Exploring the nexus of oral communication, masculinity, and gender-based violence in Congolese households: a qualitative study

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the nexus of oral communication, masculinity, and gender-based violence (GBV) in Congolese households in the City of Bukavu. It was conducted between October and December 2023. It used a qualitative approach with 30 in-depth interviews with Congolese married men the researchers chose randomly, and whose ages ranged between 35 and 67. The research applied thematic analysis to identify major themes. Results indicate that Congolese men in Bukavu appreciate when family members value their masculinity. Monopolizing the speech gives them the feeling they are listened to, which mirrors power and respect. Interrupting a man’s oral communication despises his masculine power, which can push him to resort to GBV. This attitude originates from gender roles and beliefs that patriarchy has preset for men, obliging women to remain silent and submissive. Gender differences in spoken communication have led to either competition or connection, and affiliation or action. The study applied the theories of family violence and masculinity. Family violence entails how communication styles can influence each partner’s behaviours. The man’s abusive communication in the household can manipulate his wife’s feelings to prompt emotional abuse. Masculinity encompasses hegemonic masculinity that dominates all other masculinities. Masculinity sets boundaries to what it means to be a man by giving him power and control over women and other men. This elucidates how men have full speech, while women are passive. Once gender dissimilarities and masculinity couple with voiced negative communication, they fuel male GBV in Congolese households. To overcome this issue, constructive masculinity can promote healthy communication by encouraging men to value women and communicate freely by respecting freedom of expression in large or reduced locales.

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Introduction

This paper explores oral communication and masculinity as prompters of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in families in Bukavu city of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Bukavu sounds interesting because it is located in a patriarchal society where masculinity is very much valued. The way men and women communicate verbally in this city differs because both genders have dissimilar reasons for communicating. When their communication motives collide, they may raise misunderstanding or conflict. Greenwood (2017) confers that men hardly communicate verbally in a spontaneous manner because they are more instrumental. Men communicate to compete and engage, inferring that they use paralanguage tactics for gaining the lead over their conversations. This understands that men’s verbal conversations can sometimes lead to disagreement, which may produce distress in households. When the husband and the wife’s talking styles are incompatible, Gager and Yabiku (2010) admit that conflict may arise because gender remains very influential in spoken communication in most cultures on the globe. In cultural terms, society has edicted that when a man is talking, the woman must keep quiet and listen to him carefully. This highlights how a man talks to a woman in a family environment. Gender and masculinity dictate ways in which partners talk to each other in a household, which can prompt either harmony or conflict. When a man talks and the woman reacts verbally or bodily to disregard the man, conflict erupts. Naturally, man speaks to express his masculinity and gain the attention of his hearer. Once this fails, he attempts to impose himself (Major, 2022).
This attitude reveals how gender differences in verbal communication styles and maleness have often triggered male GBV in households. Norms of patriarchy depict the characteristics of a typical male in every society. Thus, masculinity gives the husband power and respect in the household, including the power of communication (Mugisho, 2022). Society has socialized people that masculinity is an expression of gender differences, and this often leads to GBV. When a man notices his masculinity has been humiliated, and he cannot communicate as the man of the house, he imposes himself as a man. This attitude may culminate into moral, physical or verbal abuse to restore his power. Patriarchy encourages gendered verbal communication to enforce maleness. This infers that maleness can sustain egocentrism and inflated self-esteem (Cain, Pincus & Ansell, 2018). Most men use force to restore their machismo when they feel their communication strategies have failed at family level. This context occurs when the man has developed the feeling of complex of inferiority, as he thinks his level of respect and control over the wife has vanished.

Gender differences in verbalized communication styles and maleness intersect to generate GBV. Similarly, Gager and Yabiku (2010) agree that when gender threatens masculinity, abuse can rise. Gender differences can also reflect masculinity and masculine gender identity because patriarchy condones them by demanding men to control women to feel manly (Southard, 2023). This elucidates the cultural adherence of males to gender stereotypes and the support of their power over women through their submission. Accordingly, Green et al. (2019) explain how gender differences in communication inspire and reinforce masculine behaviours toward female partners in the name of men's social entitlement for power and influence. The theories of masculinity and family violence informed this study. According to Wood (2020), family violence via communication styles within a family can influence each partner's actions. The man's abusive communication in the home has the power to manipulate his wife's feelings to cause emotional abuse. This context, congruent with Mugisho (2022), relates to family communication, relationships, and couples' problem-solving abilities, but it may lead to violence in some situations. Aggressive men sometimes use their poisonous language to correct their wives’ misbehaviour. Occasionally, this may cause the wife to take on the husband's attitude, resulting in symmetrical violence in the home. However, women’s violence seems insignificant because it does not affect men's safety and well-being (Dobash & Dobash, 2024). This helps to explain why men hardly ever seek protection from women who abuse them. The approach to domestic abuse stays away from any critique of the underlying systems of male privilege and ignores gendered realities.

