

GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN AFRICAN APOSTOLIC CHURCHES: A CASE STUDY OF JOHANNE MARANGE APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN MANICALAND PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

This study is an analysis of the effects of Gender Based Violence (GBV) in African Apostolic Churches particularly Johanne Marange Apostolic Church in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The study employed a mixed method approach combining questionnaires with church members, members, focus group discussions with church leaders and in-depth interviews with members of the police and community leaders. The findings indicate that the of inequality between men and women cut across public and private spheres of life, and across social, economic, cultural, and human rights have contributed to GBV in apostolic churches. The study recommended that African Apostolic Churches should have rehabilitation activities for victims of Gender Based Violence. The study also recommended that apostolic churches should desist from any form of gender based violence.

KEYWORDS

African Apostolic Church, women, human rights, gender based violence.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide up to 50% percent of sexual assaults are committed against girls under 16 and research proves that the first sexual experience of some 30% of women was forced. The percentage is even higher among those who were under 15 at the time of their sexual initiation, with up to 45% of them reported to be in forced marriages or experienced their sexual experiences by force (compiled by UN Women, 2012 update). Child marriage is more common in West and Central Africa, where four among ten girls were married before the age of 18, and about one among seven were married or in union before the age of 15.

Gender based violence has remained as the biggest challenge and threat in many women and girls lives and it has proved to be the obstacle to the social and economic development of the communities and states. Violence against women is a persistent and universal problem occurring in every culture and social group around the world. According to Chireshe (2012), at least one in

every three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime most often by someone she knows, including a member of her own family, an employer or a co-worker.

Globally gender based violence has not been recognised as the violation of human rights alone but it has proved to be the greatest hindrance of achieving the internationally agreed goals, including the Millennium Development Goals as well as the current Sustainable Development goals. Without inequality especially on women the world would have been a better place, where the society would experience the social and economic development of communities and states for the betterment of the world. In East Africa and Southern Africa a number of cases of gender based violence have increased. Countries like Uganda recorded a rate of 48% on cases of violence against girls and women where women were attacked by their husbands and also Tanzania has their statistics at 60% of abuses and assaults by their partners and male strangers (Oluyeni-kusi 2007)

Oluyeni-kusi (2007) states that violence against women has been called the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It takes many forms like physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and socio-economic abuse. Gender based violence can also be experienced by a woman or it can be directed to a woman because she is a woman or it can affect the women disproportionately (Oluyeni-kusi 2007). According to Bishau et al (2013), human community is characterised by a basic structural injustice, a distorted rationality between these two sexes such that men as a group have the power over women as a group. She goes on to say this basic inequality has characterised all known history and is universal and enshrined in language, culture, social relations, mythology and religion.

GBV is defined by the UN as “physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (WHO 2012). The term, however, also applies to violence specifically targeted against men and boys (UNFPA, 2012).

Young girls are forced to drop school and become wives at a tender age, leaving their future and careers in shambles because of their parent’s greediness and evil doctrines. They ruin the future of the young girls and increase the rate of illiteracy in the country. Young girls cannot go against the will of the church elders and leave my husband in order to attend school. According to Bishau, Chitando and Chirongoma (2013) women and young girls are among the poorest in the world because of their gendered identity. This anti-modern healthy methods attitude in the Johanne Marange Apostolic Church, women and girls will continue to be the victims of polygamy, forced marriages and HIV and AIDs.

The church also forbids the girls to be married by other men and boys from other churches ,marriages with non- members of the church is referred to as unholy union and anyone who decides to marry outside the church is expelled from the church. The girls and women are not allowed by the doctrine of the church to decide whom to marry, it is the practice of church to involve the parents of the woman to decide for her together with the in-laws the type of a husband

for her. The religion of Johanne Marange uses exploitation and abuse of children; women and girl are also other reasons for the practice but people hide behind religion and its doctrines.

