maya said, "Yes, you want the funding. But we won't take the funding if it's going to compromise our standards and our values." Postcolonial theory provides a framework for the criticism of these funding policies since it addresses how colonial legacies affect modern practices and the sometimes dubious application of Western standards on African countries (Mabvurira, 2020).

The conversation on gender-based violence is significantly influenced by society expectations. Interviewees underlined how sensitive subjects like abortion and witchcraft are addressed, "Traditional, religious, and resource persons were trained on human rights and laws against witchcraft accusations." (Nia). This training shifts communications from conventional blame narratives to a rights-based viewpoint. These observations contribute to academic discussions on how local adaptations of gender-based violence narratives might affect a more general society transformation.

Empowering Through Education

Transforming society standards and improving knowledge inside Sub-Saharan African communities depends mostly on gender-based violence education. 'It's really all about the education and encouraging people to, to really, actually understand what is happening,' Aisha stressed. Training campaigns highlight unnoticed mistreatment of women, which many

men do not consider inappropriate. For example, courses on consent and legal rights often underline that "it's violating your rights if even your husband has sex with you against your will." (Maya)

The 2019 UN Women report shows the power of changing social norms via economic empowerment and group action, emphasizing women's inclusion in educational conversations (Elson et al., 2019). Maya underlined that when they "leave a community, there should be no one in that community that actually hasn't received training." Women who are important to local communities are sometimes trained to be empathic listeners to women who may need help. This approach not only shares knowledge but also helps women to initiate conversations on their rights and the legal systems meant to defend them. Furthermore, the way these educational programs combine group discussions and role-playing activities helps participants actively interact with and integrate the content. Nia said "We also organize community theater forums to prevent violence and invite victims to seek help, raise awareness within households to improve communication and encourage women's involvement in family decision-making, and support women in income-generating activities, encouraging others to seek help." These approaches help to promote improved understanding and readiness to question negative standards. Durable changes depend on community engagement, ensuring members, especially women, are ready to fight for their rights (Elson et al., 2019).

Creating Inclusive Change

Effective intervention depends on women being included into the conversation on gender-based violence in societies that value conventional leadership systems. Traditional and religious leaders are acknowledged by NGOs, who then strongly include these leaders to change society expectations and improve understanding of the position of women. NGOs use leaders' influence in presentations at churches, community events, and schools. This method is critical because opinions against gender-based violence can differ substantially across religions and even within communities, from urban to rural places. For example, the challenge is greater in places where gender-based violence is implicitly accepted by religious beliefs. As observed by Lila, "when key people like traditional leaders tend to be radical in practicing this culture, if the traditional leader will not encourage people to change so that they will never change." The way women are represented in these educational dialogues guarantees that knowledge sharing also enables them to lead conversations on their rights and the legal frameworks accessible to defend them (Mannell et al., 2019). Moreover, by teaching these powerful people the knowledge about gender-based violence prevention and the rights of women, it "trickles down" (Tara) through society, therefore promoting a larger cultural change that supports and protects women more closely.

To create long-lasting changes in society attitudes and behavior, some NGOs stressed the importance of including men in projects. "If we want to change the narrative of having equal participation and representation of women in decision-making positions, we seriously have to engage men," Zara said. Men typically have significant impact in both public and personal domains, consequently this inclusive approach is rather essential. This theoretical viewpoint supports the idea that changing the fundamental gender relationships is necessary for sustainable change in attitudes and behaviors against gender-based violence (Minckas,

Shannon, & Mannell, 2020). Whether through distinct conversation sessions where "men and women separated, women on one side, men on the other," (Aisha) or through integrated talks leading to moments of awareness like "oh, OK. Well, I'll do things differently then" programs can promote an in-depth understanding of gender-based violence. Programs can more successfully involve men in a conversation that questions and changes conventional ideas on masculinity and power by recognizing the several levels of inequality that interact with gender, therefore generating more significant social change (Khanam & Meem, 2018).

