

Mubobobo: Women have no Sexual Fantasies in their Sleep

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Abstract: *Mubobobo* is a belief among traditional Shona people of Zimbabwe that women cannot have nocturnal emission in their sleep. This study explored traditional Shona women's experiences of *mubobobo* from an ethnopsychological perspective. Participants were three men who were alleged to be the perpetrators of *mubobobo* and three women who claimed to be the victims of *mubobobo*. The men and women in this study were not related or involved in litigation relating to *mubobobo*. In fact, the presented cases in this study were isolated individual experiences of *mubobobo*. In-depth interviews were held to assess the views of participants who were embroiled in the *mubobobo* controversy as perpetrators and victims. A thematic content analysis of the narratives of the participants was done to establish the reasonableness of participants' convictions about *mubobobo* in the context of human sexuality. The findings of the study revealed that traditional Shona women experienced nocturnal emission like any other women in the world but due to cultural constraints they could not believe the excitation of their reproductive system in their sleep as real and a normal biological process. Furthermore, research on the sexuality of traditional Shona women could have a special focus on women empowerment in the context of sexual and reproductive health education.

Key Words: *Mubobobo*, Nocturnal emission, Sexual fantasy, Shona people, Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION

Mubobobo is a belief among traditional Shona women of Zimbabwe that they cannot have nocturnal emission in their sleep without manipulation by an evil man. When a woman notices a heavy vaginal discharge in the morning after having experienced wet dreams in her sleep she attributes that nocturnal emission to *mubobobo*. The man or wizard who manipulates the woman until she reaches orgasm in her sleep comes in clear visual images such that the victim is able to identify the perpetrator in wakefulness. If the perpetrator uses a strong type of magic the woman might not be able to have a clear-cut picture of the culprit but she would have the sense that men in her vicinity using magic would be sexually abusing her. In this context of *mubobobo* sexual fantasies in sleep caused by magic will result in orgasm that causes vaginal discharge. The man would not be physically present but through magic he would be able to seduce and manipulate the woman to experience wet dreams in her sleep. When *mubobobo* is being experienced, the victim goes into a deep slumber and actively engages with the perpetrator in a trance-like dream in which the victim can recall some or the entire graphic details of the encounter. The recollections of sex dreams by traditional Shona women would not be interpreted as ordinary wet dreams like it is among men but real sexual experiences in their sleep that cannot be taken for granted. Sexual fantasies in sleep and sexual dream experiences are not culturally sanctioned among the traditional Shona culture. Whereas in conscious forms of sexual abuse of women the victims are passive or inactive, in the case of *mubobobo* the victims are willing and active partners. In

contrast to the pleasurable wet dream experiences, the woman wakes up angry and baffled the following morning on noticing vaginal fluids associated with sexual intercourse. This cultural erotic sensation among the Shona people is generally missed by some African and Western researchers who would treat it as a form of witchcraft and this concept of *mubobobo* is also misrepresented under the current Witchcraft Suppression Act of Zimbabwe 2006 [1-3]. For the purpose of this study the terms sexual fantasy, sexual dreams and nocturnal emission are used interchangeably as these terms are almost semantically similar in the Shona culture.

A victim of *mubobobo* will show signs of generalized anxiety and fear of what happened to them in their sleep. The woman may perceive herself as a victim of a real sexual assault in her sleep. She will be confident and quite sure that she was manipulated by a man in her sleep. In some instances perpetrators are people known to the victim and names can be provided in case of litigation. It is also common that a woman can report of a total stranger with vivid physical features as their sex dream partner. Some women may not be able to establish the physical appearance of the perpetrators in detail. In such circumstances of blurred images of the perpetrator, the victim might seek the services of a traditional healer who would use traditional projective techniques similar to the Rorschach technique and the "figure and ground images" of Gestalt psychology to project the hidden image of the perpetrator into the limelight. This traditional technique helps the woman identify an individual usually in their community [1]. They may develop a sense of self-blame, anger, frustration and some of the victims with stronger cultural beliefs may report vivid memories of what happened to them as a form of sexual assault. In some situations the victims will have the courage to tell a friend, spouse, close relative, or report the matter to the police. In the village, the woman approaches an elder to file a case of

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sexual abuse in her sleep at the village court. However, due to social stigma or pride some of the traditional Shona women even if they experience *mubobobo* as unwanted sexual manipulation, may bottle it up and actively repress the memories and feelings to the unconscious mind.