Just like in the cultural perspective, most Churches today provide a hidden haven for Gender Based Violence and condone it by misunderstanding the Bible. With reference, to 1 Peter 3:1-7, a woman is supposed to submit to her husband and the husband should love his wife, however, the church today uses this verse as a single phase point ,to suppress women and to destine their position in the society. In actual sense, submissiveness in the Bible encourages a woman to be obedient, humble, willing, loyal, respectful, and loving and have compassion for her husband. In the same way the husband should love, respect and take care of his wife. What does this mean? It means, that for this to happen both the wife and the husband should understand their roles and duties and be able to apply and abide by them with due respect for each other. These biblical verses have been twisted and used to come up with suppressing doctrines in churches like Johanne Marange Apostolic Church, young girls are forced and threatened with fake doctrines of dreams from old men in church who are referred to as Prophets and church leaders, who proclaim to have been shown in dreams young women and girls to marry for their selfish reasons. These practices have caused a lot of suffering on the young girls of Johanne Marange Apostolic Churches because it is a taboo to turn down the Prophet's proposal to become his wife and it also shows no respect for the religious practices and the church doctrines. The whole family can be expelled from church because of their incorporation and insubordination of the church rules and regulations. Otherwise failure of one party to recognize his or her responsibility would create a barrier, the barrier conceives conflict, conflict gives birth to Domestic Violence then Domestic Violence graduates to Gender Based Violence.

The center points of this verse are for both the man and woman to love, respect, and care for and appreciate each other. Submissiveness in this case does not mean that a woman should tolerate ill treatment against her will. Just like in most National and Global political systems in the world, Leadership positions and roles in most churches are dominated by men. Female church leaders who may portray strong personalities, who confront situations head on, are usually considered to be noisy, disrespectful, arrogant and uncontrollable. Such strong and capable women are in most cases kept, either off or behind the line. In some societies, access, control and benefits of these resources as well as power tend to favour boys and men instead of girls and women as advocated by the feminist perspective on gender equality and equity. Just like the religion and doctrine of Johanne Marange church, a girl child is not allowed to go to school and excel in education, her destiny is in the plans of her future that is either chosen for her or forced on her at a tender age. The Zimbabwean Constitution 2016 Chapter 2 Section 17.1 states that the state must promote full gender balance in the Zimbabwean society, and in particular the state and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take practical measures to ensure that the girl child have access to resources and that her rights are not being violated, including land, on the basis of equality with men”.

With a social message on gender-based violence and this accompanying documentation, the Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America ELCA speaks to both church and society (Country Programme Action Plan Report 2004-2007). The report states that people of all classes and of all ethnicities in all nations suffer violence inflicted on them by others for reasons

based on gender. Gender-based violence happens in both private and public situations. It occurs in families, other social relations, the church, the state, education and in society more broadly. It is a problem in the United States and globally. What happens in this church and in this country is interconnected to manifestations of gender-based violence around the world.

The African Apostolic Church of John Maranke was founded by the late Muchabaya Momberume, popularly known as Johanne Marange in the year 1912 in Manicaland Province of Zimbabwe. When Johanne the founder started his work in colonial Zimbabwe, it is said that he encouraged people to sabotage the colonial regime by refusing to pay taxes because of their doctrine. Their religion has managed to spread to other communities and even outside of Zimbabwe as well such as Malawi and Mozambique and as far afield as the Democratic Republic of Congo. Since the days of Johanne Marange, the church has continued to grow in leaps and bounds especially in remote areas where there are large populations. According to a 23 October Africa News report, it is based in Eastern Manicaland province. The sect is purist and is “notorious for its total rejection of any form of scientific medication,” which has resulted in the death of many of its adherents. The church encourages its members not to go to the hospital to seek medical attention, they believe in divine healing and spiritual healing. Pregnant women are not also allowed to seek antenatal advice and help to be able to deliver safely.

