Implicating mobile phones in violence against women: What's gender got to do with it?

Kutoma J. Wakunuma (PhD)

Abstract

This paper gives an analysis of women and men's differential access and use of the mobile phone and how through it gender stereotypes are reinforced. During a four year study in Zambia, it emerged that although there were clear advantages that have come as a result of mobile phones some negative social impacts which reinforce gender stereotypes and power relations and subsequently result in violence against women have remained largely un-documented. The paper therefore makes the case that despite the clear advantage of the mobile phone; it is also providing a new focal point for social conflict and violence in relationships.

Keywords: mobile phones, social and economic development, violence, social strife, gender differentials, empowerment.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that new information and communication technologies (ICTs) like mobile phones are playing an important role in enhancing social and economic change in the world, particularly in many countries of Africa. A number of international and academic reports have illustrated this change over time. For example, the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) 2008 report on African telecommunication/ICT indicators reports that "the African continent saw a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 32 percent in mobile subscribers between 2006 and 2007, with almost 65 million new subscribers added during the year" (p. 6). The report further adds that the continent had some quarter of a billion subscribers at the beginning of 2008 (ITU, 2008). Other studies like that of Zurovac, Talisuna &

Snow (2012); Shet & de Costa, (2011); Kinkade & Verclas (2008) and Wakunuma (2008) have highlighted how mobile phones are helping with social change. They have provided examples of how mobile phones have been used by health clinicians to promote and assist with health care especially in relation to HIV/AIDS such as the case has been in South Africa, Kenya and Zambia (Kinkade and Verclas 2008: p.13, 16, 19). The importance of ICTs like mobile phones in enhancing social and economic change in Africa has further been highlighted by academics like Heeks (2010) who have commented on huge ICT expenditures in excess of about US$60bn by international monetary organisations like the World Bank in one year. Heeks (2010) has further pointed to the Banks investment of about US$800m per year in ICT specific loans and guarantees while the private sector invests about US$10bn in mobile telephony (p. 626). With such developments it can be said that after a lot of 'soul searching' in the developing world, particularly on the African continent, there is an acceptance that mobile phones are the one 'new' ICT that are making and continue to make a fundamental difference to most, especially through provision of easy and fast communication.

There is also belief coupled with aspiration that with the in-roads that the mobile phone is making in Africa and other developing countries, there is potential to achieve gender equality. For example in their study of the mobile phone for purposes of lifelong learning for rural women in India, Balasubramanian et al (2010) concluded that the mobile phone offers the possibility to "transition from silence to voice, from powerlessness to empowerment ... in non-formal learning contexts, just as it is in formal contexts, and that technology offers a means to accelerate this process if the use of technology is placed in an appropriate social context" (p. 207). Milek, Stork & Gillwald (2011) also suggest that mobile phones have the potential to contribute to gender equality especially when men and women have equal access to resources like income and education (p. 138). In addition, if mobile phones are considered as part of a group of ICTs that international bodies like the UN or governments like Zambia affirm have the potential to enable women's empowerment through statements like the following

> "development of ICTs provides enormous opportunities for women, who should be an integral part of, and key actors, in the Information Society. We are committed to ensuring that the Information Society enables women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society and in all decision-making processes. To this end, we should mainstream a gender equality perspective and use ICTs as a tool to that end" (UN WSIS Declaration of Principles, 2003) and

> "it is envisaged that ICTs can be harnessed to the achievement of these goals namely...Promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women (p.1) Zambia National ICT Policy, p. 1)

then we can see that there are also policy aspirations in terms of how ICTs like mobile phones can potentially contribute to gender equality.

However, while accepting these potentials, this paper looks beyond the perceived social and economic benefits by also paying attention to the downside that mobile phones are actually having on women in Zambia. This shows that despite the existing and potential advantages of mobile phones, there are also disadvantages such that gender inequalities are actually being reinforced. These are observations made over a four year period of study in Zambia where it was discovered that for some women, possession of a mobile phone meant being answerable to their spouses, it meant being at the mercy of their husbands who decided whether they could continue to have a mobile phone or not, it meant physical and verbal abuse and mobile phone inspections to see who had called their numbers, why and what relation there was between the caller and the spouse. Due to this, this paper makes the case that in as much as there are a lot of benefits that have resulted due to the mobile phone such as the obvious easy communication and potential for business (Nafukho & Muyia, 2010; Frempong, 2009) including mobile use in health service (Zurovac, Talisuna & Snow, 2012; Shet & de Costa, 2011; Kinkade & Verclas, 2008; Wakunuma, 2008), there are also drawbacks which need to be looked at in terms of how these affect gender equality, empowerment and overall social and economic development. This is because there is the danger that if the negative aspects of

the mobile phones such as those outlined above are not dealt with in policy development, positive social change and development in the developing world will prove challenging. The paper also argues that the fact that men have the power to determine when, where or whether their spouses can have access and use of mobile phones, such power can have an impact and has implications on women's ability to benefit fully, the perceived social and economic development of ICTs like the mobile phone including potential empowerment.

