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**Managers' Toxic Masculinity Erodes Employees' Work Ethics in Private Institutions of
DRC's City of Bukavu**

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of DRC's City of Bukavu**



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Abstract

Purpose: This research has explored views of employees in Bukavu (DRC) private institutions regarding ways managers' toxic masculinity damages employers' work ethics at workplace.

Methodology: Researchers conducted this qualitative study in the city of Bukavu between April and June 2024 with randomly selected 25 respondents from five private institutions. Respondents were Congolese females and males whose ages varied between 19 and 63. Data was collected via face-to-face focus group discussions, with in-depth interviews. The theories of masculinity and control guided the research. Masculinity posits that managers must exert power and control over their employees at workplace. Managers resorting to toxic masculinity damage the ethics of their workers, which can affect productivity.

Findings: Results reveal how a manager may use toxic masculinity to deride the workers, which kills their appreciation and motivation for work. Managers applying domination, homophobia, giving poor and unfair salaries, abusing employees and discriminating against them are perpetuating toxic masculinity in their institutions. These factors are demotivating and destructive agents for employees' ethics at work because they convey toxic masculinity through power and control, all causing work unproductivity.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The research suggests that employers should develop progressive masculinity at work by valuing and respecting the workers. The perspective can boost collaboration; sustain commitment and harmony at work. Socializing constructive manliness can create a conducive work environment in private institutions of Bukavu, increase workers' commitment to work, as well as the production.

Keywords: *Toxic Masculinity, Erodes, Employees, Work Ethics, DRC-Bukavu, Private Institutions*

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INTRODUCTION

This research expounds the views of employees in Bukavu Private institutions regarding ways managers use toxic masculinity to damage their employees' work ethics at workplace. The researchers selected the city of Bukavu because it engorges many private institutions whose managers are Congolese men. These managers are eager to behave manly because of patriarchal hegemony in the society. The understanding of such attitude requires exploration because it exposes male's toxic masculinity at work place, which devalues and discriminates against workers. Patriarchal norms remain the primary shelter for masculinity and particularly the toxic one because the latter perpetuates male domination, homophobia, aggression and discrimination.

Alternatively, a manager who applies toxic masculinity to employees is destroying the workplace culture. To Waling (2019:364), toxic masculinity occurs in many companies through their managers who interrupt and talk over employees. Such employers display inflexible attitude by navigating the workplace like a battle zone they have conquered. Poisonous masculinity at workplace does not mean that masculinity is toxic, nor that it is inherently wrong with men. Such misconception of toxic culture of masculinity at workplace implies the existence of something inherently 'wrong' with men (Allan, 2016:24). Similarly, the toxic culture of masculinity at a workplace reflects the dark side that regrettably some managers celebrate by maintaining their tough appearances at all costs. This is an attitude, according to Agius et al. (2020), that dismays workers who may attempt to express their emotions because their managers have used strength and physical dominance to express their power. Other managers may develop homophobia, a way of objectifying and belittling staff despite the harmful effects it causes as it allows managers to conform to their masculine ideal (Waling, 2019:362). Congruent with Askey (2028:59), masculinity may oppress other masculinities depending who holds it. Thus, a male employer may make other men suffer his power in different ways because he believes workers' masculinities are lower than his own are. The context depicts how toxic masculinity actively harms workers, though sometimes some employers endure it too.

Although toxic masculinity seeps into all areas of life, its presence at workplace can be particularly troublesome. Agius et al. (2020) assert that toxic masculinity at workplace promotes outspoken men to become confident and assertive, while outspoken women seem aggressive. Harmful masculinity is on display at workplace, according to Eksi (2017), when a male manager can talk over women and other men in meetings, disregards their ideas, and navigates the workplace like a fighting area that he has conquered. Evidence shows that both men, women and LGBTQ+ community (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more) also undergo the brunt of such abuse at work in particular and in society.

The theories of masculinity and work ethics informed this study. Masculinity encompasses hegemonic and toxic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is that form of maleness that dominates all other masculinities, making managers impose themselves on their employees, regardless of their genders (Stroebel et al., 2020). However, toxic masculinity depends on cultural pressures for men to behave in a certain way, which affects females and males in some cultural style. Such behaviour aims at disseminating men's attitudes that propagate dominance, intolerance, partiality and violence in a given location. In a work institution, this infers that the employer must act tough and avoid showing all emotions, which affects negatively the

personnel's mental health. Such masculine toxicity engenders serious consequences for the company as it can even tumble the production. On the other hand, hegemonic masculinity encourages men's dominance over other men and women at the workplace.

Managers' hunger for control clarifies how they may stigmatise their employees leaning on already socially built and accumulated traits of being a respectful man. In many workplaces, hegemonic patriarchy dominates, making employees to remain subordinate to their bosses, which empowers employers to abuse the subordinate personnel. This mirrors how toxic masculinity makes employers feel super masculine, an attitude that makes them think they are above everyone at work. Male workers can still break toxic masculinities as the result of their company to socialise them to embrace constructive manliness at the workplace. The proponents of hegemonic masculinity believe it is helpful for comprehending the social relations between genders and managers and the employees (Cornell, 1987; Stroebel et al., 2020).

Ethics and Toxic Masculinity at Workplace

Ethics at workplace are a set of moral principles, standards and values that the employee and their employers abide by at their place of work. These principles determine what actions are acceptable, appropriate at work and guide ways to conduct activities in an institution (Yoshimura & Hayden, 2017). Ethics at the place of work guide the personnel's feelings at work; the way they interact with their comrades in the institution by governing what is right or what is wrong conduct (Waling, 2019).