On the other hand, the theory of masculinity encompasses hegemonic masculinity that encourages the dominance of men over other men, and women as well in families and societies. Such control entrenches men’s stigmatization of women via socially built preconceptions (Southard, 2023). The subordination of women to men makes them endure males’ abuse in most patriarchal societies. Patriarchy allows men to be vocal in public, while women must be silent and good listeners. Such gender differences in oral communication may support toxic masculinity because maleness makes men feel they are above women and some other men.

Qualitative approach with in-depth interviews informed this research by gathering the views of 30 Congolese men in the city of Bukavu regarding communication, masculinity and GBV in homes. The city is part of a patriarchal culture in which all married men value acting like true men. Examining their viewpoints has enabled the comprehension of the ways in which they relate communication, masculinity and GBV. The local hegemony supports masculinity by making every man in the city to be aware of it. Despite not being representative of the city’s population, these men’s opinions on the subject are typical of most men due to socialisation. For data analysis, the researchers applied thematic analysis to identify the themes included in the gathered information. Such analysis required them to focus on finding recurring themes in the patterns of the interviewees’ views on GBV, communication, and masculinity.

We know little about how males simultaneously exhibit gendered differences in verbal communication and masculinity to commit GBV. We also understand how the relationship between communication styles and masculinity may fuel male gendered violence. This domain remains unexplored because researchers mostly focus on women as victims of GBV and look down men’s communication aspect of masculinity. Overall, communication styles sound like an intriguing context that can aid in understanding masculinity in connection with gendered violence. This has motivated the researchers to document how gendered differences in communication and masculinity can fuel gendered violence among Congolese households. The following two questions informed this research:

i. How do gender and oral communication cause gendered violence in households?

ii. In which ways do you think the way men speak conveys their masculinity?

The sections below discuss the research outcomes through the themes derived from the data analysis in response to the above questions.

**Gendered verbal communication reinforces maleness and GBV**

Results of this research confirmed that men speak the way they speak to women because of their society. In fact, the DRC is a patriarchal society that gives power to men as heads and bread earners in their families. Oral communication is one of the ways men in this country convey their authority at household level. Ruling the family makes the man the supreme commander whose words convey his power in the house. Wood (2020) states that when a leader speaks, everyone must feel a man has spoken and must listen to him and follow the message. Most Congolese men hate those who oppose their words in the family. Failure to abide to the leader’s
endorsements may sound provocative for his spirits, which may lead to abuse. This depicts how GBV is a complex issue that various factors can trigger, and one of them being gendered communication. Interviewee BKV/4/2023 shared,

As a man, I know the way I can give a message will make people judge me; they can understand if I am a man or a man-woman. We men are clear, concise and strict in our ways of communicating. The way we speak to other men is not the same as to our women or children. A man must speak as a man, which is the effect of our maleness and our gender, too. It is like when the king of the jungle roars, all the animals feel it, and even fear.

According to this respondent, the way a man communicates reflects a lot regarding his maleness. In the DRC in general, and in the city of Bukavu in particular, when a man speaks you feel he is a man through his voice, the message itself and its meaning, which widely differs from a woman. Such difference in communication means that a man will always dominate over his woman and that can often culminate into abuse and violence. Langer (2015) argues that no man can accept losing his privilege as a man in the house. By hindering anyone willing to shame them, Congolese men are assuring their language is supporting their masculinity in an intact manner. Therefore, masculinity can affect man’s communication in various ways. To Wood (2019), masculine communication tends to focus more on controlling the conversation, task orientation, and problem-solving, while feminine communication prioritizes empathy of feelings and validation of relationships. This has often led to a communication gap between Congolese men and their women, which can result in misunderstandings and conflicts.