An additional concern on this matter is the question of how positive social change or economic growth can be expected in a developing country where and if one half of the population – women, are still answerable to the other half of the population – men. Social change and overall development can only ensue if gender equality is guaranteed. To guarantee gender equality, it is important to not only look at the positive aspects of technologies like the mobile phone but also to take a closer look at the shifting new focal points that technologies like mobile phones are affording; that of mistrust, jealousy and violence, which are usually directed to women by men. The argument is that by highlighting these new focal points brought about as a result of new technologies and in this case the mobile phone; where gender inequalities and violence are being reinforced; chances are that opportunities might arise that will combat such instances. Equally, instances of violence for example can be made more visible and by so-doing develop ways through the same technologies that will help women overcome such subordination. These can then be factored in during policy development and implementation rather than failing to address them at all. In addition, the topic being addressed in this paper may not only be unique to Zambia but to other developing countries including the developed world so much so that solutions that may be found might be generalisable to other areas. Through this, women may begin to achieve the equality that threatens to continue to elude them even in the modern era of new technologies for development.

2. Research Methodology

This research adopted a mixed method approach. The approach saw the employment of questionnaires, face-to-face semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion and documentary analysis. These research methods were used and applied at three site locations, namely Lusaka, the capital city of Zambia, Southern Province, namely the town of Kalomo and Eastern Province in the town of Katete. Lusaka was chosen for its good ICT infrastructure and ideal location for the recruitment of large numbers of research participants. It also provided the focus group location. As it turned out, the capital city did provide more research participants than the other two locations. Kalomo was chosen due to its rurality and due to the fast that it was host to a novel women's ICT club called Bwacha Women's Club ICT that had been funded by the International Institute for Communication and Development. Katete was chosen due to a Commonwealth Learning Literacy (COLLIT) project that had been supported by the British Department for International Development (DFID) and carried out by the University of Zambia from where the author had contacts. These two rural sites provided an opportunity to understand the experiences and perceptions of participants; especially women in as far as mobile phones were concerned. The decision to adopt a mixed method approach was taken because it allows for complementarity of techniques where one or the other might be insufficient. Together, these approaches provided a more robust understanding of the topic than either one could have done on its own. The data from the questionnaire survey, interviews and focus group discussion reveal participants' personal accounts and opinions of mobile phone access and use in both urban and rural areas, highlighting actual experiences rather than policy aspirations.

2.1 Questionnaires

There were a total of 420 questionnaires distributed to a cross-section of Zambians. Of the 420, 390 were returned, with Lusaka accounting for 293 completed questionnaires. Initially the questionnaires were given to family and friends to distribute to people they knew. The approach resulted in a snowball effect whereby other participants were recruited through those that had completed the questionnaires. The questionnaire was both self-administered and assisted for those who were either illiterate or preferred only to give verbal

answers. It should be noted that some of the 390 survey participants also took part in other aspects of the study such as focus group discussions and interviews. For example, some of those who were interviewed and who were part of the focus group discussion were also asked to fill out the questionnaires.

2.2 Focus group discussion

A focus group discussion from an under-served area of the capital was conducted. The author conducted a focus group discussion in order to explore further views and experiences of mobile phone use between women and men in an economically depressed part of Zambia's capital city called Chawama. The area was host to a women's Club called Twikatane which means *'we should be* united' which was affiliated to the Chawama Youth Community Centre which was offering ICT services like internet for the first time in the community. This group of discussants were identified through the snowball technique where after administering questionnaire and talking to some mobile phone users in the city, some participants felt it would be worth visiting the Centre. After having approached the Chairperson of Twikatane Club and the Manager of the Centre, the two agreed along with their members to share their experiences of the mobile phone. In total there were 6 women and 3 men in the group. One of the women was the Chairperson of the Club; another was the treasurer while the rest were ordinary members. On the men's side, one was the Manager of the Chawama Community Youth Centre while the other two were users of the facilities of the community centre.

2.3 Interviews

As indicated above, interviews formulated part of the research approach where some of the participants who had completed the questionnaire and were part of the focus group were also willing to be interviewed. The interviews constituted a face-to-face in-depth semi-structured approach.

3. Demographic Data

Tables 1 to 3 and graph 1 below depict the demographic data of the research participants.