Clearly speaking about gender-based violence throughout different societies depends heavily on simplifying messages. The key is to make the material understandable and relevant. According to Social Exchange Theory, which maintains that the clarity and relevance of information exchange can promote understanding and cooperation (Cropanzano et al., 2017), supports the statement "if people can't relate to what you're talking about because it's too abstract or distant, they won't understand it (Tara)." This strategy guarantees that the main point of the communications is not lost in translation while also helping in "making it easier for them to accept and remember the messages". Presenting these lessons using well-known local personalities enhances their efficacy even more since it makes use of existing trust and cultural resonance, therefore grounding the educational efforts in the reality of the audience.

The need of giving women's voices priority in the fight against gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa is underlined in this section. Emphasizing the inclusion of women in leadership and educational roles exposes an intentional step towards altering society expectations and improving community support networks.

4.3 Building trust

NGOs trying to offer help to Sub-Saharan African survivors of gender-based violence face significant challenges from initial trust issues. Long established in the socio-cultural setting, these obstacles influence women's view and reaction to support initiatives. Although mistrust of NGOs is a general problem for survivors globally, the particular socio-cultural factors in Sub-Saharan Africa accentuate these difficulties.

Social Exchange Theory holds that people balance the risks and rewards of sharing sensitive information, so this mistrust is made worse by society standards that define discretion and silence regarding one's own suffering. Sharing their experiences can be challenging for survivors who must feel that the possible help exceeds the risks of disclosure, therefore they first must build substantial trust before sharing their stories (Cropanzano et al., 2017). Hana noted, "You don't talk about yourself and the deeper things in your experiences or about your trauma when you don't trust the other person." Often evident in how survivors first test the waters is this cautious approach: "My friend has an issue. My friend would like to get some support. Sometimes they test you, they tell you something to see how you're going to react. (Lila)" Tenkorang et al. (2018), who observe that society norms often stigmatize victims, thereby perpetuating a culture of discretion and silence, this indirect approach of seeking aid emphasizes the cultural background where openly talking about personal issues is sometimes discouraged.

Many Sub-Saharan African communities have a past of colonization, political unrest, and foreign interventions that help to create an inherent distrust of outside NGOs and institutions. "So sometimes it costs like two to three appointments until they really open up, so it's not a thing that they do right away," Hana said. This past history of mistrust calls for a slow approach to show actual dedication and establishing bonds over time. "For us, when we meet the women, we try to get a good relationship first so they don't have to open out quite a way immediately or yeah, we dig deeper," Hana underlined, showing the value of initial relationship-building.

Community Advocacy and Shared Experiences

In many Sub-Saharan African countries, where official systems are sometimes seen as unreliable, the value of trust developed via community networks needs to be emphasized. This kind of word-of-mouth is especially important since it makes use of the communal and relational dynamics typical in collectivist societies, in which power and authority are seen as resources held by the society instead of by individuals (Torelli & Shavitt, 2010).

Perhaps the most effective approach to building trust and inspiring more women to get help involves training survivors to become advocates. Those who have effectively gone through their healing process can prove very helpful and inspirational to others. "Many of our girls, who we sponsored through vocational training... have experienced severe abuse. So our girls actually start inviting their friends," Aisha explained. As trustworthy voices in their communities, these survivors-turned-advocates provide first-hand accounts of the help and empowerment they received. "Their peoples, they become like ambassadors, to tell to speak about as to other peoples. So that's how they spread and anything, how they know us," Lila noted. Bencherki et al. (2019) explore this dynamic further since they argue that social interactions always negotiate authority and power. In this regard, survivors who support these NGOs are not only sharing their stories but also actively helping to reshape society impressions and distribute power.

Seeing other women get help makes women more at ease and validated. "When they start to see other people speak up, then they start to realize that it's OK to share their voice as well," Aisha explained. Through this group sharing, survivors feel understood and less isolated in their experiences. Support groups where women may talk about their problems in a secure and empathetic environment help to build this trust even further. Maya pointed out: "They will also bring women from different communities together... they share their ideas and experiences across their communities and they learn from each other."

