# Exploring the Nexus Between Gender Expectations and Mental Health Outcomes in African Societies: Insights from the Ndebele Community in Zimbabwe.

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## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes how gender-related social expectations impact mental health outcomes among the Ndebele community in Zimbabwe. The research collected data through qualitative interviews with 20 female and 20 male participants who are conversant with the Ndebele culture. Influenced by the social construction theory, the study investigates the effect of traditional gender norms on people's mental well-being. Thus, findings reveal that societal expectations have a strong impact on mental health outcomes because women often handle increased caregiving stress while men are faced with pressures to conform to strict masculine customs. The research emphasizes the need to create culturally relevant mental health initiatives that specifically address these gender dynamics that result in mental health challenges in the Ndebele community and other African Communities.

**Keywords**: (Societal gender expectations; Mental Health; African Context; Ndebele Community in Zimbabwe)

## INTRODUCTION

The traditional gender norms within African communities strongly influence people's identities and mental health outcomes. It is established that the pressure to meet societal standards leads to considerable stress, anxiety, and challenges in emotional regulation (Kamyab and Hoseinzadeh, 2023). Hence, this study focuses on the relationship between gender expectations and mental health challenges in the Ndebele community of Zimbabwe. It posits that gender expectations generate unique mental health outcomes for both males and females in society. Qualitative interviews were employed, allowing the research to analyze the impact of social norms on mental health among the Ndebele-speaking people. Grounded in social role theory, the study illuminates how mental health disparities emerge as women are expected to play caregiving roles and fulfill many cultural norms that make them acceptable women in the Ndebele community. On the other hand, men also struggle with pressures to embody masculine ideas, which many find burdening. In addition, Amuyunzu-Nyamongo (2013) reiterates that the social environment in many African contexts does not nurture good mental health. The study's findings reveal the exigent need for cultural-specific interventions. Understanding these social dynamics remains essential for crafting mental health strategies that both comply with community beliefs/values and address gender-specific mental health challenges among the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe. Therefore, the research seeks to strengthen the mental health discussion in African communities through advocacy for tailored approaches that promote mental health and well-being for everyone.

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized the qualitative methodological approach to examine how gender-related social expectations impact mental health outcomes among the Ndebele community in Zimbabwe. This method was preferred because it helps researchers to better understand and interpret the complex reality of a given phenomenon or situation and the implications, insights, and meaning of quantitative data (Corner et al., 2019). On the other hand, Creswell (2016) advances that the qualitative methodology allows the researcher to get first-hand information from the participants. As a result, the researcher conducted interviews with 20 Ndebele women and 20 Ndebele men who are acquainted with the Ndebele culture. Hence, the selection criteria ensured that only participants

with deep knowledge of Ndebele traditions and cultural practices were included, thereby guaranteeing relevance and authenticity of responses. Equal representation of 20 men and 20 women allowed for gender-balanced perspectives, while diversity in age, marital status, and socio-economic background enriched the findings by capturing varied lived experiences. Data analysis followed the thematic approach, enabling systematic coding, identification of recurring patterns, and inductive theme development (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This rigorous approach enhanced credibility, ensured cultural sensitivity, and preserved participants' voices through direct quotations, thereby strengthening the reliability and transferability of the study's conclusions.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts the social construction theory as its theoretical framework. The social construction theory is centered on the assumption that individuals' perceptions and worldviews are consequences of jointly developed shared meanings with significant others around them (Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Saxena (2022) upholds that it implies that social elements, including language, power dynamics, social norms, and cultural surroundings, have an impact on our views, values, and identities. Hence, gender expectations within the Ndebele community emerge through traditional norms, language use, and social interactions that shape how people perceive masculine and feminine traits. In addition, Hundzukani (2018) maintains that men and women behave differently because of societal expectations. These expectations and their associated behaviors originate in the home, the workplace, and other social situations (Hundzukani, 2018). As a result, individuals modify their behavior to blend in with culturally acceptable gender norms and expectations (Abrams et al., 2018). This framework is, therefore, relevant to the study as it highlights how societal narratives and beliefs about gender can impact mental health outcomes. Thus, understanding these constructs is essential for developing effective mental health interventions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Another critical area of concern is the impact of social expectations on mental health and well-being (Kamyab and Hoseinzadeh, 2023). Unfortunately, mental issues in Africa receive little attention from policymakers (Okasha, 2002; Omigbodun, 2008; Rotich and Tugumisirize, 2017). This is buttressed by Olawo (2019) who maintains that in some African countries, mental health care and literacy are not often considered as important due to multiple competing priorities the continent faces. In addition, Amuyunzu-Nyamongo (2013) highlights that African communities' mental health and mental illness are highly stigmatized, and those living with a mental illness, particularly those with psychotic disorders, are often feared, avoided, and in some cases, receive anger from those who encounter them. Mental health and illness are conceptualized and experienced differently across and within continents based on unique cultural, social, and religious factors (Olawo, 2019). The social implications of mental illness have a particularly negative impact in African societies, and this has caused what Amuyunzu-Nyamongo (2013) describes as "a silent epidemic." Families often hide members who have either been diagnosed with mental illness or are experiencing mental health challenges for fear of social discrimination (Amuyunzu-Nyamongo, 2013). Accordingly, the issues surrounding mental health/illness in African communities include acknowledgment of the illness, mental health literacy, stigma, cultural beliefs, and access to care (Olawo,2019).