Table 1: Gender

1a-b. Sex of respondent

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	209	53.6	53.6	53.6
	Female	181	46.4	46.4	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Age Group

1a-a. Age Group of respondent

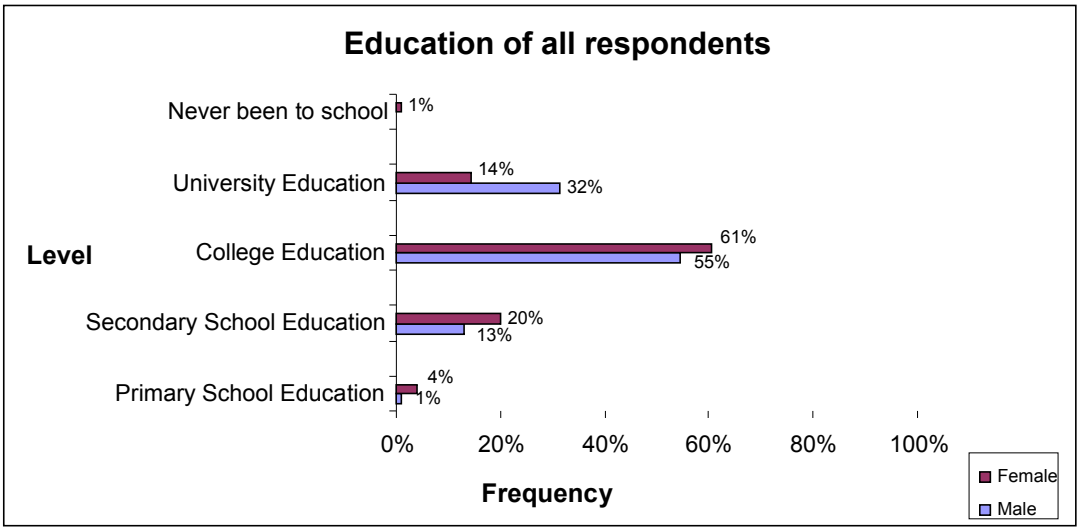
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	15 to 20	18	4.6	4.6	4.6
	21 to 25	75	19.2	19.2	23.8
	26 to 30	100	25.6	25.6	49.5
	31 to 35	78	20.0	20.0	69.5
	36 to 40	42	10.8	10.8	80.3
	41 to 45	33	8.5	8.5	88.7
	46 to 50	25	6.4	6.4	95.1
	51 to 55	12	3.1	3.1	98.2
	56 and above	7	1.8	1.8	100.0
	Total	390	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Education

a4. What is your level of education?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Primary School Education	9	2.3	2.3	2.3
	Secondary School Education	63	16.2	16.2	18.5
	College Education	223	57.2	57.3	75.8
	University Education	92	23.6	23.7	99.5
	Never been to school	2	.5	.5	100.0
	Total	389	99.7	100.0	
Missing	System	1	.3		
Total		390	100.0		

Graph 1



There were a total of 209 male participants and 181 female participants. 100 of the participants were between the age ranges of 26 to 30; while 78 fell in the age range of 31 to 35 with 75 participants falling in the range of 21 to 25. Most participants, 223 in total, had a college education with only 92 attending university. As can be seen from graph 1, of those who attended University only 14% were women while 32% were men. This mirrors the general trend in the country. There are a variety of social and economic factors that relate to fewer females attending and obtaining higher levels of education as they progress. These include marriage, pregnancy; need to assist with household chores and looking after the sick. A lack of affordable school fees is also a factor. In addition, where guardians face having to make a choice between a male and female child to send to school, often the male child will be given preference. The education system in Zambia is such that if at all possible and depending on the financial status of parents or guardians, a child can begin school at kindergarten level. This is then followed by primary school, then secondary, followed by College with University being the highest level.

4. The Mobile Phone: More than an instrument of social and economic development

Since its introduction in Zambia in the 1990s, the mobile phone has become a 'revolution' in its own right. Initially, the mobile phone was seen as a technology for the elite in urban areas, but this is no longer the

case as appropriation of this technology has extended even to the most ordinary of people in Zambian society. Of all the new technologies that include the ubiquitous internet, there is no doubt that the mobile phone is the more "popular" and frequently used technology in both urban and rural areas (Porter et al, 2012; Wakunuma, 2006). Etzo & Collender (2010) suggest that the impact of the mobile phone has revolutionalised how business such as transfer of money, health care as well as politics is conducted. This may be attributed to several factors which include much easier and cheaper access than the internet. As Ling (2004) illustrates, "mobile telephony is, in itself, more accessible than the PC/internet. The technology is relatively inexpensive and widely available [than the internet]" (p. 16, 17). Also it might be because mobile phones seem to have much more relevance than other technologies. For instance and according to the Zambia Information and Communications Technology Authority (ZICTA), during the period ending December 2011, there were more than 8.1 million mobile phone subscribers in Zambia compared to slightly over 49 000 subscribers back in 2000 (ZICTA, 2012). However, the Authority shows that subscribers of mobile broadband are lamentably low with a total of only 28 992 at end of 2011 having slightly increased from 24 169 in 2010 when broadband was starting to be used more generally. In addition, there are now more mobile phones than fixed lines which only total 85 727.