Social Exchange Theory can help us to understand this trust-building as an exchange where the initial 'currency' is the positive experiences shared by those who've been helped by the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This trust, once established, keeps growing. Every positive story shared adds to the organization's credibility and encourages more women to seek help. This cycle of trust and support shows the strength of community ties and the importance of each survivor's voice in shaping a trustworthy support network.

Reducing Power Imbalances

Establishing trust calls for addressing power imbalances so that support systems do not unintentionally disempower survivors. Preventing power disparities that can place survivors in subordinate roles requires constant policy review. Effective trust-building is both organizational and personal, aimed at making sure survivors' opinions are heard and valued.

When women do finally seek help, they usually arrive in a very vulnerable and distressed state. "When women come into the organization or to our shelter or to our counselling services, initially they come in, they're quite battered and bruised and they're quite hesitant," Maya shared. Often the choice to get in touch is filled with inner struggle and anxiety about social reaction. "So for them to even make the decision to reach out means that they are really, they really looked at who would put them and where they are most likely to get support," Suki said. For survivors, this emphasizes the power disparities since NGOs own the resources and apparent authority, which can be intimidating.

Staff members use caution when engaging with survivors in public places, as one participant pointed out, to prevent unintentionally drawing attention to them or subjecting them to risk. Survivors have to trust that their privacy will be protected as the widespread stigma and possible negative consequences necessitate it. "We are very, very strict around issues of confidentiality. So they know that no one else would know." Maya underlined. "People can even be victims of coming out; things like identity could be leaked," Suki said. The fear emphasizes the power dynamics. Maintaining strong confidentiality is not only a policy but also a lifeline for survivors in societies where getting help is sometimes greeted with hostility or resistance.

Moreover, in Sub-Saharan Africa's socio-cultural setting, people are not often inclined to accept help from total strangers. Direct, personal ties build trust more effectively than a professional, pragmatic approach that would be more typical in Western settings. The cultural norm of depending on close-knit community ties means NGOs have to spend time and effort in creating these personal ties to acquire the trust of survivors. Delhey and Newton (2003) underlines that social trust differs significantly across cultures, which influences the development and preservation of trust. Their study confirms the need of recognizing particular cultural settings in order to develop trust in the right way. Suki highlighted this way of building trust: "So when we went into this community, it wasn't just us as outsiders, so to say, trying to change their belief system. We had people from their own communities speak with them."

Some NGOs emphasized that the person survivors first connect with will be there for them all along. Hana observed, "I experienced that the women love to talk about their life in their own country and just to tell what they are missing and what they think it's good or bad and that the person shows interest in." This continuity provides a deeper feeling of stability and trust. According to Tara, "They know that the person who introduces themselves to them is going to see them through the whole process." According to Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2012), direct encounters help to enable a deeper awareness of social cues and intentions, which are fundamental in developing and preserving trust. This directness helps people accurately evaluate the genuineness, dependability, and skill of others. In the framework of

community relations, where unofficial social networks usually play an essential part in social support and resource exchange, these personal interactions are fundamental for building a strong feeling of trust and community connectedness.