However, it is important to note that not all men communicate in the same way. Congolese men use various forms of communications depending on their culture, upbringing, and personal experiences. For instance, Ghosh (2019) confirms that men may involve in monologues, may communicate with other men or with their women. All these forms are instrumental in developing healthier relationships, close male friendships, and becoming more aware of their needs, including the assurance that their maleness remains in its limits. Interviewee BKV/14/2023 shared

We all are men but we do not do things in the same manner, and we do not speak with the same voice. Some of us have high and frustrating voice; others have tiny and unimmitating voice. But, all of us want people around us to respect us as men. A man who is not respected is humiliated and this can infuriate him. Also, the way we can speak to ourselves differs from the manner we talk to our wives, the children or a woman. Our way of communicating depends on what we want to convey. Our voice can express power, or happiness, anger or emotion. All this is what I can call gendered sound, language or communication.

The excerpt of this research informant infers that men can use language to express their masculinity. According to Wood (2019), gendered verbal communication refers to the way people express their ideas and feelings based on their gender identity, which can perpetuate harmful gender stereotypes and power imbalances. This attitude can elicit GBV, which is a form of violence most men perpetrate to women and children in connection with gender or sex. Most Congolese men in Bukavu often resort to such form of violence to confirm they are true men. Multiple factors prompt gendered violence, including gendered communication, social norms, cultural practices, and power dynamics. Congolese men and women belonging to similar backgrounds, place, social groups do communicate using their language, although they may fail to communicate positively. Their fiasco in understanding each other well can also create and exacerbate miscommunication, and this is how communication relates to gendered abuse. Gager and Yabiku (2010) confirm that various communication styles closely relate to emotional dissimilarities as well as preconceived social gender labels that often nurture gendered violence among people. In other words, emotional differences due to miscommunication can quite literally change the developing structure of the brain. By internalizing the messages communicated by verbal abuse, Congolese men resort to violence. Verbally abused Congolese often have poor mental health, a condition that explains their brutality.

Normalizing GBV and maleness through verbal communication

Interviewees in this research shared that gendered violence is on rise in relationships and households because of the normalization of abusive maleness through verbal communication. To Gager and Yabiku (2010), identifying social norms that trigger verbal abuse can help to know how it takes place in a relationship. The harm that Congolese men in Bukavu create through miscommunication upsurges the importance of the relationship. It becomes frustrating to see a man who should be protecting his family becoming the source of abuse via communication. An outsider may say something dismissive or insulting, but it cannot do permanent damage as the one a family leader utters. This becomes more harmful in the sense that family members and the woman depend on the man, who now becomes a verbal abuser. In other words, the man’s verbal abuse causes deep and lasting damage. In this vein, interviewee BKV/10/2023 revealed

You and I know that our society does not blame us for how we communicate. We are men, and must behave as such in everything we do. I am saying that verbal abuse is proliferating in families. We as men are protectors of families; we should not abuse those we rule. Abuse exists because the norms in our society shut an eye on power imbalance between our women and us. Such power roots in our socio-cultural structure that gives us the privilege of ruling over our women because we are superior to them.

This Congolese man from Bukavu depicts how a man’s communication may generate verbal abuse, which increases in a relationship with an imbalanced power. This condition remains engrained into social norms, creating social imbalance via relationships in which the man is more powerful than his woman does. Labov (2019) reveals how society encourages men to have economic or emotional power and sometimes the combination of both to ascertain their communicative influence. When Congolese men abuse their wives verbally, they are creating their way of maintaining power and control over them. They regularly resort to verbal communication to
prompts abuse by ostracizing their partners in order to solidify their control and masculinity. In other words, DRC’s patriarchy normalizes verbal abuse, implying that the male abuser is more important than the female victim is. Interviewee BKV/22/2023 shared,

Ha haah! Who is that man who cannot maintain his verbal power and control in his house? This makes us men feel we are in control. This is also because patriarchy takes that as normal in our society. When a man speaks, no one must cough, no fly must move. Quietness conveys a true man is speaking. This means the house has a masculine man. When speaking, the woman and the children must listen and not interrupt him.