The social consequences associated with *mubobobo* could be that married women may perceive of it as infidelity, seductive behaviour, adultery or rape. The victim may feel unprotected by her family spirits *vadzimu* who allow foreign spirits to enter her territory [4-6]. In some instances, the victim will report of a strange man, very short, with a long beard abusing her and this figure is referred to as a *chikwambo* [2-6]. Women with deceased spouses may, in the early part of their grief, experience episodes of the husband coming to have sexual intercourse with them. In the traditional Shona culture the woman will wear a black cloth around her head or wear black clothes to tell possible suitors that she is still in mourning and grieving. According to the Shona culture, the grief can extend up to two years or beyond before she can remarry [2-6]. When the sex dreams involve the husband, society is not offended but will organize rituals to appease the deceased husband so that the woman can have peace in her sleep. Sometimes traditional marriages are arranged and suitable suitors are those approved by the deceased according to the Shona tradition such as the husband's younger brothers (*vana babamunini* meaning *small fathers*) or his sister's sons (*vamuzukuru*) [1-6].

FANTASY IN THE TRADITIONAL SHONA MARRIAGE

The traditional marriage system shows that women can express their fantasies within the family hierarchical structure [1-6]. According to the traditional Shona culture a married woman could express her conscious desires and sexual frustrations through the husband's brothers or the husband's elderly women relatives (*vatete*). She would not be expected to discuss conjugal relations outside of the approved kinship system responsible for the handling of marital relations [3, 4]. The marriage system of the Shona tends to downplay personal interests in marriage and excessive demands of conjugal rights are discouraged. For example, if a married woman needs to have sex most of the time with her husband, the Shona culture would say she has *rukwezengwe* or *ana mbuya* meaning the spirit of the woman's grandmother is behind the heightened drive. She would need *kuchikidzwa* that is to be given traditional medicine [7-10] which is normally given to girl children at birth to retard excessive sexual drive in adulthood [2, 7, 8]. The virtues in marriage are the ability of the woman to have children, look after them and to be sensitive to the husband's needs as well. In return, the husband and his extended family give her honour, dignity and respect for that role [1, 3, 4]. The husband, relatives, and the immediate community are expected to provide social, political and economic security to the married woman. A married woman can express her desires to the husband in a culturally defined way and the husband is expected to respond according to the traditions of satisfying his wife in marriage. When he fails he consults with his elders and solutions ranging from, coaching, mentoring, counselling and the provision of traditional medicine were availed to the husband to keep his wife happy in marriage [2, 7-10].

Sexual fantasies in wakefulness could be expressed in folk tales, love songs and praise poetry which are told or sung during bedtime [11-13]. Girls could express fears of marrying an insensitive, cruel, selfish, or unfaithful husband. They could also express their feelings about the type of husband they wanted in life through love songs, poetry, drama and games [9, 11-14]. It is mandatory that the husband listens to these poems or songs as they convey an essential message about the wife's sexual fantasies [9, 14]. The wife can act out without saying it bluntly and the husband must respect and understand the customary implications of the behaviour. For example, the wife can wake up at dawn and start pounding grain noisily or do some other work in a noise manner and this could indicate to the parents that the married woman had an unfinished business with her husband that needed family support [11, 12, 14]. In all forms of love and sexual fantasy reported in marriage there is paucity on research that looks at *mubobobo* as a social phenomenon worth researching in the marriage institution of the traditional Shona people.