Building trust with survivors of gender-based violence is not a one-time event but rather a continual process needing persistent and trustworthy support. Regular follow-ups using contemporary communication platforms like WhatsApp guarantees survivors continuous assistance and helps them avoid feeling abandoned following their first contact. Maya observed, "We'll just follow up from time to time, checking via WhatsApp. In person, are you OK to see me, or do you want to continue talking on WhatsApp? When they want to, they have a face-to-face." Moreover, ongoing support from several sources helps to balance the power relations between NGOs and survivors. NGOs that demonstrate a regular presence and involvement show that they are dependable and truly concerned about the path of recovery of the survivors. "We just have to overcome the barriers. It's time, I mean, we just have to show that we are there constantly and it's through repetition and seeing us, seeing our team," Aisha stated. Building trust with survivors of gender-based violence is considered as a continual exchange, where each interaction helps the survivor to trust the organization more. This is consistent with Social Exchange Theory and the theory of distrust from Hardin (2001), which sees trust as building through positive interactions that lower psychological expenses and improve benefits for the survivors. This strategy not only preserves institutional trust by displaying organizational dependability but also strengthens relational trust by means of personalized, frequent encounters, therefore balancing power dynamics and proving real concern and dedication to the healing process for the survivors (Cropanzano et al., 2017).

Building trust with survivors in Sub-Saharan Africa calls for using community networks and addressing power disparities. To properly build and sustain trust, NGOs have to build personal relationships, uphold strict confidentiality, and involve survivors constantly, thereby guaranteeing culturally sensitive and constant support.

5. Discussion & conclusion

Strengthening trust in gender-based violence interventions is critical to their effectiveness, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. This study sought to determine how the gender-based violence discourse within NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa influences efforts to build trust with victims of violence. Effective interventions are primarily based on trust, which directly influences survivors' willingness to interact with support systems and seek help. This study adds a valuable perspective to current theories by focusing on the specific cultural and power dynamics found in Sub-Saharan Africa, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive strategies for building trust in gender-based violence interventions. The findings highlight the shortcomings of current models, such as Social Exchange Theory, in dealing with these nuances, as well as the importance of including feminist perspectives in order to develop deeper and effective trust-building techniques. The most significant findings on trust-building in this context will be discussed in the following paragraphs, addressing the research questions.

Processes for building trust in Western countries and sub-Saharan African countries vary considerably. In Western countries, trust-building assumes institutional dependability and reciprocal nature. However political unrest and colonization of Sub-Saharan Africa led to mistrust of outside NGOs, especially Western ones. Cultural standards that regard men as dominant and women as subordinate heighten power imbalances and complicate trust-building.

Emphasizing reciprocity and trust, traditional Social Exchange Theory ignores intricate power differences. In Sub-Saharan Africa, survivors may avoid NGOs for fear of mistrust and stigma. This research reveals that women approach NGOs through friends or community leaders to test the waters before fully engaging. Openly talking about personal trauma might cause social isolation, thus this careful approach is required.

For NGOs, cultural and power dynamics complicate trust-building. Women hesitate to disclose their experiences and often worry about judgment and more victimization. In Sub-Saharan Africa, survivors might mistrust NGOs out of concern about community reaction and violations of confidentiality.

Social Exchange Theory is modified to fill in these gaps. To build trust, implementing culturally sensitive approaches and recognizing power dynamics is important. Practical strategies call for frequent follow-ups and personal relationships. Additionally effective is empowering survivors by using community engagement and survivor-led advocacy. Training survivors to become community advocates has allowed NGOs to make use of local trust networks.

Gender-based violence persists in many Sub-Saharan African cultures due to social norms. Normalizing marital rape, domestic discipline, and financial control reflects male dominance. Women seeking help face cultural barriers because acknowledging abuse often involves questioning long-held societal values.

NGOs are essential to changing harmful gender norms. Their actions change community attitudes toward gender-based violence. This research shows that culturally sensitive NGOs are more effective at changing society. Local leaders and respected community members have successfully participated in educational programs promoting women's rights and gender equality. These initiatives enable communities to challenge their accepted norms and progressively change them. These initiatives demonstrate how NGOs can break the silence on gender-based violence and create a supportive environment for survivors by giving women spaces to tell their stories and help one each other

These interventions have long-term effects including changes in society and women's growing willingness to get help. By engaging with society and building trust, NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa can help to redefine gender roles while strengthening efforts against gender-based violence.