Scrutiny of this informant’s narrative illustrates how Congolese men’s voice depicts their imposition of communication in their homes. In other words, when they are speaking, no one else must speak in the house. This is what other informants called, “two bulls never mow on the same hill.” At family level, Gager and Yabiku (2010:160) confirm that when a partner is speaking, the other should be an attentive listener to avoid chaos. In case the man is not listened to while talking either to the woman or to the children, there arises emotional confusion. The condition might intensify to generate into gendered abuse as the other party undercuts the communication of the man (Endenjik et al., 2017: 230; Solnit, 2017). In some situations, the man may weaponize his words against the wife or the children, which can still cause emotional harm to them. Men using detrimental words believe to express their masculine power society has endowed with them. In fact, most men sound masculine in their families through their verbal communication. The attitude transmits men’s self-esteem and self-confidence because their communication intends to attract others’ attention to their faces as they talk (Wood, 2019; Wood, 2020). Congolese men express themselves and embody masculinity considering how male language functions in verbal communication. This means that men’s verbal communication conveys the influence of masculinity. The latter displays a man’s trait of masculinity, that is protecting his self-image through maleness. He wants everyone to claim he is a man everyone appreciates and fears when communicating. Congolese men’s emotional and social sense of self makes them think everyone should recognize them as such. In other words, true men should not sound feminine in their conversation, which Yashimura (2017) depicts, as men should not communicate as women do. When Congolese men use feminine expressions and language, people consider them as indecisive, lacking determination and losing self-respect and expression. Such faltering men cannot decide or make a direct comment, which makes family members disregard them because of their shyness and weakness. Men are not familiar to pursuing opinions of others but mostly make direct declaration of certain points, otherwise they think it is probable to show that they do not have their own opinions or cannot fully express themselves (Gager & Yabiku, 2010:160). This highlights how Congolese men communicate aggressively to confirm their maleness because they are uncontrollable in their families. Using domineering and imperative language with dictatorial and determined tone means that Congolese men are sticking to their masculinity. Thus, their dignity and authority closely relate to their resilient sense of preserving their maleness. Mugisho (2022) confirms that men cannot exist in isolation, but must follow certain social norms based on gender perspectives. This happens because patriarchy endows men with gendered roles and statuses, which they must abide to. The parents socialize their sons with their social roles and statuses the society wants them to follow, including their standard of manners. Patriarchy and masculinity make Congolese men powerful, decisive, positive, confident and masculine meaning that their verbal communication must symbolize their masculinity, social roles and statuses.

**Dependence of males’ verbal communication on hierarchy**

Men’s social status increases their masculinity, which influences their way of communicating. According to Wood (2019), society commands men’s verbal communication through their masculinity and social status. Since people differ in their idiosyncrasy, Congolese men in high social position use harsh language to mean they are men. This builds on the role they have in their communities, families and villages. Kimmel (2013) asserts that leaders and workers have special privileges from society as it allows them to communicate differently to those under them in leadership. In other words, the Congolese patriarchal structure allows men to raise their voices against their women and children to confirm they are on top of their households. A man behaving in this manner deprives his family members of their right of expression because he is intimidating them. Congruent with Mugisho & Muthuki (2022), social hierarchy remains a great tool that determines people’s language, just as society has preset norms to define a man and a woman. Similarly, BKV/16/2023 shared.

Men lead every society everywhere in the world. I think this means they are real men and it shows they are on top of everything. Now, see our women. They always have lower status than we men do. This encourages us to use bad language against them and this is normal in our societies. Communication between our wives and us Congolese men conveys we are masculine. I am saying that our social position commands the way we communicate. This is why most of us men are not verbose, and talk to convey our power.