Ethical values are very important in the workplace for various reasons, including the pride of feeling one works for a given company. Research conducted in the UK in 2019 found that 94% of employees (Allan (2016) believe in that it is appealing to see their work institution indorsing ethical morals. Another study conducted by Agius et al. (2020) in Australia confirmed with 82% that ethics is such an important factor to the point that the personnel can accept a low salary provided they are under the guidance of constructive ethical practices. Congruent with Agius (2022), these employees shared that they cannot prefer a higher salary when they work in horrible work conditions and questionable methods. In fact, economic instability in many institutions today is causing employees to experience an increase in skepticism combined with anxiety(Askey, 2018), meaning that businesses are operating in an environment where people perceive behaviour as unethical (Yoshimura & Hayden, 2017:107). This condition can generate a myriad of public disapprovals from workers, which might encourage positive ethical behaviours in the workplace. Employees' lives can improve positively if employers, according to Agius (2022),ponder the loudness of their workers' voices claiming shift to new ethical expectations. In other words, the social responsibility of organisations can gain traction in their environments by committing to sustainable and inclusive growth of their personnel regardless of gender and origin.

On the other hand, toxic masculinity is bad thing to the personnel of an institution. Its negative side causes employees to suffer by lack of motivation in working with satisfaction. Such masculinity rears an ugly head in the workplace in subtle manners, making this masculine trait promotes extreme self-reliance (Wood, 2019 & Wood, 2020). Man's personal ability to navigate life situations using his own knowledge, resources and abilities depicts a positive characteristic that encourages our depth by asking for help. Toxic masculinity encourages the idea of risky self-reliance, to the point that an employee may feel compelled to do everything alone; because he thinks, asking for support is an emasculating act. Allan (2016) argues that many employees may not have required skills to carry out some tasks but keenly refuse to

accept help from someone experienced to save hours of struggling. Such masculinity tends to harm relationships amongst work colleagues and eventually prevents correct and timely completion of projects.

Toxic masculinity breeds insecurity at workplace in different ways. Agius (2022) illustrates how most men disapprove of being under a woman's leadership, may it be in homes or in any organisation. Once the situation is mandatory at work, most men will undermine the woman's authority lest their masculinity does not suffer. Men expose their manliness through constant attempt to one up anything their co-workers have achieved, or constant bragging about their wealth, partner, or physical prowess (Askey, 2018). Research conducted in Nigeria by Wood (2019) showed that many staff units in private and public organisations boast a lot to their coworkers during break time about their life conquests, sometimes make some hurtful jokes about the way their colleagues look like or regarding their sexuality. When a staff behaves like this at work, he is displaying his toxic masculinity without noticing it affects others' ability to form genuine relationships, or build trust and mutual respect among themselves, which affects negatively their service production.

Toxic masculinity can also take the form of sexual aggressiveness. In this regards, Agius et al. (2020) opine how a male manager and other male workers can create opportunities they consider as sexual, no matter how harmless they may appear. Such are occasions that most female employees complain against because their male comrades jokingly remind them about their genitals, which sounds a taboo in some cultures. Workers who involve in sexual discussions at work with their coworkers of opposite sex may hurt them morally, but still are exposing their toxic masculinity. Men conversing about their own genitals or sex life, and asking personal and sexual questions to female or male colleagues remains an exposure of their toxic masculinity, which highly embarrasses the colleagues. This behaviour depicts particular issues of power dynamics. Similarly, Wood (2019) and Wood (2020) confirm that the personnel may hear a male manager making constant inappropriate remarks towards the women under his power, but will never talk about it. In other words, men always cover other men who express overtly their toxic masculinity in society and or at work. In the latter case, Waling (2019) admits that silence implies 'no one wants to ridicule a male boss because making such a fuss can jeopardise one's career progression.' This happens because most men fear to become jobless, as having a job helps them to be real breadwinners, and a man who cannot earn bread for his family is not a real man. Toxic masculinity through sexual discussions may be entrenched in workplace culture, despite it being embarrassing and disrespectful to women at work but they should feel safe and comfortable.

Toxic manliness can also spread at a workplace through extreme competitiveness. In line with Agius (2022), competition within a work institution can be a great thing to use effectively as a driver of productivity. However, to some extent, some employees or employers can use it as a harmful tool yet they could execute it in a friendly manner. This means holding an office in a company is not a game of powers. The lens of toxic masculinity express ultra-competitiveness, leading to masculinity and contesting culture in the sense that it can brag about working unreasonably prolonged periods of hours. This condition can cause the personnel to assume heavy assignments and even unnecessary risks. Besides, it can also create an environment where employees hate or attack others because everyone wants to show his masculinity through control and domination. Creating such imbalance in an organisation implies that the strongest are dominating the weak, which perfectly denotes masculinity. To Waling (2019), this situation generates a setting where leaders dictate and demean the losers who feel their masculinity goes

down. In a short period, such a culture may be cost-effective in the institution, but in the end, it has dire influence on the employees' creativity, innovation, productivity and employees' wellbeing at workplace. Such masculine but harmful manners are, in line with Wood (2020), exclusively joint in male-dominated companies, including the industries of finance, law, military and technology. Women in these domains may find themselves playing the same game, and the few who succeed will likely do so by emulating this behaviour. Nonetheless, they will have to work much harder to prove themselves, as well as face a backlash for demonstrating governing comportments.