The exponential growth of mobile phones has proved extremely popular and accessible, such that there have been suggestions that the mobile phone is the technology that will help Africa out of its social and economic malaise (Donner, 2005b; Butler, 2005). Horst and Miller (2006) thus conclude that "the cell phone mushrooms up from inside mud-brick shacks and under corrugated iron sheet roofing to become an insistent and active presence that has us rushing to even acknowledge, let alone appreciate" (p. 11).

Could this then explain the uptake of mobile phones much more than other technologies such as the internet in most developing countries in Africa like Zambia? Other than the obvious restrictions of infrastructure and the cost of computers, perhaps it is the social meaning, which is attached to the mobile phone which makes it more easily adoptable. This is why a woman who used to walk several kilometres to communicate with her family now finds the mobile phone a much quicker and easier option. In this respect and borrowing from Horst and Miller, it is what the mobile phone has become in light of its use by women, and

what women have become in light of their use of the mobile phone – that makes the social meaning attached of relevance and makes a mobile phone such an important tool in developing countries, particularly in rural areas. It is also perhaps due to this social meaning that some men are threatened by the mobile phone that they resort to violence and abuse of their spouses in order to maintain what was and in their eyes what should always be, the status quo, where they and not their partners are the dominant gender. This is not to say that women may not be treated in the same way if there was a ubiquitous use of other technologies such as the landline, emails or indeed ordinary mail. However the point being argued is that because the mobile phone is the one new technology whose use is growing exponentially, it also presents a new focal point for gender differences and the reinforcement of gender inequalities which includes violence against women.

Of course the phenomenon of gender violence or conflict happens in a variety of ways, including via different other technologies like the internet and for different reasons. For instance, Brickell (2012) has pointed out to the inequality that the internet can present through for example harassment, unwanted sexual solicitation and even cyber stalking which can impact women's safety online. Ybarra et al (2007) have also highlighted how internet chat rooms can be used for unwanted sexual solicitation which also has an impact on women's safety. These examples show how technology, specifically the internet can be implicated in violence against women.

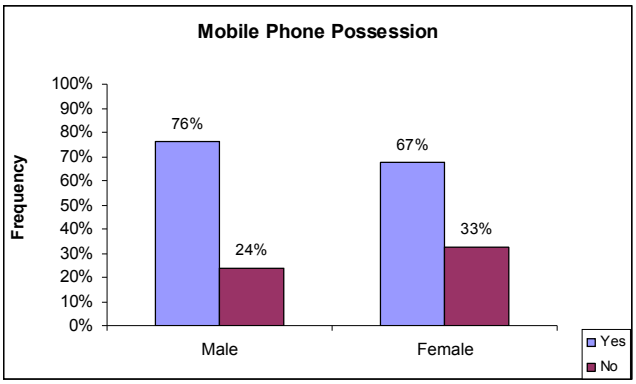
However, what is missing and where this paper makes a novel contribution is how the mobile phone as a technology that is being appropriated at an exponential rate especially in the developing world is being implicated in violence against women. The mobile phone presents a new phenomenon in the age of new technologies in as far as social conflicts in relationships is concerned. The following section will look at this phenomenon and present data to support the trend.

5. Findings

5.1 Mobile phone access and use

As noted above, 390 respondents returned the questionnaires out of 420. Of the 390 returned, 209 (54%) were from men and 181 (46%) were from women. Survey respondents were asked a series of questions on their access to and use of mobile phones. As shown in graph 2, 76% male and 67% female respondents said they had a mobile phone.

Graph 2



Interestingly, although admitting that there may be some gender imbalances in mobile phone ownership, some respondents felt that women were already more frequent users of the mobile phone than men. One male interviewee had this to say:

> If I am to look at access and accessibility to the internet, to the landline even, to the old forms of technology, I extrapolate that to the mobile phone, then I might say that we still experience that imbalance that in fact women are less pre-disposed to own mobile phones because of their economic needs which cannot enable them to do that. But I see a counter trend emerging, it seems to me that more and more women are definitely buying mobile phones. Now I am gonna be cheeky here and say most of the boyfriends, you know, will like to buy them mobile phones, I mean that's the one thing you want to buy your girlfriend, something of that sort. So one might argue that this is not an issue anymore really, so that before long we might in fact discover that more women have got mobile phones plus add to that the chitchat that women tend to indulge in, I mean *(laughs)*, they