The above informant agrees that social hierarchy differentiates between men and women. The discrepancy derives from the social hierarchy that presents men above women, highlighting women’s subordinate status compared to men. Thus, Congolese society embeds and normalizes language that stereotype women. Gager and Yabiku (2010:158) state that men’s social position reflects their verbal communication style that hardly values the process of communicating. Men are less concerned with the establishment and maintenance of contacts and sharing opinions and emotions. Men seek appreciation from women in order to underscore their own position in the hierarchy (Labov, 2019; Major, 2022:33). Overall, the main goal of male conversation is breaking the news to the listener as directly and briefly as possible to avoid being misunderstood. Moreover, Congolese men tend to interject and speak more positively than women in order to establish their masculine leadership and impress anyone listening to them. In fact, this supports men’s communication skill because BKV/20/2023 confirmed, “the communication manner of boys and men never aims at erecting
reciprocal comprehension with their listeners, but clarification to wash away confusion. We are never emotive when we speak”. Naturally, unlike women, men involve in dialogue for dominating their listeners, which, once opposed generates GBV. This mirrors the way Congolese men communicate when they want to reveal their values, goals and needs based on their gender. Consequently, Greenwood (2017) points that gendered communication infers how “it is common knowledge that men are goal-oriented whereas women are relationship-oriented”. To put it differently, Congolese men tend to be self-affective in their communication, as they want to sustain their masculinity. Contrarily, the women create a friendly and helpful atmosphere though their communication. In fact, Major (2022) admits that the context for women’s converse is relationship and cooperation oriented for confirming their femininity. Eventually most Congolese men communicate assertively, confidently and independently, while women interchange in a more polite manner to shun swearing and using intensifiers and tag questions. Such communication dissimilarity conveys how hierarchy promotes the male gendered communication, which often prompts GBV at family level in the DRC. This often occurs in families in Bukavu because men convey their maleness and women their womanity through their way of interacting. Overall, gendered dialogue in the DRC families leans on both men and women’s social status.

Women’s oral communication harms maleness to activate GBV

Most informants in this research shared how the way women communicate harms their maleness, a context that pushes them to resort to GBV. This happens because, in line with Major (2022), men communicate verbally to convince they know by expressing their knowledge, but women to strengthen relationships. However, many women use toxic language that humiliates men’s masculinity which leads to GBV. In most cases, the women who badmouth do so to revenge an abuse from a man because they have no physical force to beat men or punish them financially, as men do to them. Mugisho (2022) admits that most women resort to harmful communication to rescind men’s masculinity. Such women’s attitude sounds provocative as it hurts men to the extent that they resort to violence. Interviewee BKV7/2023 confirmed that

This is a very wonderful question and I will tell you the truth. I think you are married and you have once had contention with your wife. Women willingly and provocatively communicate to break men morally. The words that come out from their mouths often cause men to touch on them [abuse them]. They are so shameful words that you feel they can pull your trousers down. No man can accept his masculinity to be humiliated to that extent. For example, when a woman tells you... I am not sure you are a man... do you also go when men are called? Even dogs can wear trousers.

Most of the respondents shared the same views as those of the above respondents verbatim. Using such expressions clearly shows that some women communicate with their men to denigrate their masculinity. Similarly, Solnit (2017) asserts that when a woman is angry, she hardly controls her language because all she utters is hurtful. When men feel demeaned by women’s verbal communication, they react brutally. Disregarding men’s masculinity pushes them to opt for physical, moral and financial punishment. Communicative language remains human being’s greatest creations, and communication may become toxic or sophisticated. Congolese women have developed different manners in which they express their linguistic prowess and vocabulary variety when negatively communicating with men. For this reason, interviewee BKV 5/2023 confirmed “our women are poor materially but rich verbally. They have words and phrases that can leave you naked, yet you have clothes on you. “This interviewee simply implies that women tend to overuse abusive phrases that put men down, which they do for revenging the abuse men have caused them. Men should be aware of such words so that when they engage in a conversation with angry women, they know how to manage their communication. Therefore, men should avoid being involved in a gendered communicative misunderstanding. To Langer (2015), communication-based conflict is sometimes inevitable as a part of our language in life, but it all depends on how we manage it. Men should know how to communicate positively with heated women so that they can preserve their masculine identity. Peaceful conversation between genders can cool down irritated souls. Congolese women involve in conversation to create connections that they can still destroy us using verbal abuse. Women are shameless in their communication. Solnit (2017) approves that for solving a problem, women talk about it by stirring up emotions whereas men discuss how to solve it as quickly as possible, and in a rational way. Even though, naturally, men speak slightly less than women do.