PLACES THAT REPORT MORE CASES OF MUBOBOBO IN ZIMBABWE

In Zimbabwe the public gets to know of cases of *mubobobo* through the press, court proceedings, community rumours, community violence or a feud between families due to witchcraft accusations or witch-hunting [2, 4]. The Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 made it a criminal offence to accuse anyone of practising witchcraft [2]. As a result, people in communal areas ended up taking their cases to traditional chiefs who had a customary way of dealing with such issues. However, with the repeal of some of the provisions of the Witchcraft Suppression Act in 2006, more cases of *mubobobo* are now reported in the press than before [2, 7, 15-17]. Individuals are now allowed to bring cases of witchcraft to court but the burden of providing proof in court as evidence of *mubobobo* is problematic and discouraging as most of the claims lodged are lost in court [2, 17]. Nonetheless, traditional courts tend to succeed in this regard if the victim and perpetrator mutually agree that it did happen as *uroyi hwamabvukapasi/mabvuri* meaning that the perpetrator was not aware that he inherited the magical spirit from his ancestors [2, 12, 13].

People living in hostels and crowded compounds report more cases of *mubobobo* than people living in spacious houses [2, 17]. These residences are occupied by married and unmarried people sharing communal facilities. These hostels are common to the police force, prison services, the army, companies with shift workers, and other organizations which keep employees closer to the workplace. Employees of any rank living in these premises could be accused of sexually molesting women in their sleep [18-22]. Boarding schools report of *mubobobo* in the dormitories as causing hysteria among girls [23, 24]. Girls are reported to be sexually abused in their sleep by wizards who use the power of *mubobobo* and when this happens lessons are suspended until it is safe to resume learning [18, 19, 23]. Headmasters are usually reported as the culprits if the victims are women teachers but ordinary male teachers could also be implicated [24-28]. On farms and mines, workers living in compounds are wary of *mubobobo* and they take stern measures against the accused if such complaints are made [2, 8, 17].

In any event, when cases of *mubobobo* are reported, management is left with more questions than answers because such claims cannot be falsified scientifically and more so the claims cannot be defended in a court of law as the Criminal Law Codification Act 23 of 2004 of Zimbabwe demands proof that a person has supernatural powers which they are using to harm others [17]. This law tends to challenge, contradict or make void the provisions of the amended Witchcraft Suppression Act of 2006. In effect, by strictly adhering to tangible evidence in cases of witchcraft accusations, the Criminal Law Codification Act 23 of 2004 appeals more to the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 than it works in unison with the amended version of the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 2006. It can also be observed that people who live in close contact and who share same facilities like communal bathrooms, ablution facilities, and other social amenities tend to develop sexual experiences relating to *mubobobo* in their sleep [25, 29-31].

In view of the folklore narratives and oral traditions among the Shona it is apparent that no mention is made about wet dreams as an extension of love fantasies in sleep among women [1, 3, 4, 9, 11-14]. However, some of the beliefs about *mubobobo* may be less pronounced in some communities of the Shona people due to culture change and the influence of modernization on cultural practices. It was the intention of this study to further explore the extent to which sex dreams are incorporated into the traditional Shona people's contemporary knowledge systems and practices.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore the ethnopsychological implications of *mubobobo* as it relates to wet dreams among traditional Shona women. The study sought to understand sexual dreams of traditional Shona women in the context of human sexuality and how social context could influence the perceptions of individuals and their sexual behaviours in a culturally relevant manner. In pursuit of this idea, the study sought to answer the following research question:

Do traditional Shona women experience wet dreams in their sleep as *mubobobo*?

MATERIALS AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design: Case Study

The study interviewed three alleged perpetrators of *mubobobo* and three victims of *mubobobo*. The participants in this study were all recruited independent of each other; had no relationship, and the men and women in this study were not accusing each other of *mubobobo*. Participants were visited in their homes and the issues of *mubobobo* were discussed. Participants' narratives about their experiences, feelings and attitudes were recorded during the interview.