Toxic masculinity at work place is more destructive than constructive, which makes it be hard for employers to tackle. Confronting harmful masculinity requires everyone, employer and his employees to stand as one body to root it out from their work place. This sounds a difficult culture to initiate, as it requires the management and the staff to make many preparations for serious introspection. It must also be committed to a long-term culture shift at the workplace. Companies are often hesitant to address the phenomenon because some of its features, such as masculinity contest culture, are beneficial for the business. Another huge barrier is the belief that not all men appreciate toxic masculinity. This phenomenon makes some men resist attempts to deal with rooted misogyny and sexism because they do not think they are personally blameworthy.

METHODOLOGY

In terms of methods, the researchers used a qualitative approach with in-depth interviews in order to gather views of Congolese men's attitudes towards ways employers' masculinity erodes workplace ethics in private institutions in Bukavu. The city is part of society where men lead institutions they have created or those other men created, all being under a patriarchal culture in which most men appreciate displaying their masculine traits. Scrutinizing their viewpoints enables the comprehension of the ways in which they manage their institutions. In fact, the local hegemony supports masculinity, making the majority of men managers in companies be happy with its applicability. The respondents' opinions on how toxic masculinity can endanger the workplace culture are not representative of the city's population, but that sounds typical of most men due to socialization.

Researchers randomly selected 25 female and male respondents from five private institutions. Their ages varied between 19 and 63, and were living and working in Bukavu at the time of the interview. Interviewees who willingly involved in the discussions would quit any time should they feel so without an explanation. Before the interviews, researchers had sought permission from the target institutions' management, and later on explained to the interviewees the objectives of the study. Researchers also negotiated and obtained respondents' informed consent as they had voluntarily agreed to engage in the interviews. Researchers allowed the respondents to use false names to go with their narratives, due to sensitivity and protection of their real identities. The researchers used in-depth interviews with an interview guide in order to collect information that could facilitate them to understand how managers' toxic masculinity can disturb employees' ethics in their company. Although the verbatim of the interviewees seem general, they apply to personal experiences of each of them in their respective work department.

This research focuses solely on male employers' toxic masculinity in private institutions because it wants to explore how it causes them lose their ethical values and motivation at workplace. Perhaps other researchers would also focus on public institutions to understand if

the managers in public and private institutions use their toxic masculinity in the same context and if the workers have the same attitudes. For data analysis, the researchers applied thematic analysis to identify the themes included in the collected data.

Lots of research has explored toxic masculinity, but little has concentrated on ways male employers in private institutions use toxic masculinity to destroy their personnel's morals at work place. This domain remains unexplored because hegemonic patriarchy makes men over represent males using toxic masculinity in private institutions. This link sounds a supportive but captivating process for understanding male toxic masculinity at workplace and its impact on personnel's ethics. Toxic masculinity at private workplace can negatively affect workers integrity and the production. Consequently, this understanding has prompted the researchers' interest to explore that influence.

The section below spells out the analysis of the results collected based on the questions below:

1. How can a manager's harmful masculinity deride his employers' ethical values at workplace?
2. What impact do the managers' masculine attitudes and beliefs have on the workplace environment?
3. In which ways men managers can reduce the effect of toxic masculinity at workplace to restore constructive culture?

Data Analysis

Toxic Masculinity Derides Workers' Ethical Values

Most respondents confirmed that toxic masculinity kills employers' appreciation and motivation for work. According to Wood (2019), managers applying toxic masculinities at workplace discourage their employees to perform their daily activities in a good mood, as they constantly feel frustrated. Working in such environment is highly destructive physically and morally for the employee though it makes the toxic employer feel manlier. Interviewee BKV 12/2024confided

You know what? Some bosses behave poisonously and believe their behaviours make them real men. I think when a man imposes his harmfulness around him he knows how bad it is, but he applies it against all odds just because he is a manager. No man can criticize him because all men behave similarly in their churches, families and even schools. The way men behave in workplaces reflects the society in which they live. I have personally gone through my employer's abusive masculinity. It did really kill my personality to the point I was ready thinking to resign. But when I thought about earning the bread for my family, I endured. The consequence was that I lost courage and motivation for every activity I was doing. My boss was behaving that way and that was eroding my ethical values as a worker in our institution. This also affected most of my colleagues.

Most interviewees had the same opinions as those of BKV12/2024here above. In fact, a common form of toxicity exists in institutions, and it comes from the global understanding society has regarding gender, specifically of maleness. Agius et al. (2020) elucidate that an inflexible outward characterises individuals who lean on their masculinity. Congolese men who behave masculine are very tough towards the people around them, comprising of children, men and women. The implication of such attitude at a workplace is that masculine Congolese managers never show their emotions, hide their agony and behave ruthlessly in their

environment to convey their masculine power. In fact, a manager coercing his emotions into hiding and not asking for help when he is in distress, may make people think he is mentally abnormal (Yoshimura & Hayden, 2017). Employers who behave this way express their toxic masculinity, which hurts all people in his environment without discrimination. This attitude is a killer for good manners in most private institutions in Bukavu because toxicity hurts everyone at workplace and sometimes, the toxic employer may end up victimizing himself willingly or unwillingly. Wood (2019) and Wood (2020) confer that executives who apply toxic masculinity create many moral and psychological instabilities in themselves because of their toxicity. Noxious masculinity can harm men and women, children and people of other genders, no matter the setting.

Many other interviewees admitted that in some private institutions of Bukavu, managers in offices apply the principles of dog eat dog and work-first. Most male employers epitomize and encourage such attitude as they think it is worth their leadership (Askey, 2024). In other words, workers should understand that their bosses are never their friends, regardless of how close they are at work. Workers must learn to set professional boundaries with their employers to avoiding falling into the toxic trap of their authorities. This is because the manager might lean on an employee's failure to work effectively to resort to his abusive masculinity. To interviewee BKV 2/2024

...when we are workers, we must know that our directors and managers are not our friends. I had experienced this personally, as I was very close to my direct line manager but at the end of the day, he started sending people secretly to snip on me. I think that we as workers must collaborate with our bosses yet keeping some distance from them. When you have a boss with toxic masculinity, those near him will be the first to suffer it. Again, my boss was listening more to the people he used to send to spy me than what I used to confide to him.