On the other hand, the magnitudes of verbal abuse can creep up on anyone suffering gendered abuse, a condition that often causes severe and lasting effects. Verbal abuse in households builds like a fire. Labov (2019) admits that gendered violence begins slowly to become progressively worse with time. Thus, the abuse fuels dangerous psychological consequences for the woman victim. An abusive environment at household level makes the woman to become plagued with depression, humor instability and lowered self-esteem. Wood (2020) adds that harmful communication plunges the victim into self-guilt, isolation, loneliness, and sometimes Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These negative side effects may outlast the relationship itself because they are not generally permanent and can be treated and overcome completely. Most Congolese men abuse verbally their women in their households, which devastates the victim’s quality of life. Such women cannot easily move on and find happiness when they host all heavy and negative side effects of toxic love. Nevertheless, consequences of verbal abuse should be temporary, and not perpetual. Endenjik et al. (2017) admits that with an investment in the victim’s own mental wellbeing, through either therapy, self-help reading, reaching out to close friends or family, or other options for recovery, she can subdue painful symptoms of a relationship that has gone wrong.

Verbal communication encourages clichés of GBV

Interviewees in this research connected verbal communication and clichés of GBV. According to Yashimura (2017), when people use a certain language, they refer to some communication aspects that encompass clichés of gendered violence. Such aspects of language communication need framing so that they can shun gendered abuse. Ghosh (2019) acknowledges that when verbal
communication lacks clarity, concretisation, and specificity, it emboldens clichés of gendered violence. Similarly, Kimmel (2023) opines that most communication violence is not mere communication since it produces verbal gendered abuse. Similarly, interviewee BKV 17/2023 shared

As a man, the way I communicate can include some banalities, and I think this is normal and everyone can do it. I was born and met men use such truism language and I will die and leave it as such. But I hear some people say it harms morally, but men never created those things in the language. That is how men use the language; and women use it their way. We think the way we speak is socially natural. Sometimes, it may be obscure or not real, but I think it is here that some people say it sounds offensive.

The above research respondent confirms that society condones men’s communication although it embeds social and widespread clichés in society. In other words, men are keen on using an abusive language because it sounds an aspect of hegemonic masculinity. In fact, Endenjik et al. (2017) thinks that society should instruct its patriarchal structure to thwart such communication as long as its perpetuation carries gendered violence. Deterring its continuation conveys that any attitude pertaining to it must curtail, substantiate or illuminate the actions of those Congolese men who perform it under the common tropes of gender. In fact, the men who use communication as a gendered manipulation are familiar Congolese men, who are not different from other men, and they are neither monsters nor evils. They live in their society where such behavioural attitude is the way of life.

Some research respondents who had used toxic communication confirmed that it is easier to put the blames on alcohol and stress as prompts of such abuse. Interviewee BKV/14/2023 confided that

...and you know that alcohol can sometimes save you from your misconduct. When you had taken some, you may become drunk, which is a good alibi one can use later. It becomes easier to mention alcohol and no man will blame you about that. We all are men, and often resort to this as an excellent strategy to silence everyone in our homes, our women and children. Sometimes, we use this tactic to harm morally those we might have feared when sober."

Scrutiny of the above interviewee’s discourse highlights that some men plan for using abusive communication, thanks to alcohol. Mugisho & Umumararungu (2023) concur that many people plan violence and communication gendered abuse to hurt morally their friends or family members. This explicates how some Congolese men advance stress as their cause for taking an extra glass, yet it is their strategy to address their women and relatives unsafely. Alcohol cannot create ideas of abuse in a person, yet they had never thought about them. Congolese men seep on alcohol willingly in order to oppress their children and wives, an aim they plan before taking alcohol. This often happens among many men as interviewee BKV/11/2023 shared “...and you are playing with me. Wait and you will see me! I am going to take a bottle and come back to you. “ This clearly shows how some men use alcohol to reach to their aim of communicating abusively, although they know the consequences of such attitude. According to Mugisho and Muthuki (2022), alcohol abuse can cause moral and physical injuries to either the abuser or the victim, and sometimes both. When some Congolese men fear to speak openly to people because of sobriety, they resort to liquor, as they believe it triggers well their abusive communication. In this particular context, alcohol abuse is not the prima fascia cause of the abuse, but rather the premeditated attitude of alcohol use that produces harmful words utterances when they are drunk (Endenjik et al., 2017). Besides, ruthless verbal communication precedes any violence, may it be between two or more people in community or in the household. Congolese men should not blame directly or indirectly alcohol and anxiety for their abusive manners. In a nutshell, communication may usher into gendered violence, an expression of gendered inequality, which explains the wider context for patriarchy to condone males’ abuse to females in society.