They have got their untrained mid-wives and other inexperienced women can assist each other when one is in labor. They believe that if an expectant mother loses her child its normal that child was not meant to be part of them. Even if it means the child has been affected by any diseases that needs immunization they do not value it at all. The church members are not allowed to marry one wife and women and girls are encouraged to get used to the life of polygamy. Girls are also not allowed to be educated to higher level than the primary level which is mostly grade 7 if they are permitted to go to school, but most families does not consider it wise to send their girl child to school at all. The doctrine has also affected even the education of the male child some of them do not know how to read and write even grown up men. Johane Marange Apostolic sect also believes that one should be able to work using his or her hand to make a living and they should train each other to use their hands to make a living. Skills like welding, carpentry, sawing and many other skills.

Religious extremism has devastated many nations around the world and has become a daily phenomenon in the Marange Apostolic sect of white garment churches or apostolic churches where a lot of women and girls’ rights are violated. In southern Africa, for example, the first sexual experience of many girls end up being victims of violence through desperation and circumstances around them like being orphaned or in child headed families even other religions are also contributing to these young people’s gender based violence such that; one in every five women is a victim of rape or forced child marriages (United Nations 2009). Cultural and religious roles are closely connected to both gender-based violence and HIV risks. The rate of cases of gender based violence is a cause for concerns in our nation despite the effort of the civil society and the government on awareness campaigns, Therefore, Zimbabwe not been spared from this type of abuse against women and violation of human rights. The female child just as the male child is important contributors to peace building, conflict resolution processes and sustainable development if they are given equal opportunities in the community. Polygamy has also

contributed to the abuse and violence on woman and the girl child. UNHCR (2013) also viewed polygamy as culturally or religiously oriented. He asserts that polygamy existed as an integral family life which had its basis on culture or religion. Even though it has been noted that the prevalence rate of gender based violence and cases of polygamy in the young generations has significantly declined because of the awareness's and protection of women by instruments which endeavor to eradicate abuse and discrimination against women.

The International Human Rights instrument asserts that polygamy is discriminatory as it promotes gender inequality in both sexes. Culturally, a woman is not supposed to question a man's decision neither is he supposed to be accountable to his wife for any misconduct. Instead he can be accountable to the leaders of his community, his church or his parents. These are some of the areas which expose the woman to vulnerability of Gender Based Violence. The study analysis how Gender Based Violence has caused a number of effects on the girls' livelihood in Johanne Marange Apostolic Churches by discriminating the girl child on how she should live her day to day life, she is denied the access to resources, self empowerment like education and decision making. The girls in Johanne Marange are forced to early marriages, polygamous relationships, religious practices that violate their human rights and suppress them. They are made subjects to abuse and they have to go through undesirable submission to decisions made for them by religious leaders and their family members. According to Chireshe (2012), GBV has contributed to the inability of the society to recognize the roles and contributions made by men and women and their failure to create an environment that reflects an understanding of these realities. The abuse of the girl child has continued to be a matter of concern especially in Apostolic Churches where church doctrines are more suppressive on the female child than the male child. The study adopted the rights- based approach to gender research, which, according to Machakanja (2010), is guided by a conceptual framework that integrates principles of international human rights processes into gender sensitive research. However, there are still some cases where women are falling or being forced into such relationships because of the patriarchy, religion and cultural beliefs and most of them do not know where to turn to for their protection and advocacy.

Statement of the problem

The girl child has remained at the mercy of their male counterparts. It is only men in Johanne Marange who have got the voice and choice in the church. They preach, they decide who to take for a wife or reject as at when they feel. They are the ones who decide on family planning and they have ruled that their females should not access public health medical care and access to the females' education is not guaranteed. No doubt, this has effects on women. For how long should this continue? The purpose of the study was to to analyse the impact of gender based violence on women and girls' livelihood in Johanne Marange apostolic churches.

Objectives

- To identify factors contributing to gender based violence in Zimbabwe apostolic churches.