As long as the focus of the employer is the employee's results, the latter must learn to do his job appropriately; otherwise, the boss might opt for using his power through his masculine toxicity in order to suffocate the worker. Allan (2016) shares that managers might resort to toxic masculinity because there are always some employees who bring him news, often accusations, in his office to gain his sympathy. Toxic managers will always seek to track staffs who escape their surveillance, and accordingly Agius et al. (2020) advise such workers to keep distance from some colleagues who the manager might be using to spy on everyone at work. Interviewee BKV 27/2024 shared that

My manager used to be angry with me, but I could not know why. I had to explain myself on issues I never knew how he got them right. Actually, I had committed some nonsense but I could never imagine he would be aware of it with rightful details. Then I noticed that I had been under his secret investigation. From that time, I was no more close to some of my colleagues I had suspected. Despite this, I was demotivated and could not do well my daily activities.

The perusal of the above interviewee's verbatim illustrates how male managers use their toxic masculinity by deploying some people to keep an eye on other employees at work. Mugisho & Umumarungu (2024) and Gill (2016) ascertain that keeping staffs in surveillance discourages them in their workplace, and it breaks the concord at work as it creates hatred among the workers. Similarly, most employers in Bukavu believe they are true men because they have sat their power of control throughout their companies to make sure all employees fear them. Eksi

(2017) admits that creating an environment where managers are keeping their employees in a loop breaks the spirit of trust and hard work in teams in the company. Setting his authority in the company in this manner can become more destructive than constructive of good manners. Managers' toxic masculinity remains a tool they use, sometimes unwillingly, in order to ruin the culture of hard work in the institution.

The above descriptions elucidate how the behaviours of bosses in most private institutions in Bukavu make them behave manly, yet they are discouraging the workers. In fact, employees dislike administrators with poisonous etiquettes because they discourage them to develop attitudes that can construct the company. Such leaders lack constructive communication, as they hinder the workers from loving their job, growing self-confidence and developing love for their job wholeheartedly. Thus, to interviewee BKV/8/2024 to share, *"they are making us become unproductive and useless workers. We cannot become servant leaders when we see none around us here."* Toxic conducts embody deterrence and relinquishment because a leader who embodies them is spreading poisonous manners, and he cannot abandon them since they allow him to express his manly leadership he deems worthy within the company. Such is a reminder that men dominates all the leadership positions, from the family to the presidency of a country. Accordingly, most interviewees admitted that *"discriminatory and abusive masculinity create challenge, which we do not really appreciate as workers in this place."* This is not about succeeding at whatever the work mission is, but about what National Academies of Science, Emergency and Medicine calls, "an employer winning and attempting to prove he is the winner" (Nasem, 2018). Many male employers in private institutions in Bukavu display similar attitudes as they seek to confirm their masculine dominant and toxic traits. This context depicts how male employers value themselves as the only men at the work place, and perhaps the employees are the half-men. Such denigration is emasculating for many male employees, which often thwart them from moving successfully toward their expectations in their institution.

Undesirability of male weakness at workplace

This theme emerged from several respondents who leaned on the belief that Gough et al. (2016) called "men showing weaknesses are never desired due to their becoming more susceptible to a culture of competition among employees in an institution." When an institution prompts such masculine competition, the system becomes chaotic. Interviewee BKV 4/2024 shared,

At the start, all of us were friendly and supporting one another in different ways. We had to move forward together as a team of vision. As a team, if we seek victory, it must be for all of us, but not a boss desiring to win over us, or us to win over him. Very few of us can appreciate a toxic boss. Even women at work have become competitive as they primarily focus on completing their tasks. But I think women are very emotive and weak physically. This cannot make them to manage us men.

Congruent with Pettyjohn et al. (2019), in a toxic work environment, only some managers may benefit from toxic systems. Society makes men develop toxicity toward women and other men, with women being more vulnerable compared to men. Society has preset women's failure, and so do the private institutions in Bukavu city. These plans of making women lose may cause women to attempt to race in the put work first challenge at the office. Interviewee BKV 17/2024 shared,

Brother, we live in a society where we men are the leaders. But the men who believe are more men than others never let those others rule; they hinder them to do so. Not allowing other men to rule denotes behavioural toxicity. Society encourages men to develop toxic masculinity that undermines the efforts of men and women in our companies here in Bukavu. Behaviours like these show how our managers are responsible for a disproportionate care and emotional amount of the care they give us as employees. It also causes emotional labour, either at home or at work. All this happens because our society encourages us to behave toxically toward women and other men. This attitude makes women to become more vulnerable compared to us men. Society has preset women's failure, and so do the private institutions in Bukavu city. Causing women to fail premeditatedly may cause them to attempt to race in producing qualitative work in an institution where they work.