**Masculine verbal communication hurts emotions**

Interviewees confirmed that in most cases, some masculine verbal communication might hurt emotions. To Gager and Yabiku (2010), in many world cultures, some men’s sayings or expressions generate emotional abuse to the hearer, although society views them as normal. Similarly, the Congolese society allows negative verbal communication that men can use to humiliate women and other men. Interviewee BKV/13/2023 shared,

*We are men and our society boosts us to behave as such. The way we speak shows that we are men, but some people say we speak badly. They say society encourages us men to hurt their feelings. In our country here, we are familiar to some sayings or expressions, and they are normal here. Men used them before we were born. We met them and we shall leave them here. Er! Yes, they might be harmful, but nothing I can do the stop men to use them because society does not see them as bad. Yes, an example is from my tribe, where we can call a woman “mwali wanakala” [meaning daughter of a dog].

The above interviewee describes how society condones negative verbal communication although it is humiliating. In most cases, men communicate in that manner under the pressure of anger. Congolese society encourages such communication through harmful expressions, and the survivors should bear with although they are verbal attacks that hurt their emotions. Congruent with Greenwood (2017), societal structure prompts verbal manipulation consistency to target somebody’s sensitive spots purposefully. Congolese men’s objective of verbal attacks to women remains another expression of their masculinity, and not nastiness. Their verbal abuse may embrace issues that are particular to an individual. Such is the case when a man calls his wife “a daughter of a dog.” Moreover, men’s verbal attack may aim at children and other men as well. Using communication to put other people down in private or in public depicts another level of masculinity in the DRC that is ridiculing. Furthermore, the use of swear words highlights how Congolese men appreciate seeing other people uncomfortable, including their loved ones. Major (2022) shares that using disdainful
communication towards children, other men or women is considered as threatening which is another form of violence. At other times, the verbal abuse may be relevant to the background of the victim, such as their religion, culture, language, alleged sexual orientation or traditions (Wood, 2019). Men use gendered communication abusively depending on the most emotionally sensitive areas of the victim. They often do so consciously to target their victims in a way that is painful, humiliating and threatening to the victim. Furthermore, men direct verbal violence to women because society sexualizes women, classifying the communication as sexual violence. Humiliating verbal GBV to women in the public sphere directly connects with gender roles. Similarly, Congolese men articulate jokes and comments about their wives, which sometimes presents women as sex objects. Yashimura (2017) confides how society allows men to express their masculinity through jokes about sexual availability, prostitution and even rape. Most men bully about perceived sexuality of young people, mostly the boys. In line with Solnit (2017), the regular negative use of communication through words such as ‘queer’ or ‘fag’ often transmits trauma for those perceived as gays and lesbians. This is very likely one of the reasons why many gays and lesbians only ‘come out’ after secondary school. Alternatively, verbal violence may convey hate speech when it takes the form of words, videos, memes, or pictures that are posted on social networks. It may also carry a violent message threatening a person or a group of people because of certain characteristics. Considering the above context, Wood (2020) admits that gendered communication can develop hatred by transitioning to sexiest hate communication because it mostly targets females, as well as other genders, such as LGBT+ people (Langer, 2015). Such communication builds on sex, gender, sexual orientation or gender identity both in the private and public spheres, including the Internet as it is also considered as a public sphere. Many Congolese men use this form of GBV using private e-mails or messages through online messaging software. In fact, the indispensability for men to promote healthy communication in their large or reduced environment can reduce such violence since it promotes respecting their freedom of communication in a constructive manner. Freedom of expression and opinion does not convey an unqualified right but it must be exercised in a manner consistent with the rights of others. Confidential and safe verbal communication

Interviewees shared supportive opinions regarding verbal communication that should remain confidential and safe. In fact, Congolese abusive men do not appreciate when women survivors of male GBV speak out about their ordeal. This makes the perpetrators feel their lives are at risk, which can make them retaliate. In line with Labov (2019), men hate anyone who dares to mouth about the abusive manners they undergo from them. The abusive communication men use to hurt morally their women and children in their household and other people in society, and male GBV in general fall into this category. At the family level, Congolese men will retaliate as the result of their societal right. Accordingly, interviewee BKV/22/2023 argues

When I have done something wrong to someone or to my wife, I cannot be happy everyone to know it. Perhaps, it is not good but what people should do with it. I am sure; the narrator will not say it as it happened. They will want to describe you as a social evil, as someone who is wrong and they are right. Even you, you cannot appreciate that manner of behaving. That is why I cannot let those talking about it in peace. Now, you see how that situation can put you in danger, and the one telling the story too is at risk.