PARTICIPANTS

These were three alleged perpetrators of *mubobobo* and three women who claimed to be victims of *mubobobo*. Participants who were involved in *mubobobo* as perpetrators or victims and whose experiences were public knowledge within their immediate communities through public hearings, fights, or court appearances were approached and invited to participate in the study. The participants were told how the researchers got to know about their involvement in the case

of *mubobobo* and they were also told that the study intended to get more information on the subject for civic education. The alleged perpetrators were men. The first participant worked as a policeman in a police camp located in an urban area. The second participant was a headmaster in a rural area in which teachers' houses were in the school premises. The third participant was a peasant farmer who also acted as a headman in the absence of his father who was the village headman. Of the three women who participated in the study the first was married, the second was a widow and the third was a divorcee.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and were free to participate or withdraw from the study if they were uncomfortable with the study. It was also explained that the information was kept confidential and that since the laws on witchcraft had changed participants were free to talk about it for the good of society and to educate others about it.

DATA COLLECTION

The research used a tape recorder and note pads to collect data from participants. Participants' narratives were tape-recorded after getting informed consent from the participants. The responses were also written down in the note pads as a back up to the audio record. An interview schedule with the open-ended questions was used to collect data. For the alleged perpetrators the following questions were asked:

1. Do you think *mubobobo* exists?
2. If so, can you explain how a man can have sex with a woman in her sleep?
3. Are the accusations that you have *mubobobo* accurate?

The victims were asked the following questions:

1. Do you think *mubobobo* exists?
2. If so, can you explain how a man can have sex with a woman in her sleep?
3. As a victim of *mubobobo*, do you think that it would be accurate to say sex through *mubobobo* and ordinary sex are almost the same in terms of a woman's experiences and body fluids related to sex?

PROCEDURE

The participants were interviewed in their residences or places they were comfortable to answer the research questions. They were told how the study got to know about their involvement in *mubobobo* and they were asked whether or not they were free and willing to participate in the intended study. The participants were told that no names of participants were to appear on any part of the study and that tape-recorded material and hand-written notes were going to be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. The participants' responses to the questions on the interview schedule were recorded.

CASE PRESENTATION

Case Example 1

The perpetrator was a policeman who held the rank of "Inspector". He was single and he described himself as a

quiet man who was duty conscious and spent most of his time at work. He said that, as an African man he believed that *mubobobo* exists. He was socialized to believe that wizards use magic to seduce women and to sexually abuse them in their sleep. He said it is a common belief among the Shona and it is part of the African culture. At a professional level he was not allowed to acknowledge that witchcraft exists and that presented a conflict of interest in the workplace. In fact he alluded to the fact that all religious claims be they traditional or western were not enforceable at law by means of laying charges on police dockets. He advised that in order to circumvent the likely consequences, victims were supposed to resolve the issue through traditional channels that were acceptable to both the victim and the accused. On the issue of how a man can use *mubobobo* to manipulate a woman he said magic goes beyond human comprehension. Like an electric current, people can only see the consequences of *mubobobo* and not the electric current itself. When asked about the accusations against him, he flatly denied that he had *mubobobo*. In fact he attributed that to jealous women who wanted him to be in love with them and rivals at work who wanted to narrow his chances of promotion through slander.

Case Example 2

This was the case of a school head who was accused of sexually molesting female teachers in their sleep. This man was relatively wealthy as compared to other teachers. He had viable businesses in the city apart from his regular job as a teacher. His wife was deceased and he lived with his two children without a child minder. He had previously transferred from a school where he was the school head when pupils started to experience hysteria, hallucinations, and general restlessness in the school. The community and other teachers started witch-hunting and made use of traditional healers in the school. He left the school because he felt issues of superstition were now interfering with professional issues and the community had entrenched beliefs in *mubobobo* to such an extent that help sought from scientists and professional groups was sidelined.

He acknowledged that he believed in *mubobobo* as part of Shona beliefs. It was a form of sexual abuse of women by men who used evil spirits to derive sexual pleasure from unsuspecting victims whom they are afraid to approach during the day. He said it is a cowardly and villainous act by undesirable individuals who are bent on disrupting the social fabric and decorum of society.