Hegemonico-patriarchal attitudes encourage men to never expose their weaknesses and urge men to remain always stronger. The implication of such assertiveness, according to Audickas, Dempsey and Keen (2018), is that “real men always have strong desire to display their strength at their workplace by discarding females who compete with men.” In fact, weak men at workplace can never expose themselves, but rather become toxic to anyone who may compete them. This clearly explains why weak managers of companies in Bukavu fabricate reasons to expel their employees who oppose them or compete with them at workplace. To feel manlier and enjoy their peace of mind, such managers often sack people from their positions without notice or explanation so that they can feel at peace and masculine. Requiring men to behave emotionless and not listening to other people is another aspect of masculinity that most employers display in their institutions in Bukavu. On the other hand, when a woman competes such masculinity, men give her names just to discourage her, and any other woman who would dream so. Mugisho & Umumararungu (2024) and Mugisho & Muthuki (2023) assert “most men see female adversaries as emasculating” and “undercut male colleagues” by demonstrating masculinity in the same manners most men do in society. This often occurs in Bukavu private institutions where male managers see females opposing them as a workplace threat, causing these male managers to mistreat them. Such toxicity sheds a negative light as it responds harshly to anyone hindering the employers’ attitudes and beliefs. In fact, managers’ harmful attitudes at workplace may illustrate their poisonous machismo as the latter applauds employers whom the staffs fear. Such form of terrorism at workplace conveys narcissistic attitudes that make some men feel highly egocentric, and placing them above everyone at work (Sculos, 2017).

Furthermore, some managers’ intimidating directives reflect toxic masculinity at workplace. This employers’ conduct often drives women to conformity, sometimes coercing them into sexual promiscuity. Similarly, Bale, Poletti and Webb (2018) aver that some toxic managers who sleep with their female employees feel manlier by seeing them more submissive to them, making the female staff unable to oppose the manager’s weakness at workplace. This is why interviewee BKV 21/2024 shared,

We are men and we live in our country DRC. Our country is a patriarchy. It blesses hegemonic masculinity by recommending every man to behave like a true man. So, we as true men must embark on hunting women for pleasure. Employers also apply sexual conquest, but with the women in their institutions. Embarking on such an adventure makes managers feel they are real male managers in their workplaces. Sexual conquest is a form of toxic masculinity managers appreciate as it allows them to objectify women to feel more masculine.

This respondent argues that DRC is a patriarchy that blesses hegemonic masculinity by strongly recommending men to sexual conquest and the objectification of women to feel more masculine. Accordingly, employees who adapt to this epitome in Bukavu amass multiple sexual partners because they view them as desirable objects. To Kimmel and Wade (2018), this attitude may become toxic at workplace once it maintains harmful gender dynamics that exploit, objectify and subjugate female workers. It is important to recognize that hegemonic masculinity is a social construct that can vary across cultures and periods. However, these characteristics highlight gender roles where patriarchal systems are prevalent. Challenging and deconstructing these social constructs at workplace can promote gender equality and so shrink employers' toxic masculinity (Konopka et al., 2019). In other words, reducing toxic masculinity at workplace is crucial because it can create a more inclusive and accepting work community.

On the other hand, many other respondents shared how they could easily opt for harmful behaviours when they felt their gender identity was at risk of threat. They agreed that such attitude is a masculine specificity that most women would not have, yet being in the same workplace. To Birdsall & Keay (2018), fragile masculinity would affect the workplace because male managers tend to respond to perceptions that question their identity. Interviewee BKV/29/2024 shared similar opinions as he stated,

As a manager, I cannot think twice to show those under me that I am a man and not a woman. I must react, no need to wait because my work and personality are at risk. The gender of a man is inalienable and must remain intact. I must defend it as a man because it defines me. I think no one can like a weak man as his employer. A good manager must be a real and strong man.

This verbatim confirms that a manager must protect his identity as a man at work. In fact, managers in private institutions in Bukavu display toxic behaviours as a reaction to threat against their gender, masculinity and position as a manager. As such, a male manager's reaction would include showing he has power over everyone at work (Mugisho & Muthuki, 2023). Thus, male managers can mistreat the staff, deprive them of their basic work rights, including salary increase and other benefits, and others lie against them just to show they are rightful. All these factors and many others show how masculinity is a fragile identity. It is so precarious its ultimate goal is to prove that the user is a real man, which may push some leaders to lie and to some men to cheat, harass, and even commit assault (McGinley, 2018:56). Perhaps the managers who cultivate such behaviours ignore how demotivating they are toward their staff, which can generate a negative impact on workers' motivation and output, and ultimately the company's productivity as well. To address this effect, many respondents said, "*managers should be aware of their toxicity to their work environment*", which can push them to recognize the dangers they cause to their own institutions. Besides, reacting proactively often allows male managers to embrace a healthier version of masculinity as it can progressively dismantle the structures driving men to feel that their masculinity is in danger in the first place. Ultimately, Bukavu male managers of private institutions can defeat their weakness of toxic masculinity by developing a workplace culture in which everyone feels support of their gender identities. Such change of behaviours does not flout masculinity, but rather blurs the uncertainty and threat built on outdated stereotypes. This alteration disassembles the weakness of toxic masculinity because it backs the power of constructive maleness, which equally benefits employers and employees at work (Coumarelos et al., 2023). This approach can help male

managers in Bukavu to understand that feeling more relaxed and positively commanding at work can scale down destructive behaviours.

Male Managers' Toxic Masculinity Weakens Institution

Interviewees' narratives endorse that an institution can weaken because its managers are displaying toxic masculinity. In fact, masculinity is not harmful in itself, but culture makes it so. In other words, culture can make men to develop harmful masculinity, making some male leaders not to listen to their employees. According to Konopka et al. (2019), a leader who lacks careful listening cannot build his community. Such a manager lacks empathy and conceptualization as key attitudes to sustain his enterprise. Accordingly, Childs and Hughes (2018:286) share that some individuals can take maleness to the extreme in a cultural context as a sign of lack of commitment and stewardship. Interviewee BKV/22/2024 said,

What I can share is that when leaders stick to their maleness, they fail to listen to those they rule. Being a man without empathy makes some to feel they are the only men in their communities and no one else is like them. I think this attitude stains the image of their job. This is not good for the work and their institution. It weakens the company because of its harmfulness branding that most of us men appreciate. Masculinity is not detrimental in itself, but culture makes it so. Some managers can take their maleness to the life-threatening context leaning on the local culture.