The above narrative illuminates how when someone fails to remain confidential about men’s misbehaviours can face many risks. In this context, Kimmel (2023) asserts that communicative gendered violence does not end with an occurrence, but the ripples and consequences for survivors can be extensive as they can last long. The dominant concern of reporting around male gendered abuse must be the direct or indirect security of survivors, from the moment the incident happened and even in the future. Most interviewees shared their views through that of BKV/7/2023, who discussed

I am trying to make you understand how it is not appropriate for anyone to endanger their lives. Endangering life because you want to use information or can make you a victim for what you do not know. If you are identified, make sure you will not be safe. The release of information on abuse can cause more harm than what many people think. I think even if you know what has happened; you must learn to be less communicative by being confidential. Talking a lot sometimes kills.

In fact, it does not sound appropriate for anyone to communicate any evidence that risks making the victim of male gendered abuse easily identifiable. Congruent with Ghosh (2019), detectible information, including jigsaw identification should remain confidential. It is also critical to ensure that the survivor agrees referencing, along with a discussion about the potential reach of their words (Sullivan, 2018). Understanding that stigma for survivors can be a secondary traumatic experience means that anonymity, confidentiality and privacy are paramount. This condition is a significant component of recovery from trauma considering that when the victim is recovering, it becomes a more complex identity beyond being just a survivor of violence, no matter its form. Accordingly, Congolese men who report such news must know they are accountable of warranting the gendered violence does not lead to defining the survivor identity in the community.

Conclusion

This research has explored the nexus of oral communication, masculinity, and GBV in Congolese households in the City of Bukavu. Because gendered communication and masculinity are major elements causing GBV in many households, it was imperative to investigate this connection. On the one hand, masculinity includes the social pre-established characteristics that define a classic male.
In other words, men use masculinity in different ways based on their culture, but its manifestation often results in gendered abuse. The process of socialisation allows men to develop the attitudes and behaviours that define them as real men the society needs. The results have shown that the patriarchal system allows men to exert dominance and influence in families and society through gendered communication and masculinity. The majority of the Congolese men interviewed acknowledged that they might use negative communication and masculinity to humiliate their women in families and other men in society. This indicates how culturally imposed gendered communication and masculinity humiliate women through their submission, which substantiates how patriarchy allows men to take advantage of women. This endorses how Congolese men in Bukavu use their social rights for dominance and exploitation to control and promote masculine qualities and attitudes in their relationships. Congruently, some Congolese men’s attitudes and behaviours of gendered communication can also contribute to GBV because they portray their inherent masculinity.

Finally, other results connected verbal communication and clichés of GBV. When people use a certain language, they refer to some communication aspects that encompass clichés of gendered violence. Such aspects of language communication need framing so that they can shun gendered abuse. Another result was that masculine verbal communication might hurt emotions. In fact, in many world cultures, some men’s expressions generate emotional abuse to the hearer, although society views them as normal. Similarly, society allows negative verbal communication that men can use to humiliate women and other men. Finally, another result discusses how verbal communication should remain confidential and safe. Abusive men do not appreciate when women survivors of male GBV speak out about their ordeal. This makes the perpetrators feel they are living a dangerous life, which can infuriate them and so resort to tough violence for revenge.

In order to address negative gendered communication, masculinity and GBV in the households of DRC, men should socialize in using masculinity and right to expression in a constructive manner. Avoiding expressions of power struggles can help in reducing destructive masculinity and negative communication. The indispensability for men to promote healthy communication in their large or reduced environment can help in valuing their freedom of communication. Freedom of expression and opinion should be qualified right that men must exercise in a manner consistent with the rights of others. Furthermore, focusing on mental wellbeing of the victim using therapy, self-help reading, reaching out to close friends or family or another prospect for recovery, the victim can often hurt in indicators of a relationship that has experienced chaos because of toxic communication. Socialization practices that promote mutual respect and equality between genders by promoting constructive communication can stabilize emotions of victims. By doing so, men can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for both men and women. Positive masculinity could help in supporting the process, which can scale down negative gendered communication, negative masculinity and GBV in homes.

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