On the accusations against him he pointed out that women who were not performing their duties properly were accusing him of using *mubobobo* in order to damage his reputation. He also pointed out that some women loved him but were not forthcoming by openly telling him that they loved him. He said he had heard stories of how a wizard can use a *chikwambo/tokoloshi* to seduce women through *mubobobo*. He acknowledged that he was also accused of using *chikwambo* to accumulate wealth. He denied that the accusations against him were based on evidence.

Case Example 3

The man was a successful peasant farmer with two wives. He had a good number of farm animals and had a

thriving poultry project. He said he was aware that *mubobobo* exists but he said some people could abuse it to settle their old scores. He said it was possible for a man to sleep with a woman in her sleep but the man would have transformed into a spiritual being. The woman will participate in the act in her sleep and it will be like her spirit and that of the wizard will fall in love in the sex dream. He referred to the accusations against him as baseless because he was also accused often of using hippopotamuses to irrigate and harvest his crops.

After interviewing the alleged perpetrators the research focused on the victims of *mubobobo*. Their views are expressed below.

Case Example 4

The participant was a married woman who admitted that *mubobobo* exists. She explained that men could be cruel to women and try to humiliate them by sexually abusing them in dreams. She explained that if men's love proposals are turned down they find alternative means of revenge. If the husband is away for a long time the evil men will come through *mubobobo* to entice women into sexual dreams. She said the woman's body fluids caused by *mubobobo* were the same as those caused by heterosexual relations. She considered *mubobobo* as good as rape for which communities must impose deterrent punishment on the perpetrators.

Case Example 5

This woman was a widow and she agreed that she was a victim of *mubobobo* since she lost her husband three years ago. She was firm in her belief that the man she accused of having *mubobobo* had sexually assaulted her in her sleep on several occasions and now it was time to seek redress by making it known to the public. She explained that in her dreams she would see a man known to her coming to her for sex. She said that in her dreams she finds it difficult to resist or escape as her feet would appear as if they were tied to the ground. What also surprised her was the willingness, excitement, enthusiasm or speed with which the events happened. Sometimes she would respond with much excitement to a headless man with even unclear physical features. Relations with her deceased husband that resulted in wet dreams were considered as soothing and completed the bridge between the world of the departed and the present. She would be angry about having had sexual relations with strangers when she goes to the bathroom the following morning realizing that what had happened is the work of a wizard through *mubobobo*. She argued that there was no difference between normal sex and sex through *mubobobo* as the two forms of sexual experience produced identical body fluids in a woman.

Case Example 6

The participant was single and viewed herself as a target of *mubobobo* after divorce. She felt vulnerable as only her family spirits were to defend her against evil unlike in the past when her family spirits and the husband's would protect her as their daughter. She was clear who her abuser was and was convinced that the man she was accusing of sexually abusing her in her sleep was indeed taking advantage of her loneliness and exploited her.

She explained that in her sleep she would meet with this man and he appears to be romantic in her dreams. She would love him and he would also show her his love but the problem was that in real life she did not love him and neither did the man propose love to her. She laid the accusations because the thoughts kept coming and the wet dreams continued and hence she felt manipulated by this man through *mubobobo*. She confirmed that the wet dreams produced body fluids that resembled fluids of ordinary sex and this was viewed as evidence by the participant that *mubobobo* was like real sex in her sleep.

It should be noted that, according to the women interviewed, a woman's body fluids related to sex did not refer to the clinical distinction between semen and a woman's own lubrication. The entire discharge by a woman's reproductive system was regarded as awesome and frightening. Further to that, sex through *mubobobo* cannot cause a woman to fall pregnant according to the cultural beliefs of the Shona people.

DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic content analysis was used to analyse textual material obtained from the interviews. This involved putting major themes or ideas raised by participants into categories for further qualitative analysis. Data analysis involved the transcription of the interview material, decoding of information on tape or written notes and analyzing dominant themes or ideas of interest to the study question. These themes were captured on tape and written notes. The information regarding participant feelings, facial expressions, gestures and generalized body language and affect regarding *mubobobo* which could not have been captured electronically on tape was captured as handwritten notes. The advantage of using thematic content analysis unlike quantitative approaches is that the information recorded will reflect perceptions, beliefs, feelings, attitudes and the participant's world view or philosophy without relying on statistical indices.

RESULTS

The responses of the respondents were categorized into five themes. The themes were: the existence of *mubobobo* as reality, the form of *mubobobo*, denial of involvement in *mubobobo* by male perpetrators, acknowledgement of experiencing of *mubobobo* by women victims, and evidence of *mubobobo*. Each of the themes is considered next.

THE EXISTENCE OF *MUBOBOBO* AS REALITY

Both alleged perpetrators and alleged victims acknowledged that *mubobobo* was a living phenomenon among the traditional Shona people. The men and women in this study would not regard the belief as superstition but a cultural experience only peculiar to the traditional Shona people. The Zimbabwean laws acknowledge its existence and there is still controversy between traditional courts and formal courts which use the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 which was amended in 2006. This law is generally viewed by traditionalists as an affront to the victim because the law tends to treat witchcraft claims with disdain as a pretence and a sham or something which in actual fact has no real existence at all [17].

THE FORM OF *MUBOBOBO*

The participants belied that a woman could have sex in her sleep with a man using magic. Both the man and the woman will have a romantic relationship only in the dream but in wakefulness the two would not love each other. The man using magic gains access to the woman when she is asleep and manipulates her to like him. The man will derive sexual satisfaction from a woman who does not love him. The woman in her sexual dream will also derive sexual satisfaction from the dream partner. The experience is hated by the Shona society because it is considered as an unwanted sexual experience induced by magic and evil spirits.

DENIAL OF PRACTISING *MUBOBOBO* BY ALLEGED PERPETRATORS

The three men denied that they had magic to induce women into sex even though they acknowledged the existence of *mubobobo*. They attributed the allegations to jealousy, hatred and slander.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF EXPERIENCING *MUBOBOBO* BY WOMEN VICTIMS

The women who regarded themselves as victims of *mubobobo* perceived themselves as individuals sexually abused in real life situations. They did not take it literally that a woman could have wet dreams as Shona men did. They perceived the experience as rape and sought institutional protection against the perpetrators.

EVIDENCE FOR THE CASE OF *MUBOBOBO*

The women regarded vaginal discharge after *mubobobo* as evidence of sexual abuse. The fact that in most of the cases reported the alleged victims could identify the men who sexually abused them in their sleep was taken as evidence that unwanted and unsolicited sex did happen against the woman's volition or will. The Shona culture also sanctions the existence of *mubobobo* and therefore the accusers were culturally empowered to seek redress with the alleged perpetrators.

DISCUSSION

The study confirmed that traditional Zimbabwean men and women believe that *mubobobo* exists as a social phenomenon that is conceptualized at a cultural level but without scientific evidence or legal basis to support its existence. The men who were alleged to be the perpetrators of *mubobobo* and the women who perceived themselves as the victims conceded to the existence of *mubobobo* as a social malady [26-28]. It is referred to as a cultural vice that society should guard against but such beliefs are paradoxically reinforced and legitimized through oral tradition, folklores, songs, poems, taboos, rituals, and the general lifestyle of the traditional people in their political, social and economic engagements [1, 3, 6, 9]. The study attempted to understand the experiences of the Shona traditional women from an ethnopsychological perspective by examining the influence of sexual deprivation, cultural control on women's sexuality, subliminal stimulation associated with individual and group contact, and the psychoanalytic processes in nocturnal emission [32-36]. All these factors are discussed as conjecture as the study did not perform quantitative procedures to measure

each of these variables. The interpretation is mainly rooted within the philosophy and traditions of the Shona people [37-39]. Any inferences made regarding the sexuality of the traditional Shona women are solely based on ethnopsychological premises that may not be falsifiable.