> enjoy sending text messages. It's amazing, so if you don't have a mobile phone you are nothing at any work place if you are a woman. You need to have a mobile phone. So all these social, cultural things are coming in and it seems to me that well, you know, it might not be surprising to find that in fact women do own, maybe own is not the right word, because the question of ownership is something else, but at least do have access to mobile phones. *(Mr Mathews[1])*

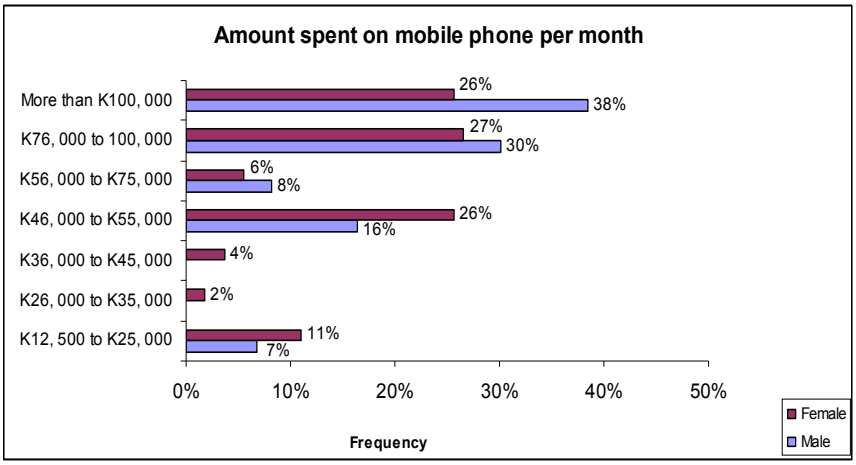
Such a revelation although showing that women might begin to possess mobile phones more than their male counterparts, also suggests that most women do not have the economic power to buy their own phones. *Mr Matthews'* remarks make clear that he believes that women are still in a subordinate position as far as economic power is concerned. He also alludes to the fact that for women, a mobile phone is a social status symbol amongst her peers as without one, she is seen as nothing. However, one might argue with his assertion when one looks at the interest in upgrading every time a new model comes out. This may seem to be mostly in the West, but the desire to upgrade is also very strong in a developing country like Zambia. As such, the issue of status is as much for women as it is for men, perhaps even much more for men because they are more likely to buy phones regularly than women due to their better economic position. *Mr Mathews* also stereotypes women's love of "chit chat". This might be read to imply that whereas men have the economic power they also use the mobile phone for productive purposes which is, allegedly, in contrast to women's more frivolous use.

5.2 Financial Economic Power

Men's financial economic power was confirmed by the amount of money they spent on their mobile phones compared to women in a month. The findings, as supported by graph 3 below, showed that more men than women spent a lot of money on airtime.

[1] All the names of research participants have been changed to protect confidentiality

Graph 3



The graph shows the amounts quoted in Zambian currency called Kwacha which is often abbreviated to 'K'. For instance there were 38% men and only 26% women who spent over K100, 000. After this category and at all but two categories, men spent more than women. However, it seemed the less the amount spent, the more women were to be found in such a category. The trend only changes between the range of K46, 000 to K55, 000 where more women at 26% than men, at 16% are prominent. The general conclusion seems to be that men spent more on their mobile phones at any one given time than women.

6. Getting in deeper with interview revelations

The interview data do not simply complement the questionnaire survey but foreground the personal experiences of the research participants. Although a few interview extracts are described above, this section discusses the data in much greater detail. Although many interviewees indicated that the mobile phone was a tool that helped them in many different ways, particularly with communication they also implicated it in gender inequalities including spousal strife and violence.

6.1 Impact of financial inequality

Although it is clear that there is little significant gender difference in terms of women and men's possession and use of the mobile phones from the findings presented above, it is however evident that there is

significant financial economic difference between women and men, with men having a better financial standing than women. Men were more inclined to spend more on airtime, mobile upgrade or purchase. As a result, women were more likely to engage in 'paging' or 'beeping' activities in order to be able to afford to communicate. The paging/beeping phenomenon allows communication between those who cannot afford their own airtime and those who can. Donner (2005a) states that "beeping both reflects (relies on) and reinforces (creates) shared understandings of economic and power hierarchies, social exchange, and gender roles, as well as the particular circumstances of relationships between two people". (p. 3).