This interviewee relates how culture makes some male leaders to lack servant leader's attitudes and behaviours that can value the community. In this way, Congolese male fail to put their employees first. Leaving the people one leads behind is to behave unethically, which disempowers the workers. Such toxic masculinity does not create any value for the community, and so the company fails to push its workers into performance and growth. Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2017) ascertain that making toxic masculinity a cultural phenomenon at work remains a weakness although it encourages employers to control the employees at work. The negative side is that some managers in Bukavu private institutions can brandish such attitude against their staffs who are unwilling to abide to behavioral control via gender roles at work. However, being a man is not the key cause of resorting to toxic masculinity and male violence in general. When Congolese managers become toxic, those under their leadership, either at work or in the household become overwhelmingly discouraged and frustrated. Speaking of women employees, Yoshimura and Hayden (2017:118) admit that women's dissuasion conveys how culture in the community pushes people to experiment misogyny. This situation makes male leaders to blame women employees, which some men believe makes them feel more powerful.

Some other respondents shared that, sometimes, toxic masculinity can evolve from subordinate masculinities. Connell presents subservient maleness as the way in which the men who have failed to adjust with the leading ideal of masculinity endure marginalisation and stigmatisation (Mugisho, 2022). In the same context, interviewee BKV/26/2024 specified,

Masculinity makes us men. All men must abide to the existing principles of being a real man in their current society. Again, I think not all men can adhere to this maleness. So, those who cannot will take a subordination way. The men in this category can suffer because real men will not see them with a good eye. Men rule society, but nowadays some women can too. I think those people who are not men and not women are also concerned. Yes, and in my mind all these categories of people are also able to assume and preserve these archetypes of being a man. I think this is normal because all of us live in the same society. When in a society, we must abide to its customs and beliefs.

The above informant details how hegemony rules societies and decides on ways to protect masculinity. However, some men in Bukavu private institutions fail to abide by the principles of maleness, which makes them remain eternal subordinates to their managers, as they are the real men at the workplace. In other words, the subordination condition of employees makes them seem weak, effeminate, or non-normative. All of these, in line with Stroebel et al. (2020), make outranked workers face their working environment pressures to conform to the dominant model who is the employer. Besides, the concept of hegemonic masculinity embodies both males and females as a group, and non-binary persons. On the latter category, Ekşi (2017) concludes that they too can embrace and preserve masculine ideals, social norms and expectations if their working institution embraces them. This situation has buttressed gender labels in some Bukavu private institutions by segregating against those outside the binary framework of femininity and masculinity. In fact, considering hegemonic maleness remains decisive for addressing questions of gendered imbalance (Askey, 2018). Similarly, the same concern can endorse more general and impartial living conditions in Bukavu private companies. By challenging the dominant model of masculinity and recognizing the diversity of masculinities, Gough et al. (2016) believe that managers of companies can generate working conducive environments for workers to express their gender personalities without criticism or fear.

Employers' harmful maleness discriminates and nurtures homophobia at work

Information collected on the field confirms that when a male employer applies toxic masculinity, it leads to creating discrimination and homophobia within the institution. Agius et al. (2020) confirm that a manager who gives poor and unfair salaries to his employees is perpetuating toxic masculinity in their companies. Most interviewees confirmed that a progressive manager should encourage his personnel to feel his empathy and commit to their empowerment. In other words, Congolese men feel demotivated due to their managers' bias and unreasonable hatred toward some staff, which is demotivating and destructive for workers' work ethics within the organisation. Interviewee BKV5/2024 shared,

Brother, I think you too work for someone. When the salary is insignificant we feel humiliated and even discriminated against. With a poor and unfair salary, and you are the bread earner in your family, you feel your masculinity has been spat at. That boss who gives salaries like those is bigoted and shows hatred to us men, for he wants to show you he is manlier than you are. It simply explains how harmful and mean he is to his staff at work. An employer like this displays homophobia. He has no sympathy to, nor understanding for his workers and cannot empower them. He is not for their development or empowerment because that attitude of his is dissuading.

The above interviewee, in his verbatim, explicates how toxic masculinity makes the leaders lose empathy for their staff. In Bukavu's private institutions, this condition contributes a lot to

damaging staff's ethics, growth and development at workplace. Such is the attitude of a non-servant leader whose masculinity is toxic, making his community not to progress.

On the other hand, poor and unfair salaries depict discriminatory and homophobic attitudes. Currently, there exist a growing recognition of the need to challenge and deconstruct hegemonic masculinity (Mugisho & Muthuki, 2022), but in DRC, this remains a sticking issue. In fact, movements such as feminism and LGBTQ+ activism have played a significant role in questioning and dismantling the oppressive norms associated with traditional masculinity (Mugisho & Umumararungu, 2023). Congolese private institutions are excluding some individuals from employment and if employed, they go through lots of humiliation and ostracism, which characterises an exclusive environment. Audickas, Dempsey and Keen (2018) illustrate how managers fail to create a more equitable and inclusive work environment that permits various masculinities that comply with hegemonic ideals. In fact, the notion of hegemonic masculinity does not aim at demonizing or vilifying men. Rather, it seeks to shed light on the ways in which societal expectations and norms can shape and constrain individuals' behaviours and identities. By understanding and challenging the influence of hegemonic masculinity, managers can create a more just and inclusive institution where all genders can feel at ease. Interviewee BKV/20/2024 puts it in this way,

You see, at work our boss does not value all of us in the same way. You can see men, women, and those who are not men or women at work. The boss does not treat all these persons the same way; they ought to feel at ease at work. Any maleness that makes people at work live a stressful life like that is hegemonic maleness. We want this kind of masculinity if it does defame some men and women. Yes, and I think it clarifies the beliefs and norms of where we live or work.