Global narratives concerning gender-based violence emphasize laws, human rights, and systematic interventions. However, Sub-Saharan African cultural discourses are anchored in local customs, communal values, and traditional beliefs. These discourses stress shared identities and community values, which could clash with global narratives.

This study shows that including local leaders in program creation and implementation has helped NGOs incorporate these narratives. Effective programs also mix legal education with conventional conflict resolution, making interventions legally and culturally relevant. Other NGOs worked with local women's groups to create educational resources honoring local culture and international standards. This strategy made the conversations about women's rights and violence prevention more inclusive.

These combined strategies increase local community trust and involvement and progressively change society perceptions of gender-based violence. One organization noted an increase in women seeking support following public support of their initiatives by local leaders. An initiative whereby members of the community were equipped to intervene in instances of domestic violence demonstrates how international narratives can be implemented locally.

Maintaining community involvement and modifying plans to fit evolving cultural settings present difficulties. These cases demonstrate how culturally aware NGOs may connect local and global narratives and build trust, thereby strengthening gender-based violence interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

5.1 Theoretical implications

The results of this study improve the theoretical application of Social Exchange Theory by stressing the requirement to include power inequalities in environments with gender-based violence. Social Exchange Theory has concentrated on mutual reciprocity and trust dynamics but has notably neglected the complexity introduced by power disparities, especially prevalent in relationships involving vulnerable populations such as survivors of gender-based violence (Minckas et al., 2020; Morgan, 2016; Schilke et al., 2015). This study reveals a fundamental gap in the conventional knowledge of Social Exchange Theory and suggests an enlarged framework considering the power dynamics and cultural settings influencing trust-building mechanisms. Building trust with survivors of gender-based violence calls for a refined strategy different from Western standards in Sub-Saharan Africa, where a baseline trust may be more easily built. This study proposes an adaptation whereby survivors must feel safe and supported through frequent, respectful interactions, therefore understanding the extended duration and specialized strategies needed to build trust in culturally sensitive settings.

The findings of this study calls for a review of theoretical models such as Hardin's observations on mistrust, particularly in relation to gender-based violence interventions. Hardin (2001) argues that mistrust acts as a protective mechanism in untrustworthy surroundings, which becomes more relevant in contexts where power disparities and cultural stigmas are widespread. This study emphasizes the requirement of interventions that not only seem reliable but also actively show trustworthiness by means of survivor-centered behavior and being conscious of power dynamics. Building trust with survivors in Sub-Saharan Africa requires a longer process distinguished by a conscious attempt to guarantee safety and create genuine bonds free from pressure. Such a strategy highlights the requirement of a customized approach that fits particular cultural sensitivity and the first hesitancy usually demonstrated by survivors who are affected by stigma. It contrasts with faster trust-building expectations seen in Western environments.

Gender-based violence programs can help to build closer and more successful connections with survivors by concentrating on developing interventions that are responsive rather than prescriptive and that actively try to minimize power differences. This is consistent with the updated theoretical model that emphasizes more on comprehending and combining the particular situations and needs of survivors, thereby improving the efficacy and credibility of the support environments (Hardin, 2001).

Power management is essential in interventions aiming at gender-based violence since it goes beyond basic assistance to promote actual empowerment and active involvement. This strategy questions established power relations in support environments and advocates a change in perspective from seeing survivors only as beneficiaries of aid to one of active participants in their own recovery process (Abramowitz & Moran, 2012). Therefore, effective empowerment techniques must guarantee that power is not only acknowledged but also actively transferred to survivors, therefore enabling them to make important choices regarding their rehabilitation and future and to retake control over their life.

In practice, empowerment inside these interventions requires genuine changes in power relations that allow survivors to act in their own life, not only give them a place to speak (Goldman & Little, 2015). Many NGOs, for example, concentrate on teaching survivors about their rights and offering vocational training to help with financial independence. Such programs are essential since they empower survivors with the information and tools required for building new lives, therefore strengthening their autonomy and lowering the risk of future violence.