The reliance and creation of power hierarchies can be reflected between spouses, giving an indication of social and economic power between the beeper and the beeped/pager and paged. Services such as the sharing or transfer of airtime between mobile phone users also creat power relation hierarchies. For example, a service called Me2U which is provided by one of the mobile service providers in Zambia allows a user who has $10 worth of airtime on their mobile for instance to be able to share some of the airtime with another user. This is achieved by using a particular code provided by the service provider which allows the sender to transfer any amount of the $10 to a preferred user. This is more likely to happen between those with better financial standing such that they are able to transfer airtime to those with a lower financial standing. In this respect, it is highly likely that men who are often financially stable will transfer and share airtime with their wives, girlfriends, sisters or their mothers. Such a service is helpful in helping women to have credit and use it in a way they may desire. However, it also shows how gender differences may be performed through a mobile technology device. Such gender differences as a result of different financial standings in society may breed power hierarchies where the one with a better financial standing will almost always feel that they have power over those with a lower financial standing. In certain instances, such differences lead to gender conflict and violence as will be discussed below.

6.2 Gender conflict – Spousal social strife

Although there are clear benefits resulting from mobile phones in Zambia, there are drawbacks as well which have reinforced social gender differences and violence against women. It appears that with the

mobile phone has brought a new focal point for gender differences and this particularly includes social strife and/or violence between men and women. Many of the study participants revealed the unequal gender differentials especially between spouses, which became accentuated through the ownership and use of the mobile phone. Some research participants, for example, revealed that the mobile phone had brought social strife into the home, leading to insecurity and insensitivity which sometimes resulted in physical and verbal abuse as well as jealousy and mistrust. Several women in the focus group that formed part of the research approach mentioned this issue, with one discussant revealing that she knew of women who had been beaten because of the mobile phone. She had the following to say:

Interviewee: Most of us housewives don't even know what a phone looks like. Even if it is ringing here for their husbands, they will just say, "oh no, I don't even know where to press"! Then if and when the woman answers she will be beaten. The husbands will be like: "Why did you answer my phone, who told you to be answering my phone?"

Interviewer: Have you had such situations? Have you really experienced such situations?

Interviewee: Oh yes! Wives being battered because of answering the phone.

Coincidentally, this point is graphically demonstrated by a news report which came out in the *Zambian Post* newspaper on 21st April 2007. A man is believed to have beaten his wife and causing her serious bodily harm because he suspected her of having an extra-marital affair. The beating was compounded by the fact that she refused to disclose her mobile phone pin number for him to check her phone calls and text messages. Needless to say, there was an outcry particularly from advocates of women's rights who stated that whatever wrong the woman had done; there was no justification for such brutality. However, as the paper pointed out, wife battery is not a new phenomenon, even if it can never be justified. But what was new in this case was that the man battered his wife due to a mobile phone prompted by his failure to access her text messages. This failure rendered him unable to control a situation he saw was rightly his to control.

Another woman in the focus group revealed how she had to sell her mobile phone because her husband suspected her of infidelity. He would search her mobile phone to monitor any calls she might have received while he was away at work even though they may have been as a result of wrong numbers. When he found numbers he did not recognise, he would immediately call the number to make enquiries and then would start a fight with his wife. The interviewee said,

Interviewee: It's like whenever he knocks off he has to check all incoming calls that came in when he was away at work. But when he comes from work, I never touch his cell phone.

(Group laughs sympathetically)

Another group discussant says: At the end of the day they withdraw it from you.

Previous Interviewee: Yes, that's how I sold my cell phone.

Interviewer: Oh, that's how you sold your phone?

Interviewee: Yes, there was too much noise. Whenever someone called he was suspicious, he wanted to know who called on the number. Even though there was no talk time, he would find talk time to call that person to find out who it was. When he finds it's a man who has answered, he asks who he is and why he had called my number because it had registered on my cell phone even though it might have been a wrong number. He would then accuse the person on the other end of the phone of having an affair with me. Then he would have a go at me. So there was too much noise. I never used to enjoy.

However, in a defiant tone she stated that she would buy another one because she realized it was very important to her. The author wondered whether she was not scared of the consequences and asked her as such. She said:

Interviewee: It's nice to communicate with parents who live far off, so it's better as it saves on transport money. That's why I had bought the cell phone. It's important, so I think I will buy again – I have to.

Interviewer: *But won't there be problems still?*

Interviewee: I know… but what can I do?

Another woman complained about men's bullying tactics when it came to answering phone calls or demanding that their spouses answer their calls in their presence when in fact they refused to do the same. She said,

Interviewee: These men they really surprise me. When the phone rings he goes outside to answer it, but if a phone call comes for me as a woman, he says: "you answer it right here".

(The women in the group agree in unison)

Interviewer: *So why don't you as women say "no" you should also answer right here.*

(The women in the group murmur and shift nervously, expressing a sense of helplessness).

Interviewee: You know with a man when he says something it has to be done. I mean they say the man is the head of the household. So we have to listen to them.