- To analyse how religion influences gendered violence on women and girls in apostolic churches.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in the ten districts of Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The ten districts combined seven rural districts and three urban districts. The rural districts covered were Buhera, Chimanimani, Mutasa, Makoni, Nyanga, Chipinge Rural and Mutare Rural. The urban districts were Mutare Urban, Chipinge Urban and Makoni urban. The study used a mixed methods approach combining questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Survey data was collected from a sample of 250 respondents which was drawn using a stratified random sampling approach from all the 10 districts in the province. In-depth interviews were done with 8 participants drawn from community leadership, the police and senior apostolic church leaders. Seven focus group discussions were conducted with 65 out of 87 members who comprise the local church leadership. Purposive sampling was used to identify participants for both the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to get accurate information of the situation in Makoni District, the study gender as an important variable to consider. Table 1 below shows the gender statistics for the members of Johanne Marange Apostolic Church.

Table 1: Gender participants

N=250

Gender	Frequency %
Male	21
Female	79
Total	100

(Source: Primary data 2019)

The researchers considered the gender of church participants which was female dominated. This helped the study to get information that was not gender biased.

Interviews with the church members of churches revealed that majority of women and girls majority of the respondents are subject to high cases of gender based violence though some members were not really sure about the definition of gender based violence. One participant a 22 year old lady indicated that they are now used to the doctrine and its oppressive ways," *that's how even our mothers got married. (Ndomaroorerwo akangoitwawo ana mai vedu) , that's our religion and our beliefs, there is nothing new to call it violence or any other name*". She was a bit emotional to discuss about GBV. Even though a large number of the church members were indicating that there are a lot of cases of gender based violence in their church, they also believed

that all these abusive doctrines were part of the Bible's plan to help a woman submit to her husband.

This belief was the reason other participants though a small group indicated that gender based violence cases are low in the apostolic churches in Zimbabwe. This made a great bearing on their understanding of what gender based violence entailed. Talking about gender based violence on young girls in Marange was something that was once referred to as evil, it's like an idea that wants to destroy a strong church with its beliefs and values, but because of the awareness campaigns and change through modernisation some parents and church members are now enlightened a bit by how these customs are violating their rights.

This was also the same with some respondents that were given by the church authorities, some of them were aware about gender based violence in the church whilst others had mixed feelings about the issues and this knowledge gap affected mostly the girls at school age. Another respondent highlighted that " *because we are in remote areas information here is interpreted wrongly, we heard about the Anti-child Marriages Act, but our parents and our church authorities are saying the Government knows about our church doctrines for years and it cannot do anything about it*". So it means the community of Marange is still not well empowered and educated about the rights of the Girl child and also on policies that protects women and girls that are being implemented daily by their government to protect them. Young girls who are about to reach puberty stages or who are already teen agers are not happy they leave if fear of being forced into marriages with old men and the poor families can give out their girls as a payment for food and money to rich old men in the church.

Just like in the cultural perspective, most Churches today provide a hidden haven for Gender Based Violence and condone it by misunderstanding the Bible. With reference, to 1 Peter 3:1-7, a woman is supposed to submit to her husband and the husband should love his wife, however, the church today uses this verse as a single phase point ,to suppress women and to destine their position in the society. In actual sense, submissiveness in the Bible encourages a woman to be obedient, humble, willing, loyal, respectful, and loving and have compassion for her husband. In the same way the husband should love, respect and take care of his wife. What does this mean? It means, that for this to happen both the wife and the husband should understand their roles and duties and be able to apply and abide by them with due respect for each other. These biblical verses have been twisted and used to come up with suppressing doctrines in churches like Johanne Marange Apostolic Church, young girls are forced and threatened with fake doctrines of dreams from old men in church who are referred to as Prophets and church leaders, who proclaim to have been shown in dreams young women and girls to marry for their selfish reasons. These practices have caused a lot of suffering on the young girls of Johanne Marange Apostolic Churches because it is a taboo to turn down the Prophet's proposal to become his wife and it also shows no respect for the religious practices and the church doctrines. The whole family can be expelled from church because of their incorporation and insubordination of the church rules and regulations. Otherwise failure of one party to recognize his or her responsibility would create a barrier, the barrier conceives conflict, conflict gives birth to Domestic Violence then Domestic Violence graduates to Gender Based Violence.