Masculinity conveys the beliefs and norms of hegemonic masculinity en vogue in our society. In most cases and at a work place, masculinity reflects the local hegemony, condoning the behaviours and identities of some staff, mostly the manager. Most male employers appreciate applying the norms of toxic hegemonic masculinity to ridicule some staff, but Gill (2016) concludes that a servant leader uses hegemonic masculinity to help the workers to reach their potentials and reinforce positive manners at work for greater achievements. Such maleness advances the company's expectations, but shuns norms that cannot build a good image of the organisation. Positive masculinity fosters and shapes the employees' behaviours and identities. By understanding and challenging the influence of harmful hegemonic masculinity, Allan (2016) ascertains that managers can create a more conducive environment where everyone feels working in an inclusive institution. In this way, the working environment should be motivating for all the workers regardless of their genders, a condition that can make them feel at ease and proud of their tasks.

Respondents admitted that the workplace should not offer any room to toxic masculinity, even if some managers may promote it. Male managers have various ways they manifest their toxicity through various harmful behaviours. McGinley (2018) explicates that managers' toxicity can manifest itself through several ways, including anti-feminism and discrimination against non-heterosexual people at workplace. Sculos (2017) admits that some managers manifest anti-feminist behaviours within the company's premises, which habits boil down to misogyny. Interviewee BKV/1/2024 shared,

You can see a manager who has habits of denigrating female staff. They do this openly, and others hide their hatred to women. You can see a man refusing to execute a task that is naturally or socially for women, or applying discrimination based on gendered tasks. An employer saying a woman should not seek work outside the house but must remain in the kitchen also hates women. It is normal that such manager can humiliate or abuse women.

In his opinion, the above interviewee implies that male managers manifest anti-feminist and homophobic behaviours within the company's premises. Such habits boil down Bukavu male employers due to the misogyny they often express overtly. Male managers talking down to female coworkers or vocally speaking out against women's rights, and refusing to do tasks they see as feminine are expressing their homophobic attitudes toward female staff. Nevertheless, some leaders' lack of wisdom toward female workers under their leadership makes them detest them in a subtle manner. This is what some respondents mentioned as *"managers often talk of girl stuff and women belong in the kitchen."* Displaying such beliefs mirrors the employer's extremely demeaning mind toward females. In a similar context, Birds all and Keay (2018) elucidate how most men in office refuse to clean the break room microwave because that is a woman's traditional task. Such leaders disregard the female staff who are hierarchically under them, which is irritating and unproductive in the company.

Ultimately, some respondents also disclosed that some managers discriminate against female workers, an expression of victimizing non-heterosexual people at work. To Waling (2019:365), queer identities in some workplaces have no place because leaders' toxic masculinity value them as atypical. Homophobia and transphobia correlate with toxic masculinity that a cis, straight man acting as an ally, which other men can see as not masculine through the lens of toxic masculinity (Wood, 2020). Most male managers in Bukavu private institutions believe in their toxic masculinity, which makes them ridicule or keep complete silence about homophobia, a manifestation of their being real men. Furthermore, male managers' toxic masculinity can easily spread homophobic attitudes all over the institution, which mirrors a patriarchal society. In this regards, Mugisho (2022) asserts that patriarchy condones men's attitudes of discrimination toward women, such as considering them as second-class citizen. This connotation exposes most women to various denigrating treatments and infringement of their basic rights. Similarly, interviewee BKV/10/2024 confided,

Our society discourages those kinds of behaviours in men. A man must behave like a man in everything. We cannot allow a man to behave like a woman or a woman to behave like a man. Yes, the society here does not tolerate those other genders. This is why even at work most men cannot tolerate them. This is not men's decision but our patriarchal society. I know some men do not appreciate that but most men do not like anyone who stain their masculine identity.

Patriarchal beliefs make some men develop homophobic attitudes in homes and at work. In the latter case, Agius (2022:400) admits that toxic leaders can express their homophobic arrogance at workplace by joking with some workers as "gays" because the society in which the institution is allows such malignance. This illustrates how society is the main cause of toxic masculinity as it condones women's humiliation as a sign of masculinity. Nurturing such attitudes at work damages the working conditions because it is insulting to some identities that ultimately affects negatively the productivity (Wood, 2019). Furthermore, identity denigration damages the employers' work ethics and the company's productivity because it creates an

atmosphere of discouragement, distress, detestation and wrath among coworkers, and in some instances it may lead to gendered verbal abuse. Conversely, many other respondents opposed the above attitudes because they shatter institutions. They argued how “*positive masculinity could dismantle the poisonous one.*” In other words, a good manager should create a conducive work environment where all genders, according to McGinley (2018), should feel as “a united and valuable team where everyone needs and values one another in their existence.”

Power and Control Convey Toxic Masculinity

Power and control was another theme the researchers developed from the interviewees’ verbatim. Control and authority can connect with toxic masculinity and poor work outcomes in an institution. In the context of toxic masculinity, power is control as hegemonic masculinity conceives it. Accordingly, Connell’s concept of hegemonic masculinity has influenced the understanding of how gender operates within society (Connell, 1987). It values more certain forms of masculinity compared to others, which creates a pyramid that reinforces gender inequalities. This form of masculinity is not a fixed or universal concept, but rather varies across different cultures, historical periods, and social contexts (Mugisho & Muthuki, 2022). One key aspect of hegemonic masculinity is its association with power. However, some male employers embody toxic masculinity in their leadership characteristics, such as taking decisions and behaving authoritatively. Harmful maleness makes male employers fail to develop constructive attitudes of vigorous, competitive and emotionally detached attitudes (Mugisho & Umumararungu, 2023). Different settings, including the workplace through managers of institutions, propagate these harmful attitudes.