2nd interviewee: Sometimes they say: "oh I am coming, a friend of mine on the phone", then they go somewhere private. But you can tell the voice on the phone is that of a woman. Sometimes the phone is so clear such that even the person seated here next to me can hear, but the man is talking in the house in a very secretive manner and saying things that do not correspond to what the woman is saying on the other side of the phone!

One male interviewer backed the habit of men expecting their spouses to answer their phones in their presence while doing the opposite themselves. He summed it up as follows:

You have a situation whereby in a particular household women are much more on the receiving end because of our own culture. In a home set-up where you have a woman and a man having a phone, where the man when he receives a phone call will probably walk away 3, 4 steps and be able to communicate and if it's the turn of the wife and the wife takes the same steps away… - you see the

connotation? It gives a negative impression to the husband, that probably the woman is messing around and yet the men folk themselves are able because of these same cultural norms. The men are able to have three or four women to themselves than women. You have a man answering a woman's phone: "hallo, yes who is that" and suppose a woman did the same thing, the man because of his supremacy, because we are patriarchal according to our set-up, according to our own history, a woman will be sidelined. Additionally, there are much more women who do not do a single thing in terms of employment compared to their men. So you've got these men who've got a phone and you've got a woman who doesn't have one and the only way she can get her piece of information is through the husband, at his own discretion. So there is that divide between the female and the male because of cultural beliefs and stuff like that. *(Mr Getty)*

Mr Getty seems to accept such situations as part of Zambian 'culture', implying that it is the norm and therefore acceptable. He does not condemn men's violent or bullying tactics, implying that nothing can be done because that's just how it is.

The interviewees were asked further questions about such situations and why there seemed to be a sense that nothing could be done to stop them.

Interviewer: *You talked about fights…are there still men and women who fight even in this day and age without seeking help?*

Interviewee 1: That's when it's even gotten worse now.

Interviewer: *What about going to the Victims Support Unit[2]?*

Interviewee 1: Some women, no matter how much they are beaten they never go there. Unless they have been beaten in such a way that everyone knows about it and are then taken there, they just say "no I don't want to have my husband arrested" because they believe that the husband is the bread winner.

[2]The police services have set up a special unit known as the Victims Support Unit where problems such as domestic violence can be reported.

Interviewee 2: And some men tell their wives that if they go to the victim support unit, then the marriage is over. You just come from the victims support unit and they say "pack and go".

Interviewer: *So are women afraid to be on their own or what?*

Interviewee2: Yes they are afraid, some are afraid that they will be laughed at because they are not married, others that they will be labeled as prostitutes.

Interviewer: *So do you think there will ever be a gender balance in Zambia then?*

Interviewee 1: In the compounds[3] it won't work.

Interviewer: *Why?*

Interviewee 1: Because levels of illiteracy are very high in the compounds.

Interviewer: *So do you think government is doing enough then?*

Interviewee 1: As much as the government is doing enough as well as existing Clubs, I still look at it as a long way. It is a long way away.

The problems looked at above have permeated society such that there are even songs referring to the social difficulties that the mobile phone has brought between men and women. Although the songs are meant to be light-hearted and full of humour, they carry an important message about the cultural changes in society that are happening as they relate to modern technology. One song talks about how a man tells his wife lies about where he is when she calls him on his mobile phone. He indicates that he is at work without knowing that the wife has been following him around and has noted he has been entertaining another woman. The same song further talks about how the man sleeps with his mobile phone and always rushes outside to answer the phone even in the middle of the night and when he is questioned by the wife as to why he has to go out he tells her that the outside is better for network purposes. These types of songs show that although times have moved on and that new technologies have permeated society, women can still be oppressed in new forms aided by new technologies like the mobile phone.

[3] In Zambia ' a compound/shanty compound' is another word for outer city slums. These are densely populated poor areas where living conditions are of low quality.

7. Discussion

As seen in the introduction, particularly in policy aspirations, there have been assumptions made that ICTs will be accessed and controlled by both men and women and at all levels in more or less equal measure. The assumptions have been that the benefits that accrue from use of ICTs like the mobile phone are going to be beneficial to everybody regardless of their social and economic positioning, their educational status and regardless of the kind of activity that they are engaged in (WSIS Declaration of Principles, 2003). Arguably, this is true to a certain extent. One only has to look at the benefits pointed at earlier. The mobile phone was seen as a very relevant and useful tool in every life. Despite this, one needs to look at the counter evidence produced that focuses on social conflict and violence between men and women, to realise that access and control by both gender has yet to arrive and be fully effective. And if ICT access and use and in this case mobile phone use are a crucial component of being a global citizen (Castells, 2000), those experiencing the social strife and violence discussed above, particularly women, may not holistically count.