When about how they react to the act of gender violence, the church authorities indicated *that it is very difficult to refer to the abuse that, and in our churches towards our girls and our women or wives as gendered violence. If any church member is quarrelling with his wives or fighting we are here to counsel them in a religious way, our doctrine encourages women to respect their husbands and to submit to them. (Hatitenderi munhukadzi kusateerera murume wake, tinotenda kuti murume ndiye musoro wemba kunyangwe akave nemadzimai masere tinedzidziso dzatinopa muchechi medu dzinoita kuti munhu rume agone kutonga imba yake). This means no matter how many wives a Marange man marries, he should be able to control them in our religious manner.* Some church authorities especially women who are in charge of the training of young wives and who serves as mid-wives in the church responded that it's not easy to let everyone out there know what is happening in your marriage, (*hatifukure hapwa chakafukidza dzimba matenga*), as a trained wife you are trained to submit to your husband and not to let the whole community know what is happening to you in your marriage or in your home, so in some cases you will just be quite towards violence because you believe that its part of marriage.

Data gathered from the Police and Community Leaders indicated that it was difficult to get concrete evidence of GBV from members of the church. One Key informant said “.....in order to get inside information from the sect, you should be one of them”.

In Johanne Marange Apostolic Church, it is a norm to see a man abusing his wives because he is the head of the family. Their doctrine does not recognise the decision of a female counterpart, even if a man decides to get a new wife he does not consult any of his wives, he is the head of the family who decides the fate of the family. Chireshe (2012) argues that the stereotypes influencing the society attitudes towards men and women in different ways and it end up forcing people living the way they do not want but because of the society they are afraid to stand up for their feelings and dreams. With reference, to 1 Peter 3:1-7, a woman is supposed to submit to her husband and the husband should love his wife, however, the church today uses this verse as a single phase point, to suppress women and to destine their position in the society. In actual sense, submissiveness in the Bible encourages a woman to be obedient, humble, willing, loyal, respectful, and loving and have compassion for her husband. In the same way the husband should love, respect and take care of his wife. Religion should be able to bring peace and happiness in families not to contribute to violence and abuse.

African values and perceptions of the society have caused many women and girls to give up their dreams because they do not know how they can follow them and fulfil them. In Johanne Marange many girls have natured their dreams and hopes until they reach puberty stage where they are shuttered of their dreams and forced to be mothers and wives of old men, the religion does not allow them to choose even their way of life, Masunungure and Mbwirire (2016)

Violence against women and girls, in its many forms, is a continuing challenge for Zimbabwe although in their endeavor to end women and child rights abuses, Apostolic Christian Council of Zimbabwe ACCZ recently established a Gender and Child Care Unit to ensure the protection of women's and children's rights as envisioned in the country's Constitution. The consequences are serious: it stops individuals from participating and contributing fully to their families and communities economically, politically, and socially. Policies and systems are gradually

strengthening support for survivors and prevention strategies. A significant number of civil society groups, local and international, advocate for change, and some have strong religious roots. However much remains to be done to address underlying social norms and gender inequalities. Religious actors, with their social influence and moral authority, can break the silence around GBV in many ways while some religious leaders and institutions are directly engaged, many are not. Young girls are married off to men often older than their own fathers. This scenario has significantly contributed to pregnancy complications in teenage mothers. These harmful cultural practices are rampant in Johanne Marange and apart from religious beliefs, poverty is one of the key reasons for early marriages, as UNFPA (2016) data have shown that about 80 percent of pregnant teenagers come from poor families.

FINDINGS

The research revealed that teenage pregnancy is on the increase in Johanne Marange and a leading cause of maternal mortality.

The presence of inequality between men and women cut across public and private spheres of life, and across social, economic, cultural, and human rights have contributed to GBV in apostolic churches.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that the Apostolic Churches should have rehabilitation activities for victims of Gender Based Violence. The study also recommends for the church to report perpetrators of Gender Based Violence for legal advice and to the police. In addition to this, the study recommends for more training programmes in multi-faith approach to fuse in and share ideas on issues which constitute Gender Based Violence.

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