Overall, the notion of hegemonic masculinity embeds in power dynamics. This intertwining often associates with dominance and control, positioning men as the primary beneficiaries of societal privileges. This can result in the marginalization and oppression of those who do not conform to the ideals of hegemonic masculinity, such as women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and men who do not fit the traditional mold. Currently, most interviewees shared that positive maleness can help reestablish an encouraging work background in private institutions.

Progressive Masculinity for Conducive Work Environment

On the question regarding ways of scaling down toxic masculinity at work place, respondents suggested that managers and employees should collaborate on ways of applying progressive maleness, a commitment that could bring inclusive harmony at work. Socialising constructive masculinity can create a conducive work environment in private institutions of Bukavu, and this can increase workers commitment to work, therefore increasing production. To Kimmel and Wade (2028:242), regressive models of masculinity build on control and power whose main objective is dominance. Similarly, respondent BKV/10/2024 asserts that

We are men and we are proud of it. This is why majority of us men lead in figures when it comes to issues of harmful maleness. Most of us are murders, segregationists, homeless, addicts, prisoners and many more. We belong to these categories because we are men and want to confirm our maleness. But I guess there is also a constructive way we can behave as men. I am sure we men can challenge our degenerating prototypes of maleness. This is a positive alternative we can offer by encouraging the youths to shun toxicity as it makes us look ugly and weak.

The above respondent’s narrative highlights how most men, and even those in commanding positions are proud of behaving masculine. To Childs and Hughes (2018), most men in

commanding positions may become a nuisance for the people around them because they attempt to apply their masculinities in a negative way. This explains how men in managing positions in Bukavu can develop an alternative to harmful masculine behaviours that would be inclusive, respectful and inspiring for all the workers of a company. Such an environment can create a safe, non-judgmental space where the leaders can behave as servant leaders who manage their employees with humility and by valuing their voices. This would also reflect positive socialisation in the global society where boys can learn how to construct models of masculinity. Such attitudes sound consistent with people's values, the kind of fathers, friends, men and partners they wish to be in the future (Konopka et al., 2019). In a word, constructive maleness in a company emboldens everyone at work to become kind and receptive to each other, a supporting motivation that can progressively built a positive work culture in a company, which leads to good production.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has discussed understandings of employees in some private institutions of DRC's city of Bukavu, regarding how managers' toxic masculinity can damage employers' work ethics by pushing them into bad work performance. Interviewees verbatim revealed that toxic masculinity derides the workers' ethical values and motivation for work. A manager with harmful maleness demotivates workers in their daily activities because he has become more frustrating than encouraging for his people, which hurts them morally. In some instances, the toxic manager can suffer his toxicity himself willingly or unwillingly. An employer with such attitudes embodies masculine dominance and toxic traits.

Toxic masculinity is undesirable at workplace for it infers male weakness. This softness occurs when there is a spirit of competition among employees in an institution. Male managers will see the females opposing them as a threat, a condition that leads to mistreating female workers. Such toxicity sheds a negative light as it responds harshly to anyone hindering the employers' attitudes and beliefs. An exaggerated managers' masculinity can easily toxic masculinity could weaken an institution. When male managers exaggerate displaying toxic masculinity in their companies, it creates a culture of not listening to their employees. This might create impartiality, which opposes the constructive model of masculinity and opposes the diversity of masculinities at workplace.

Employers' harmful maleness discriminates and nurtures homophobia at workplace in the sense that it creates judgement within the institution. Male managers' toxicity can manifest through anti-feminism and discriminatory behaviours against non-heterosexual people at workplace. This illustrates giving poor and unfair remunerations to employees, which disseminates toxic masculinity within the institutions.

Furthermore, managers' toxic masculinity can convey power and control at workplace. This attitude connects with hegemonic masculinity as it encourages men to behave masculine towards anyone at work, regardless of their gender. Ultimately, this becomes irritant for the staff because it hinders the development of their positive ethics at work, hindering the exercise of constructive maleness. Sowing progressive maleness could motivate the workers to trust their managers, a way that paves toward kindness and being receptive to each other at workplace. Such supporting attitude is motivational for it progressively builds a positive work culture in a company, which leads to good production.

Therefore, the interviewees suggested that manager's spreading beliefs of constructive masculinity could boost workers' motivation and so come with satisfactory productivity for the

institution. Progressive masculinity should promote women to detoxify male's culture of negative machismo. This could be vital for the management and the setting of a zero-tolerance rule for inappropriate sexual comments in the workplace. Toxic masculinity often creates a culture in which those who already face some form of prejudice like the LGBTQ+ community are even further disadvantaged. Training about determination could be a way to combat this attitude, and could equip people with the tools and confidence to call out prejudice and discrimination, as well as play a more active role in shaping the company's unifying culture. This implies that socializing men about becoming helpful for the other men who understand the negative side of their toxic masculinity at workplace could widespread the roots of progressive maleness. The framework would motivate men to shun masculine weakness or emotional pain as standards by unlearning any toxic behaviour. Overall, tackling toxic masculinity in the workplace would be the right way of making every employee feel more comfortable. This can restore the culture that promotes positive ideals for men managers and employees in their institution.

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