In fact women's status as the subordinate other continues to be reinforced. As a result women in certain instances begin to see and accept their position as the norm. For example, as revealed by the research participants, women with access to mobile phones have allowed their husbands to dictate to them how they can use the phone and whether they should sell their phones as well. Yet women were aware that this was unfair and were also aware that to a certain extent they had the power within themselves to change the situation but felt unable to do so due to traditional social, economic and cultural ascriptions. These included lack of financial security as a result of inadequate education which affects their potential job prospects; as well as society's expectation of women to remain married and to be married whatever the circumstances. In this regard, women's social and cultural status has left them unable to muster the agency to change their situation thereby leaving their husbands with superior status. However, as one of the participants pointed out, although she had sold her mobile phone because of constant verbal abuse from her husband, after much thought she had decided she would buy another phone because she realized and knew that the technology was important in her life. She therefore had to find the power within herself to do what was best for her and

not necessarily what her husband dictated. But the question is at what price because as Alsop, Bertelsen and Holland (2006) argue, even when actors or groups of people find that they have the capacity for choice, they may be unable to exercise it because of the power of pre-existing structures which constrain and hinder such choices. And as Sevefjord and Olsson (2001, p.10) note, "gender issues are intimately related to, and even determined by the formal distribution of power in society". But of course, the problem might not only be existing structures but the fact that women might "have internalised their social status as persons of lesser value" (Kabeer, 2001, p. 24) and as such resigned to their subordinate positions. This is because even with the promises that technologies like mobile phones bring, the fact is they still remain in societies that have not changed cultural, political, social and economic ascriptions of men and women and of other elements that perpetuate gender inequalities which result in violence from time to time.

8. Conclusion

This paper has shown that in some instances mobile phones can and do threaten gender relations through the violence directed by men to women. They also have the potential to shift and reinforce power relations between men and women; where women can begin to be empowered by the mobile phones, men try and usurp that empowerment. This is usually to maintain the status quo of control and normally the only way to do this is for men to resort to both physical and verbal abuse. The social strife and violence is as such seen to stem from perceived loss of power by men. As a consequence, in order to hold on to that power which they have traditionally enjoyed, men resort to control in an abusive and violent way. This is seen when men demand that their wives answer the calls they receive in their presence but do the opposite when they themselves receive calls on their mobile phones. What it also tells women is that despite technologies like mobile phones, they have to remember who is in control and who it is that has the power to make decisions. In most situations this type of control seemed to work because women accepted such demands on their person if only to keep the peace. Women were also fearful of divorce because with divorce came the fear of humiliation and ridicule by society including a loss of financial security that came with being married. The point of this paper was largely twofold, to shed light on the social and economic impact of the mobile phone in as far as gender is concerned as well as to shed light on an aspect that has received little to no attention in

the advent of mobile phone research. It was intended to show that with the advantages that have come as a result of mobile phone use, which granted are many, also come disadvantages. For instance, the shifting differential gender power relations as a result of mobile phones threaten to reinforce gender inequalities rather than narrow them. And it is these disadvantages that need further understanding and highlighting for new technologies like the mobile phone to become much more effective, tangible and useful by and to both men and women whenever they have the ability and choose to use it. As the Zambian ICT policy suggests, there can be no development without women's equal participation in ICTs. But the question is, how can there be equal participation if women are threatened, beaten, intimidated and controlled in how, when and where they use their mobile phones. Development in relation to ICTs which include mobile phones means equal rights and it means equal opportunities in the potentials resulting rather than violence when men fear that they may lose the power they have traditionally enjoyed.

If women's development and empowerment is to be a reality for many Zambian women as a result of new technologies like the mobile phone, it is imperative that instances like gender violence and conflict be a thing of the past. This is because any conflict that is based on the powerful and the powerless has the potential to threaten the freedom to have adequate access and use to technologies and as a result women's relationship to new technology will remain undeveloped and their economic, social and cultural standing remain unchanged. Whether these findings are generalisable to other parts of Africa or further afield is not clear as this phenomenon is just beginning to be researched in as far as mobile phones and violence are concerned. As such this will remain food for thought for future research.

9. Limitations in the study

In any form of research, limitations are bound. This research study is no exception. One limitation is the fact that the study did not have single-sex focus groups which meant that there could have been real power dimensional issues to consider. This is because although the author was of the view that all the participants in the group had expressed themselves as freely as they could have, some women may actually have held back due to fear of intimidation by their male counterparts. This is because in Zambia, men in whichever

circumstances are almost always the dominant gender and this has the potential to cause real problems for women. The other limitation is that of limited policy maker participation in the results. The study would have been enriched further had there been ample participation of policy makers. These limitations can be considered for future research in order to understand opinions of policy makers on the issue of violence against women in as far as technologies like the mobile phone is concerned.

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