In this study it was found that sexual deprivation could have led women in this study to experience wet dreams which were interpreted as the work of sorcerers and other evil body manipulators in sleep [40-43]. The women had no regular sexual contact despite the fact that one of the participants was married. Her husband was away from home most of the time due to work commitments. Sexual deprivation can result in wet dreams for both men and women [31, 44, 45]. It could be deduced from the women's narratives that wet dreams were as common among women as they were among men [45, 46]. Sexual deprivation alone may not be enough to explain the sexual drive. It can be argued that *mubobobo* can result from heightened sexual fantasy in consciousness that culminates in wet dreams for both men and women in their sleep. It should also be noted that sexual fantasy affects both married and single people and hence *mubobobo* could be experienced by women despite their marital status.

It could be posited from this study that, perhaps due to cultural beliefs, habits, norms and values, traditional Shona women considered themselves as not capable of experiencing wet dreams in their sleep. In contrast to Shona women's beliefs about wet dreams, the Shona culture regards wet dreams among male adolescents and men as normal in that males are not expected to flee from naked women or to turn down sexual advances of figureless or topless female figures in their sleep. Instead, they are expected to demonstrate their masculinity and virility by confronting the female figures and have sex with them. Even in their wakefulness, traditional Shona boys and men are socialized not to resist sex initiated by women because it is regarded as a sign of lack of manhood and not respectful of women to decline such offers [12, 13]. In this context it is also noted that traditional Shona boys, adolescents and men may not report sexual abuse by women perpetrators because of their cultural pride [12, 13]. In addition, the Zimbabwean laws are at pains to recognize sexual assault of boys or men by women because the traditional society cannot understand how women can rape men.

In this study *mubobobo* is perceived as a culture-bound sexual syndrome among traditional Shona women. In this regard *mubobobo* is a sexual experience that is feared due to cultural distortions about women's sexuality. Sexual experiences among the traditional Shona women are perceived in the context of procreation. Due to conservative and restrictive cultural roles, the traditional Shona women could have considered themselves as the beacons and custodians of the Shona culture and so they could not have experienced wet dreams involving men they were not in love with in their sleep [40, 46]. Furthermore, the women could have been less expressive of sexual arousal in their dreams. According to the traditional Shona culture, women tend to repress sensual gratification urges because the Shona culture says *musha mukadzi* meaning that there is no household or home without a restrained or decent wife [13]. In this regard, it implies that according to the Shona culture wet dreams by women are not

considered as normal or decent [22, 40, 44]. Experiencing sexual dreams among women culminating in orgasm is considered as taboo and that according to the traditional Shona culture is the work of witchcraft [2, 12]. Consequently, cultural controls can result in sexual restrictions that could be described as pathogenic, pathoplastic, or pathoprotective in human sexuality [40, 42, 43, 47]. Even though, sexual deviance in wakefulness among the traditional Shona women could also happen in form of masturbation in privacy. Masturbation by women is not culturally sanctioned among the Shona people; it is regarded as sexual deviance [42, 45]. If the sexual fantasy is satisfied in consciousness it is considered more as deviant behaviour than abnormal behaviour. The woman would take a *mukombe/budzi* (young pumpkin) and warm it on the fire and then use it in masturbation to satisfy her sexual fantasies when the husband is away. This practice was common during tribal wars or when men went on a hunting spree that could last a couple of months away from home.

Nocturnal emission could be caused by subliminal learning processes at the unconscious level of mental activity. Associative learning resulting in sexual arousal can occur gradually outside of human awareness [34, 39, 48]. The women in this study could have been unconsciously stimulated by the men with whom they had constant social contact in their day to day lives. Social contact, as argued by the proponents of contact hypothesis of group behaviour, could stimulate and accentuate human attractiveness between interacting individuals or groups [31, 41]. More social contact of group members can reduce negative perceptions of intergroup differences or biases between members [34-36]. There are instances in which *mubobobo* is experienced without clear images of the perpetrators in the dreams. The explanation for that could be attributable to top-down excitation of the central nervous system in sexual fantasy. This could result in the arousal of the reproductive system operating at an unconscious level [29, 32, 33].