Still, the degree of empowerment usually depends on the tools at hand for NGOs. Some are confined to basic support services while others can provide whole programs including legal assistance, psychiatric counseling, and career training. Despite these differences, the major objective still is to empower survivors by changing the power dynamics that previously assigned them to passive positions. By doing this, treatments not only deal with the immediate consequences of gender-based violence but also help survivors to become long-term resilient and independent, therefore providing them with the means and confidence to create a life beyond victimization.

The findings of this study highlight the need of changing global narratives on gender-based violence that mostly mirror Western ideas by means of different approaches. Emphasizing legal frameworks and individual rights, these narratives sometimes fail to accurately represent the complicated socioeconomic and cultural reality of African women, therefore perhaps reducing their agency and oversimplifying their experiences (Bayu, 2019). Strategies that go beyond Western experiences are much needed in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the trauma connected with gender-based violence might differ considerably. NGOs pointed out, for example, that although Western models of gender-based violence intervention assume a certain baseline knowledge of gender rights and the illegality of such violence, such baselines are not often present in African settings. This disparity calls for not just imported but also co-created interventions involving local people to guarantee cultural relevance and efficacy (Breton, 2023). Embracing local values and including community stakeholders not only fits better with local practices but also significantly improves trust and collaboration (Ilika & Ilika, 2005).

5.2 Social relevance

The results of this study clearly show the need for community involvement in the fight against gender-based violence, since they show how much participatory practices improve the efficacy and sustainability of treatments. Unlike traditional top-down strategies, which can force outside agendas—from planning to execution—involves community people throughout the intervention process, therefore establishing a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. This strategy guarantees that the interventions are culturally relevant as well as resonate strongly inside the community, therefore improving their legitimacy and acceptance (Minckas et al., 2020).

Community-based NGOs are very important, while they use their local knowledge and connections. Programs run by community members who can express and meet their own

needs produce more participation and commitment to the established practices. This empowerment, achieved through active participation, not only results in real change in community behavior, but also shifts perceptions of gender-based violence (Ilika & Ilika, 2005).

Changing society norms and improving the efficacy of treatments against gender-based violence depend on the integration of community involvement with individual empowerment measures. In areas where patriarchal rules are firmly ingrained and gender-based violence may be either culturally minimized or even encouraged, this strategy is especially essential. According to Keith et al. (2023), interventions aiming at gaining community trust and acceptance depend on an awareness of and resolution of these patriarchal settings.

A pillar of this transforming process are educational projects. For instance, practically every company in the research carries some kind of community education program. These initiatives strongly confront and change ingrained gender stereotypes by including community members in conversations challenging conventional patriarchal ideas, therefore transcending mere knowledge. These programs help to promote a culture change toward more gender equality and respect by teaching men and women about the consequences and reality of gender-based violence.

Effective gender-based violence interventions depend on community education and empowerment since such approaches not only break the cycle of violence but also create the foundation for continuous society transformation. This all-encompassing strategy guarantees that programs are not only instructive but also transforming, therefore enabling long-term change in community perceptions and practices toward gender-based violence.

African feminist challenges highlight how often mainstream international policies ignore the particular cultural subtleties of many communities, therefore homogenizing perhaps inaccurately reflecting the local situations or appreciation of indigenous customs (Moser, 2012). For instance, some Sub-Saharan African NGOs have observed that although international standards support general gender equality measures, these suggestions may contradict strongly ingrained patriarchal values, therefore making implementation difficult without major local adaptation.

5.3 Limitations

In reflecting on the scope and methodology of this research on gender-based violence interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, several limitations have emerged that are important for understanding the study's findings and for guiding future research.