Furthermore, Stavropoulou (2019) also assists us in understanding that gender norms shape values, practices, and behaviors that matter for health and well-being. For Stavropoulou (2019), gender norms can damage the health and well-being of women and girls as well as men and boys. Consequently, Sánchez-López et al. (2012) examine differential personality styles in men and women, shedding light on how societal expectations contribute to gender-specific stressors and mental health outcomes (Sánchez-López et al., 2012). The social hierarchy created with the role expectation implied that everyone is structurally crafted to exhibit a corresponding behavior fitting to their ascribed roles. In this case, society is conceived as a social playing ground in which all actors (male and female) consistently assume a role consciously or unconsciously (Smith, 2020; Yang, 2013). The challenge with the role play assumption is that it does not consider the behavioral or emotional exhaustion of the actor, which in turn leads to role conflict and decreased psychological well-being (Amarachi et al., 2020). In unison with these important contributions in the field, the writer believes that the outcomes of this research

will contribute to the growing body of literature on the relationship between gender roles and societal expectations, emphasizing the need to disrupt cultural expectations that result in mental health challenges.

**Background of the Ndebele-Speaking People in Zimbabwe**

The Ndebele-speaking people are a generation that migrated from Zululand with Mzilikazi and finally settled in the south of Zimbabwe. Hence, they have a well-documented history which traces them from Zululand in South Africa until they settled in the south western region of Zimbabwe where they are found today" (Dube, 2022). However, in this paper, it is important to note that socially constructed norms in the Ndebele community affected women more than their male counterparts. This is supported by Kamyab and Hoseinzadeh (2023), who maintain that cultural and environmental factors further exacerbate the pressures women face in navigating social expectations. It is therefore argued that Ndebele women and men live in different worlds (Matsa, 2015). This is so because gender dynamics in the Ndebele culture are determined by socially constructed perceptions of how women and men should behave.

**Data Analysis and Presentation:**

**The Connection Between Social Expectations and Women's Mental Health**

**Caregiving Responsibilities**

The study's findings divulged that Ndebele women often carry the burden of caregiving responsibilities, and this has caused them to have mental health challenges. Unlike their male counterparts, society customarily expects women to carry the caregiving duties at home and in community gatherings. For example, participants highlighted that when there is a sick relative, an elderly person in the family, or a funeral at any level, women have found themselves carrying the burden of caregiving. This is reinforced by Ding (2024), who upholds that the societal expectation for women to prioritize caregiving responsibilities often creates significant psychological pressure. Women are frequently expected to be the primary caregivers for their children, aging parents, and other family members, which can lead to role overload and feelings of inadequacy when they struggle to balance these demands with professional or personal aspirations (Veldhuis, 2018; Whorley and Addis, 2006). Sharing the same sentiments, Eagly and Wood (2013) further allude that societal expectations might pressure women to conform to traditional roles, such as being the primary caregivers in families or maintaining a particular physical appearance to be deemed acceptable or attractive by societal standards. Thus, for Ding (2024), these pressures often begin early in life, with young girls being socialized to adhere to these norms, which can affect their self-esteem and psychological well-being throughout their lives. Another challenge is that in the Ndebele society, daughters-in-law are pressured to please the in-laws. Hence, they will do everything out of their power to care for their husbands, children, and even members of the extended family, especially when they are ill, disabled, or of old age. Some of the societal constructions have detrimental effects on the Ndebele women because though overwhelmed by responsibilities, many of them would still want fulfill/meet the demands of an ideal woman in the community. Zhang (2018) reiterates that the pressure to be the "perfect mother/woman" can result in significant emotional distress, leading to issues such as postpartum depression, anxiety, and long-term mental health challenges. As if it was not enough, several participants indicated that the care responsibilities for Ndebele women increased during COVID-19. It is said that during the COVID-19 lockdowns, women had to endure caregiving responsibilities at work and home, and sometimes, they would spend the whole day taking care of the sick and at the same time be expected to perform other household tasks. Ding (2024) underscores that in many societies, the expectations placed on women are rigid and challenging to meet, contributing to stress and anxiety. In line with the above findings, two participants noted that:

*"Due to societal expectations, women in the Ndebele community carry the weight of caregiving responsibilities compared to their male counterparts and this have a negative bearing to their mental health."* Participant 4

*"Sometimes, women have many responsibilities in the family and community, yet no one cares about their mental health outcomes."* Participant 8

By analyzing the outcomes from the study, it is clear that there is an exigent need to challenge some of the toxic gender expectations in the Ndebele community because they are harmful to women's mental health and well-being. This calls for gender justice activists among the Ndebele communities to initiate programs that will disrupt all cultural beliefs and practices that suffocate women.

**Stigmatization of Widows and Single Women**

The stigmatization of widows and single women also emerged as another social problem that results in women's mental health in the Ndebele community. Outcomes from the research disclosed that once a woman in the Ndebele culture loses her husband through death, she is expected to undergo certain cultural practices, and in most cases, this does not apply to men when they lose their spouses. Oloko (1997) highlights that widowhood is associated with rituals and taboos that are degrading and inhuman. For instance, when a woman is widowed, she is expected to wear a black dress for some time, and she is isolated from the community, which is harmful to her mental health and well-being. Laolu (2000) confirms that in some African cultures, a widow goes into confinement for seven days in which she is not allowed to go out, or take her bath or change her clothes. This is disturbing; a grieving person needs to be surrounded by a caring community, particularly during the bereavement period, but cultural norms have made this impossible for many widows in the Ndebele community. In extreme cases, some Ndebele widows are expected to undergo harmful and unhealthy rituals that violate their bodies and destabilize their inner peace. All these challenges are coming up because in most African cultures, widows and single women have no one to stand for them, and they have been regarded as a weak group in the society. Some relatives even go to the extent of taking advantage of them and taking away their property. Furthermore, participants emphasized that even in religious settings, widows and single women are not treated fairly. As a result, all these challenges encountered by widows and single women affect their mental health and well-being. This was reiterated by two participants who noted that:

*"The stigmatization of widows and single women is so serious in our African cultures, and it has led to women's mental health problems. Thus, it will be good for gender justice advocates and religious leaders to work together to redeem vulnerable women."* Participant *2*

*"Widows and Single women are not safe at all. You go to churches where one would think they will be treated differently, but they are labelled as a group of women who take away other people's husbands."* Participant 22

In conservative African communities, single women are sometimes regarded as misfits, while at other times, they are accepted as part of society (Chirara and Chisale, 2023). Biri (2021) further echoes that single women are often placed on the lower rungs of society in comparison to married women. As a result, this research is critical because it exposes us to the reality and the weakness of our African cultures. The stigmatization of widows and single women requires combined efforts in an endeavor to advocate for the rights of women in our societies. Therefore, the current study proposes for the development of contextual and culturally relevant initiatives and structures that will address the challenges encountered by widows and single women because their mental health matters.

**Child Birth and Social Expectations**

Just because children are considered such an important part of life, many women are often asked by female relatives and friends about pregnancy soon after marriage. (De, et al., 2020). The societal pressure to give birth to children in the Ndebele culture has been a source of mental health challenges among women. Findings from the research indicated that a few years after marriage, close relatives, friends, and community elders will always expect a firstborn child to be born. For example, failure to give birth to a child within the expected years creates a lot of pressure, particularly for women. This reality is confirmed by Martínez-Casanova et al. (2024), who uphold that failing to meet these expectations can be significant, leading to feelings of inadequacy, low self-worth, and a range of psychological issues. The other dilemma is that in most African communities, it is always the problem of the woman when the married couple fails to have children. Though the child is regarded as a source of pride, a blessing, and a sign that the lineage continues, the pressure from the society can result in mental disorders among the Ndebele women. These expectations create a framework within which women are

judged and evaluated by others and themselves, influencing their behavior and self-perception (Ding, 2024). Two participants noted that:

*"Social expectations on childbirth in Ndebele marriages have resulted in unnecessary pressure that leads to mental health challenges in women."* Participant 33

*"It is sad that even if a man is the cause for the married couple not to have children, the woman is blamed. This bias in our African culture has a negative bearing on women's mental health and well-being."* Participant 6

Accordingly, some of these socially constructed expectations that negatively impact women's mental health must be challenged to the core. Ding (2024) adds that societal expectations have a direct and often detrimental impact on women's self-esteem. Thus, these outcomes from the research are very crucial because they make us realize that there is a need to educate people about infertility issues so that there can be a shift in societal attitudes towards family and motherhood.

**Infidelity and Gender Based Violence (GBV)**

It also emerged that cultural beliefs and norms embedded in language also contribute to infidelity and gender based violence, hence leading to women's mental health. Wanjiku and Masheti (1995) assert that language is the most subtle way of cementing gender biases. For example, participants noted that the Ndebele language has proverbs that promote infidelity and gender based violence. The wisdom saying that *says indoda yiNdlovu idla izihlahla zonke* (a man is likened to an elephant that eats all trees) has normalized infidelity among men and at the same time resulting in women's health challenges in marriages. Participants confirmed that infidelity in marriages has threatened women's self-esteem and mental health outcomes. In addition, findings also revealed that men who cheat on their wives also tend to be violent in their marriages. Such violence against women is caused by unequal power relations between men and women in society, where men have more power and control than women (Ain and Rasool, 2024). Moreover, the Ndebele culture has normalized that a woman is likened to a child (*owesifazana ngowesintwana*). This means that women can be treated like a child in a marriage setup, and this has created a dilemma because many women continue to experience gender based violence (GBV) in their marriages. For Ain and Rasool (2024), GBV is a severe problem that harms women's health and well-being. Sadly, patriarchy has handed men authority and freedom to do whatever benefits them since they are said to be the head of the home (*inhloko yomuzi*), yet forgetting that these cultural norms and social expectations embedded in language have a negative bearing on women's mental health and well-being. This power imbalance is perpetuated by violence and is reinforced by societal norms and attitudes that condone or minimize such violence (Ain and Rasool, 2024). Two participants indicated that:

*"There is a need to challenge some of the Ndebele proverbs because they promote infidelity and gender based violence, which in turn affects women's mental health and wellbeing*." Participant 24

*"Language is a powerful tool of socialization, and it can influence the way people think and act. Hence, the Ndebele proverbs need to be examined because some of them contribute negatively to women's mental health."* Participant 16

This research strongly advocates for the revitalization of toxic Ndebele proverbs that carry the potential to perpetuate harmful cultural norms. Hence, Matsa (2015) propounds the necessity of gender resocialization and the dismantling of entrenched stereotypes related to language and gender attitudes.

**The Impact of Societal Expectations on Men's Mental Health**

**The Provider Role**

In many African cultures, men are viewed as providers of their families. Outcomes from the study divulged that the social expectation surrounding the provider role has resulted in mental health challenges among men in the Ndebele community. In many cases, men have felt unworthy and guilty when they fail to provide for their families. For instance, in the Ndebele community, men would cross to South Africa to work for their families,

and they would come back home as *injiva* (Zimbabwean diasporans in South Africa), however things have changed in South Africa. The reality is that many of them now find it difficult to play the provider role. The *injiva* days are now over when men would come back from South Africa with groceries and money to take care of the needs of their families. More so, the economic situation in Zimbabwe has led to men's failure to fulfill the expectations of being the real men in the Ndebele community. Yet again, in the current economic setting in Zimbabwe, some women have become providers to their families, and most men still find it difficult to accept the new reality because they have been socialized to think that they should be family breadwinners. Undoubtedly, all these new realities have confronted the definition of being real men in the Ndebele community, hence leading to mental health challenges. Ezeugwu and Ojedokun (2020) maintain that while men are trying to fulfil their expected roles, their mental health is undermined not only by the society that expects them to act in a prescribed capacity but also by the actor themselves (the male figure) who may be guilty of not acting in the expected role when called upon for an expected father or uncle duties. In other words, this calls for the re-orientation of men and demystifying the social expectations that have taken away their peace. Maybe one possible explanation for the rising number of suicides among men is the immense pressure they face to fulfill traditional social expectations of being providers. When they struggle to meet these demands, the resulting sense of failure and inadequacy may contribute significantly to their vulnerability to mental health challenges. Hence, White (2022) postulates that traditional masculinity is a risk factor for suicidal ideation followed by depression. In their report, Fast et al. (2020) posited that some of the men decided to commit actual suicide after prolonged depression, anxiety, and stress, which they termed "unhealed psychological wounds". In line with the above sentiments, two participants noted that:

*"Due to the failure of men being providers and breadwinners in their families, many have succumbed to mental health challenges and suicide."* Participant 32

*"The ego of African men is usually challenged when they fail to meet societal gender expectations, and this can lead to serious mental health disorders."* Participant 9

The unquestionable internalization of social masculinity norms as defined by the social-cultural milieu makes African men more susceptible to poor mental health. (Ezeugwu and Ojedokun, 2020). This line of thought is confirmed by the discussions raised in this paper because findings indicate that gender expectations are damaging men's mental health. This, therefore, invites the Ndebele community to think of initiatives that challenge detrimental social norms and gender expectations because they have terrible effects on men's mental health and well-being.

**Men as Stoic and Self-Reliant**

Another harmful gender expectation that has affected men's mental health in the Ndebele community is associated with stoicism and self-reliance. Participants noted that societal norms and expectations have caused much harm to men's health. It is argued that real men in the Ndebele culture should be enough in themselves and not show signs of dependence. Olawo (2019) reiterates that men's conversations amongst their friends could be largely superficial and general, and conversations about emotions or feelings rarely occur. Furthermore, when seeking help, some men may feel like a failure due to being incapable of solving their own problems; they may fear that others might perceive them as "weak" or "vulnerable" or fear losing their autonomy (Addis and Mahalik, 2003; Cole, 2013; Cole and Ingram, 2020). This was reinforced by two participants who noted that:

*"Gender norms crafted by society have cost men their health and well-being."* Participant 7

*"In many cases, these social expectations have caused men to create their own world of pride. This is evidenced by how most men are secretive even when going through trying times."* Participant 28

In order to protect themselves from being perceived as weak, men may exhibit hypermasculinity, an exaggerated form of masculinity, in which they display a stereotypical "gendered display of power and consequent suppression of signs of vulnerability" (Spencer, Fegley, Harpalani and Seaton, 2004). A man who adheres to

hegemonic masculinity and gender norms does not want others to think he is not a "true man"; thus, the option of asking for help as a man can be perceived as "losing masculinity" (Cole, 2013, p. 35). This explains why men feel "faking it" or "fixing" themselves is necessary; they perceive such measures as crucial for their assimilation under masculinity and gender norms (Barragan, 2024). In reality, this idea of stoicism and self-reliance among the Ndebele men has affected men's mental health and well-being. It, therefore, calls for community programs that are aimed at addressing mental health challenges caused by gender expectations.

**Men as Strong and Resilient**

For men, masculinity could serve as a determinant of mental health and in most societies, hegemonic masculinity could be idealized in the hierarchy of masculinities (Evans et al., 2011). Findings from the study also disclosed that the idea of men being strong and resilient has led to mental health challenges among Ndebele men. Participants indicated that societal gender norms have constructed the idea that a real man should be strong, tough, and resilient. Olawo (2019) confirms that in African societies men are expected to be emotionally "stable" when dealing with challenges in life. Olawo (2019) goes on to highlight that the cultural expectation to always maintain strength in the face of adversity and to let go of all signs of weakness, such as crying, can lead them to be even more vulnerable to mental health challenges. It is a well-known fact in most African cultures that men bottle issues; they hardly open up or share their challenges because sharing their problems is regarded as a sign of weakness. However, it is disheartening that many men have succumbed to mental health challenges due to this silence. For instance, society expects men not to cry, even when they encounter painful experiences in life. Men were expected to keep a "level head," especially when others were watching, and only in private, they could break down (Olawo, 2019). On the other hand, Goodey (1997) adds that the proverbs "Boys don't cry, and men do not shed tears" is associated with the African culture about what society expects from men in typical chaotic or challenging situations. Thus, this has resulted in men not expressing their vulnerability and fearing being judged by society. During funerals, Ndebele men are encouraged not to cry or to cry with dignity, unlike their female counterparts. Hence, such gender constructions and expectations have led to several mental disorders among men. For example, men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity and gender norms tend to suppress their emotions to the point that they do not have words for their emotions or face difficulties in understanding what they feel, a concept known as normative male alexithymia (Carpenter and Addis, 2000; Levant et al., 2014). More so, the Ndebele language has phrases that discourage men from crying, such as *inyembezi zendoda ziphelela esifubeni* and *indoda iyaqinisela* (a real man must not shed tears and a real man must be strong). Young men are also groomed to be strong and resilient, being told that they must be real men (*kumele libe ngamadoda*) not women (*lingabi ngabafazi*). The challenge is that society celebrates in these social constructions yet no one thinks about the damage they cause to men's mental health when they fail to meet the societal standards set for them. One participant noted that:

*"In the Ndebele culture, men are groomed to be strong and resilient. Hence, men are regarded as strong vessels while women are weak vessels."* Participant 15

*"Men continue to suffer mental disorders because they are not ready to let go of some statuses handed to them by traditional society. Thus, they would want to remain strong and resilient beings amid challenges."* Participant 34

Olawo (2019) argues that if there is an expectation for a person to always have hope and be strong in the face of adversity, there may be a fear of being looked down upon if they were to show signs of helplessness or defeat. This is especially true for men when considering the intersections of their gender and identity, as well as cultural expectations (Olawo, 2019). Men's mental health has become a new pandemic. The research has demonstrated that some of the social expectations that are valued in our African settings have severe mental health consequences for men. Accordingly, this study comes as an eye opener for the Ndebele community and other African communities to consider rethinking some of the gender norms and constructions.

**Sexual Performance**

In most African cultures, men are expected to be highly active in bed. Participants confirmed that in the Ndebele

community, a complete man must be sexually active, and this is a given expectation. Unfortunately, the societal perception has made men who are weak in bed to feel as if they are not real men. Sadly, some women are believed to use this as a weapon to silence their husbands during marital disputes. All this has challenged men's self-esteem one way or the other, leading to severe mental disorders. Barragan (2024) adds that although research suggests that men who adhere to hegemonic masculinity norms face mental health issues, men continue to behave according to their gender roles, believing such behavior to demonstrate their status as a "real man" in society in alignment with societal expectations. In addition, the standard set by the community makes men fear to open up about their sexual lives. Hence, they chose to maintain marital privacy. Men's commitment to embodying these masculine norms often results in a silent struggle with mental health issues, as the fear of undermining their perceived role within their community and family may discourage open discussions about emotional well-being (Hunter and Davis, 1994). The study's outcomes show that African men need help; they need to be liberated from oppressive cultures. It looks like many men are tired of living under oppression, but they do not know how to free themselves. As a result, Ezeugwu and Ojedokun (2020) propose an inclusive model of addressing social constructions and modulating socially defined roles for men to help African men be less susceptible to poor mental health and also to heal those at the bridge of mental health collapse. Some male participants noted that:

*"The truth is that some of the cultural expectations are too hard for us to meet."* Participant 22

*"We are in real need to be freed from some of the gender expectations constructed by our societies."* Participant 37

*"Most men are suffering from mental health disorders because they fail to meet the societal pressures."* Participant 8

Findings do not lie, men need help. These few voices from men are speaking for many others who are suffering due to oppressive cultural norms, and at the same time, presenting social expectations that men are failing to meet. Thus, this study challenges men to stand up and free themselves from unnecessary pressures or expectations that lead to mental disorders and suicide.

## CONCLUSION

Utilizing insights of the Zimbabwe Ndebele community, this study explored the relationship between gender expectations and mental health outcomes. It became clear that men and women are expected to conform to certain societal pressures that define masculinity and femininity. Hence, the paper examined the impact of these gender expectations on the mental health of both men and women in the Ndebele community. The study's findings disclosed that some of the social expectations, such as caregiving responsibilities among women lead to mental health disorders. Similarly, men's mental health is threatened because they are expected to meet societal gender expectations which they find burdening. Therefore, this study calls for culturally relevant mental health initiatives that are tailor-made to address/challenge these gender dynamics in the Ndebele community and other African communities.

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