According to the contact hypothesis, the people who were accused as perpetrators of *mubobobo* could have had the qualities that elicited sexual excitation at a subconscious level gradually developing with more group contact into nocturnal emission among women [41-43, 48]. The contact hypothesis posits that when people form groups they tend to become more attracted to each with more group contact. More contact can result in interpersonal attraction. Similarly, the social identity theory argues that people living together could view themselves as the ingroup in which members become more attracted to each other against outsiders to such an extent that prior differences perceived between members during the initial period of group contact will blur out with time [32, 33, 35, 36].

In this respect, accusations of witchcraft could have been meant to reduce the psychological distress caused by the contradiction between loving someone in sex dreams and not loving them in wakefulness. By opening up and identifying the perpetrators as required by the traditional Shona cultural procedures for the expression of grievances, the victims could reduce the psychological pain of unwanted sexual stimulation in sleep. As a form of aggression and a desire to punish the offenders in consciousness the victims could be healed through catharsis when the offenders are brought be-

fore the courts. It could also have been a way of positively dealing with self-reproach, saving face, and protecting womanly virtues by reporting the matter to the elders for protection against evil spirits. The women did not realize that wet dreams even though not sanctioned among women by the Shona culture were a normal biological process. Unfortunately the experiences were defined and subjectively interpreted by the Shona culture as unacceptable and indecent [2, 12, 19, 20, 21].

In terms of psychoanalytic theory, individuals can unconsciously internalize the love object or figure into the unconscious mind [44, 48]. In this study, women in their conscious mind could repress sexual desires as a function of the superego into the unconscious mind. Societal norms and values, as represented by the superego, block id impulses relating to sex [46, 47]. When an individual falls asleep, the controlling power of the superego over the id is weakened and the previously repressed sexual material emerges as wet dreams in sleep. As a result of the contradictory dynamics of the id, ego and superego in human sexuality, traditional African women who experience sexual drive or instincts in their sleep are likely to get angry or confused due to their entrenched cultural beliefs [34, 40, 47].

Projection could be a defense mechanism used by victims of *mubobobo* to displace guilty feelings from themselves onto others [44, 45]. The traditional Shona women did not believe that they like men could also have wet dreams. On realizing that they had wet dreams, traditional Shona women blamed the sexual figures in their dreams for stimulating them in their sleep [46, 47].

CONCLUSION

The experiencing of sexual fantasies in sleep is considered as abnormal among the traditional Shona women but such bodily sensations are regarded as normal when experienced by men. This area is under-researched in Africa because debate on the sexuality of women is considered as taboo among the traditional Shona people. The women might not be comfortable talking about such issues openly. Although sexual fantasies can be experienced by traditional Shona women in wakefulness, the same sensations are not culturally appropriate when they are experienced by women in their dreams. Witchcraft is ascribed to *mubobobo*. It is considered unusual among the traditional Shona women to experience orgasm in sleep through dreams and yet in western societies wet dreams among women are regarded as normal experience. Nocturnal emission among traditional Shona women is regarded as evidence of sexual abuse by a wizard and society is expected to take action to protect women. Even though the Witchcraft Suppression Act of 1899 was amended in 2006 to accommodate some of the Shona cultural claims about witchcraft and *mubobobo*, the burden of proof in court against the alleged perpetrator is still controversial and a cause for concern for the public and the legislature. The problem is further complicated by the fact that women's action groups through non-governmental organizations such as the National Constitutional Assembly of Zimbabwe (NCA) and the Zimbabwe National Traditional Healers Association (ZINATHA) are very vocal about the existence of *mubobobo* and that tends to paradoxically reverse the gains made in the field of women empowerment

with particular reference to civic education on reproductive health and women's sexuality. If the traditional Shona women are not educated about the processes leading to wet dreams among women in their sleep chances are that this lack of knowledge might prevent them from understanding and participating in reproductive health programmes.

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