Methodologically, depending primarily on qualitative interviews brought significant limitations. Although the interviews were enlightening, occasionally bad internet access or participant time constraints caused disruptions that required sessions to be spreaded. This affected not just the information flow but also made it difficult to keep the consistency of answers over sessions. Moreover, the significant work needed to transcribe and interpret disturbed or low-quality audio recordings could have brought inadvertent prejudices or data interpretation mistakes. Several techniques were used to address these problems and improve the

dependability of the acquired data. First, I tried to review and summarize the earlier conversations at the beginning of every new session when interviews were interrupted or split. This method guaranteed participants could readily re-connect with the thread of conversation and helped to preserve continuity. Furthermore, aware of the possibility of transcription mistakes resulting from disturbed or low-quality audio recordings, transcriptions were checked against the original recordings several times, especially in areas marked by poor audio quality.

The study's small sample size of eight NGOs also posed a significant constraint. The limited sample size restricts the generalizability of the results even if these groups differed in size and emphasis and offered a range of points of view. The setting of every organization and the variety of their intervention tactics limit generalizations regarding the success of various strategies over Sub-Saharan Africa. The study took a qualitative method with a focus toward depth rather than generalizability in order to mitigate this restriction. Deeply interacting with every organization allowed me to have a thorough understanding of their situations and procedures. The study provides important new perspectives on the several methods to gender-based violence interventions and the idea of trust regardless of the small sample size. For NGOs and research, these deep case studies are helpful models.

Theoretically, it was difficult to apply Social Exchange Theory in a setting strongly impacted by significant power disparities and patriarchal conventions. Although Social Exchange Theory helped to shape the conversation on trust-building, its traditional uses did not adequately address the complexity faced in Sub-Saharan African environments. I combined ideas from feminist theories and culturally relevant frameworks to offset this restriction and support the Social Exchange Theory. Furthermore, the qualitative data acquired from NGOs all around Sub-Saharan Africa gave empirical support to complement the theoretical framework. This information showed how trust is developed not only by mutual behavior but also by culturally sensitive methods and intentional destruction of patriarchal conventions.

Despite these constraints, the results of this study remain relevant. The knowledge acquired on the several strategies for gender-based violence interventions and the need of trust-building offers a significant awareness that can direct further studies and activities. This study adds to a more efficient and sustainable framework for addressing gender-based violence in Sub-Saharan Africa by stressing the need for culturally sensitive and context-specific policies.

5.4 Further research

The results and limitations of this study draw attention to important directions for more research into trust-building and gender-based violence treatments. Based on the knowledge acquired from this study, the following suggestions suggest directions for developing theoretical frameworks, comparative studies, long-term impact assessments, and culturally sensitive approaches.

The results of this study have shown the requirement of a more complex application of Social Exchange Theory in settings marked by great power disparities and different cultural norms. Development and testing of an enlarged form of Social Exchange Theory with these

features should be the main emphasis of further studies. This includes developing new theoretical models, especially addressing how trust dynamics behave differently in environments with notable power differences and varied cultural backgrounds.

Comparative study of trust-building techniques between several parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and between Sub-Saharan Africa and Western countries is another interesting field of future study. This study would seek to find how particular historical settings, social structures, and cultural practices affect the efficacy of gender-based violence treatments. By means of mixed methodologies and a bigger sample size, such comparison research will enable a better knowledge of best practices and flexible tactics.

Another important topic of future study is looking at how long-term effects of community involvement and empowerment techniques affect lowering of gender-based violence. Longitudinal studies could track communities and NGOs throughout several years to evaluate the development of trust and empowering results in sustainability. This study might center on how these approaches affect society norms, lower rates of gender-based violence, and enable survivor rehabilitation and independence over time.

5.5 Ethical reflection

Researching gender-based violence interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa required careful thought of numerous ethical issues to guarantee the integrity and respectfulness of the study. Before participants could join, they had to agree to a Qualtrics survey, therefore I developed a thorough consent form and an informed consent letter. Before starting the interview, I also asked participants to confirm verbally to be sure they were at ease and had no more questions. I made it apparent that rather than concentrating on particular events of gender-based violence involving survivors, my study focused on the viewpoints of NGOs and their experiences. This strategy helped to keep the study goals clear and transparent. The section on the methodology of the research focused especially on the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Data was securely kept to safeguard participant identities; all identifiable information was anonymised. This was absolutely vital in establishing confidence and making sure participants felt free to share their observations.

