

LAW STUDENTS PRESENT AND DEBATE THEIR RESEARCH



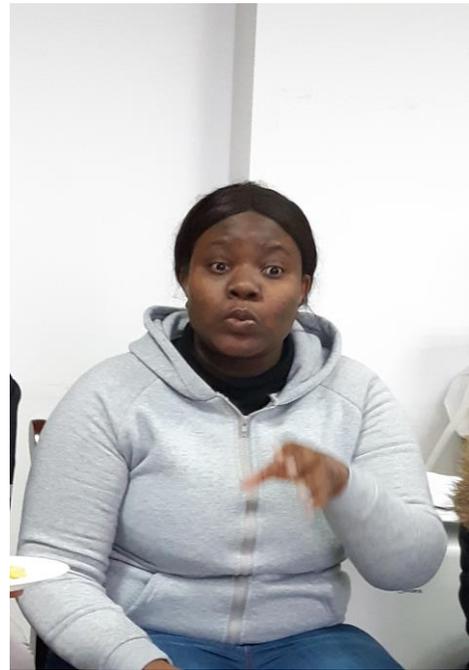
Memory Moyo discusses the law and reality of child marriages in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwe International Women's Association (ZIWA) held its first event of the new term on 21 March 2018. Four final year students gave presentations on the research that they have been doing over the last few months.

Memory Rutendo Moyo spoke about her work on child marriages in Zimbabwe. She presented the phenomenon of under-aged marriage, overwhelmingly involving girls. Key reasons, she argued, included social prejudices that regarded girls as inferior and not able to contribute anything beyond children and wifely duties. In many instances, girls are actually married early by loving parents out of concern for them, as they are felt to have no other options and marriage is the best way to ensure they are cared for. She discussed how the leading Constitutional Court case of *Loveness Mudzuru and Ruvimbo Tsoodzi v The Minister of Justice, Legal & Parliamentary Affairs, The Minister Of Women's Affairs, Gender & Community Development and The Attorney General of Zimbabwe* had declared section 22 of the Marriage Act unconstitutional, but nothing had been done to implement or enforce the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.



Lynette Panashe Karuru listens as Josephine Mutsa Chawanika argues for improvements in access to justice in marginalised areas of Zimbabwe



Adiolah Mhute queries judicial independence and impartiality

Lynette Panashe Karuru presented her work on harmful traditional cultural practices in Zimbabwe. She argued that harmful practices rooted in traditions and cultures can maintain the subordination of females in society and both legitimize and perpetuate gender based violence. Some cause excruciating physical pain, while others subject women and girls to humiliating and degrading treatment. They are part of the role differentiation and expectations in societies that relegate women to an inferior position from birth throughout their lives. Lynette spoke briefly about five of the harmful practices in Zimbabwe: polygamy, *lobola* payment, wife inheritance, virgin pledging and marriage by abduction. She spoke about the legal framework, in particular the Constitution and other legislation such as the Marriage Act and Domestic Violence Act.

Josephine Mutsa Chawanika discussed access to justice in Zimbabwe, focusing on two geographical areas: Mashonaland Central and Harare. Equal access to justice is one of the fundamental human rights that is often unrealizable to people living in marginalized areas in Zimbabwe, she argued. The Zimbabwean Constitution states that justice should be easily and readily available for all citizens seeking to enforce their rights. Article 69(2) provides for ‘a right to a fair, speedy and public hearing within a reasonable time’, but the reality, she discovered from her research is that this is not within the reach of most people living in

marginalized areas. Access to justice seems long and very challenging to attain. Josephine's research explores access to justice in both rural as well as urban marginalized areas. She discussed the three forms of judicial remedy that exist in Zimbabwe: courts of law, customary courts and informal community justice such as practised by religious groups like the Apostolic Church. She found problems with access to all of them.



Melisa Gamuchirai Kwashira addresses the gathering on the challenges to women's participation in Zimbabwean political life

Melisa Gamuchirai Kwashira shared with the gathering her study of the right of women to participate in the political life of the nation. Her work has focused on the factors and challenges affecting women in politics. The Zimbabwean political arena is a challenging environment for women to take part in, and she illustrated her presentation with the experiences of high profile women such as Grace Mugabe and Joice Mujure. Women are being sidelined and silenced in politics, she argued. This has resulted in fewer women participating in politics. Violence has also been perpetuated in the political arena, and women are often victims. Melisa's work looks into Zimbabwe's international obligations under treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Protocol to The African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. She shared some of her ideas on how women can advance better in politics.

Each of the speakers sparked off lively responses from the audience, and the discussions were rich and informed. Other students shared their own research, for example, Donald Tatenda Rushambwa spoke about his work on Rule of Law and judicial reform. Professors Suzannah Linton and Margarita Vladimirova attended and participated in the discussions.