Throughout the study, I applied a process of cultural awareness. Participants could lead the discussion within their cultural setting, within the open-ended questions. This strategy reflected the national traditions and beliefs of the several engaged countries. Particularly, participants were enthusiastic to talk about their work, which was encouraging evidence of their comfort and involvement with the study process.

I followed ethical best standards even though the study did not involve direct encounters with victims of gender-based violence. This covered a careful consent procedure and making sure the study was not harmful to anyone. The emphasis on organizational viewpoints enabled a less invasive research methodology.

In addition to this, the study process required me to recognize my own possible prejudices. My viewpoint might be influenced by my Western background, trust in organizational systems, and my educational level. Therefore, I kept a reflexive posture and concentrated on

listening to the participants. This reflexivity helps to reduce prejudice and provide a more authentic portrayal of the opinions of the subjects. Building rapport with participants was made easier by my optimistic view of the study, which emphasizes the possibility of trust-building leading to the empowerment of survivors. Since participants could see the positive goals of the research, this optimistic view probably resulted in more honest and insightful conversations.

Though the study is small in scope, the results are important for the larger scholarly and professional community as well as for the participants. Through the outcomes, the participating NGOs will be able to learn from one another and maybe implement new concepts in their own operations. Regardless of limitations, my drive to help women to become empowered maintains strong. The ethical considerations and methods used in this study guaranteed that it was carried out with honesty, respect, and a dedication to have a beneficial impact.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Guide

General Organization Information:

- What is your role in the organization?
 - What motivated you to work with women who have experienced violence?
- How would you describe your organization's vision for supporting women who have experienced violence?
- Does your organization collaborate with other local, national, or international organizations? If so, how?
- Can you discuss how your organization is funded and how this supports your activities?
 - Do they have requirements?

Trust and Help-Seeking

- How does trust influence a woman's decision to seek help in your experience?
- How does your organization build and maintain trust with the women it helps?
- What strategies does your organization use to reduce stigma and encourage women to seek help?
- Can you provide examples of successful initiatives or programs?

Cultural Influences and Global vs. Local Perspectives

- How do cultural beliefs in communities impact the decision to seek help for gender-based violence?
- Does your organization implement international guidelines on gender-based violence? Why or why not?
- How do you balance these guidelines with local cultural values and practices?
- How does your organization educate the community about gender-based violence?
 - What kind of language/examples do you use in education?
- Do you primarily use global perspectives, local perspectives, or a combination?
 - What role do you believe local and cultural discourses play in helping women who have experienced violence?
- Can you explain how your organization works with local leaders or community groups?
- What challenges has your organization faced in trying to align with global standards on gender-based violence while staying true to local cultural values and norms?

Social Exchange Theory and Power Dynamics

- How do power imbalances between the organization and the women you help affect the trust-building process?
- What measures does your organization take to minimize these imbalances and fears of exploitation?

- How does your organization ensure that building trust does not make survivors feel more vulnerable?
- What strategies do you use to empower survivors to have a voice and make their own decisions within your programs?

Recommendations and Organizational Strategies

- What organizational initiatives do you think could improve seeking help?
- In comparing your organization with others (whether they be local NGOs, international NGOs, or community-based organizations), what advantages does your organization have?

Learning and Adapting Strategies

- Have you had to change any approaches or messages over time to better resonate with survivors?
 - Can you describe these changes?
 - How have they been received by the survivors?
- Does your organization use consistent approaches across different countries, or are they customized according to local needs and conditions?

Concluding the Interview

- Are there any topics we have not covered that you think are important to discuss?
- Do you have any further suggestions or insights that could help with my research?

Appendix B

Code trees





