**Domestic Violence in an African Pentecostal Church Setting**

Marriage and Family in Christian Theology and Practice

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Case study

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**Introduction**

Domestic violence has become a common phenomenon in African countries where women experience physical, emotional, and sexual violence from their intimate partner or husbands. The rate of domestic violence is high in marriage from the approval of the World Health Organisation (WHO), ( 2013). On the other hand, the Pentecostal church condemns domestic violence and promoting love between husband and wife (Bidwel, 2013). It shows that churches can play a crucial role in promoting marriage care through theological teachings. This paper aims to identify the way domestic violence can be overcome in the African Pentecostal church setting through the care of marriage and family in Christian contexts. In this regard, the relationship has been chosen to investigate how the Pentecostal church can help build a healthy relationship between husband and wife. The structure of this case study is starting firstly to explore what the bible says about domestic violence against women and how certain verses of the bible are misinterpreted. It will be followed by analysing the factors that affect domestic violence in African countries. In the end, a detailed discussion will be carried out about the role of a Pentecostal church in teaching and promoting love in marriage and family care, and finally, the conclusion part will follow.

**Domestic Violence and Bible**

One of the leading causes of aggressive behaviour at home against ladies in relationships is the error of interpreting scripture, for example, those that allude to man dominancy and woman surrender to her husband. Notwithstanding, the bible teaches to love one another equally like Christ's love (Claassens & Spronk, 2013). Christian theologians such as Tracy Steven has pointed out patriarchal Christianity and its relationship with domestic violence (Tracy, 2007). Nevertheless, patriarchy is not the only factor responsible for domestic violence in marriage. According to Adams & Fortune (2018), domestic violence, including physical, emotional, mental, or sexual brutality, is wrong. Oppresses women reliant upon a man and violates the trust required a good and agreeable mutual fellowship. To ensure the aggressive behaviour at home against ladies in marriage, in the U.S. Meeting, the Catholic Priests said, " As pastors of the Catholic Church in the U.S., we state as unquestionably and unequivocally as we can that viciousness against women, inside or outside the house, is seldom supported." (Marriage and Family Life Ministries, 2012). Similarly, the Church of England's report (2012) has also responded to the domestic violence again women in marriage by stating that "*Christian pastors and ought not to encourage casualties to make excusing the culprit the main concern "when the government assistance and wellbeing of the individual being mishandled are in question."* Domestic violence in Africa Pentecostal church setting explores in the next part.

**Domestic Violence in African**

In Africa, the source of domestic violence is rooted in how the marriage institutions are perceived in the African indigenous culture and Pentecostal theology. One of the unforgettable causes of my ministry experience is that I know very well one couple with a six-year daughter. Most of the time, some church, and pastors' elders, including me, were involved in their problem. The primary issue was the loss of financial transparency, which is the wife does not know her husband's account. It is usual to hide money or property in their previous culture. Lately, as they are adapted to western culture, she was not convinced to be ignorant to her husband accounts. Gradually, after day-to-day verbal disagreement and harassment, their conflict is growing, and unfortunately, physical violence happened at home as he bit her. Therefore, a result of this has been divorced.

In Africa, pervasion exists between cultural practices and Pentecostal practices. Such as to be relevant to the people, Pentecostal churches in Africa use indigenous culture to evaluate and interpret the spiritual world. Therefore, domestic violence is embedded in the Pentecostal theology of marriage and the indigenous culture of marriage. In Africa, the indigenous culture gives respect to marriage institutions. Hence, the marital contract or agreement entails the involvement of the ancestral spirit (Curran, 2008)s. According to Magesa (1998), marriage makes people and families involved, and the partner's responsibilities go to the extended family. The Pentecostal church sees marriage as a sacrament act between husband and wife that can be dissolved only through death. In Africa, the Pentecostal church considers the gender role in marriage according to which husbands being male are superior to wife because women are not a full image of God but only through their husbands. Thomas Aquinas argued that man was naturally superior to a woman because his soul was created for intellectual activity; on the other hand, the woman is a rational soul created to help a man. Therefore, in Africa, men use both religion and culture to justify the abuse of power against women (Lerher, 2009). In this regard, a further discussion is continuing domestic violence and the role of a Pentecostal church in Africa.

**Domestic Violence and Role of Pentecostal Church in Africa**

As identified above, wrong interpretation of Bible verses is one factor of increased domestic violence in marriage. Pastors used to tell a woman victim of abusive behaviour at home to proceed to submit and "believe that God", as it would respect her by either forestalling the maltreatment or giving her the solidarity to endure misuse. This typical idea is closer to my ministry experience. For instance, most pastors advise a woman in Ethiopia as she surrenders to her husband, but unfortunate violence will happen. In this regard, the pastor never advised the abused wife to leave or divorce her husband (Collins, 1992). The lack of support to abused women is due to the lack of training and education for pastors. However, the theological perspective on domestic violence emphasises that church and pastors can play their roles in training and educating people in general and specifically men before the marriage to cherish love and affection in a marriage (Foccus, 2020). Different pre-marriage online courses are also considered to be effective in this regard (THE PRE-MARRIAGE COURSE ONLINE, 2019). Catholic churches are making a different effort to prevent domestic violence in marriage, and amongst them, the most important effort is marriage relationship education, help and counselling (Bidwel, 2013).

Despite the justification of violence against women by a man in a marriage, the

the bible does not support or permit violence against women in marriage. Different relationship counselling and marriage care programmes (Marriage Care, 2020) aim to educate and train people about the right interpretation of the Bible verses and spirituality (Bidwel, 2013). The Bible verses show that there are certain gaps in interpreting the verses requiring them to support the patriarchal relationships and woman-focused relationship. Paul letter to Galatian chapter 3: verse 28 highlights the concept of equality that must be understood from a spiritual perspective. In any case, the idea of balance ought to be perceived from a spiritual perspective and requires physical gender equality. It needs husbands to embrace that wives share equal right to have dignity in a marriage (Claassens & Spronk, 2013). It emphasises that despite man's superiority in terms of physical aspect, applying force or abusing power against women to punish is a sin. In this regard, it is clarified in the Apostle Paul epistle in Colossians 3:18 and Ephesians 5:21-23 that the submission of women to husbands is like how the church submits to Christ in the form of respect and admiration rather than an opportunity for violating each other (Lerher, 2009).

Domestic violence against women in marriage has been given little attention in an African Pentecostal church setting, and it is reflected in how the Pentecostal church teach about perpetuate violence in the marriage. A progression in recognising the Pentecostal church in Africa has empowered women (Machingura, 2013). Nonetheless, despite the efforts, women do not have social and economic power. According to Sande (2016), reading the Bible verses contributes to the limited interpretation of scripture that affects men's minds against women. Hence, this attitude makes the Pentecostal church setting in Africa slow in shaping the gender beliefs that spread domestic violence.

There is a lack of theological tolerance for managing domestic violence against women in marriage in the African Pentecostal church setting. Most women remain silent, and members of the faith shame about sexuality and domestic violence in the public or the church. Even if the domestic violence issues are discussed, there is an unnecessary use of analogies, idioms, and language that makes it difficult to clear the concepts (Nadar, 2004). As a result, the focus of the problem is changed from domestic violence while overlooking the ways the problem can be mitigated. There is a general assumption that church people are not supposed to discuss marriage, relationship, sexuality, and violence like the common people address these issues. Marriage in the Pentecostal church involves two partners sharing a bed and a home. It implies that violence by the husband against the wife is an internal issue associated with that relationship, and therefore, it should not be discussed externally (Lerher, 2009).

It implies significant religious hypocrisy when the issues of domestic violence arise in the Pentecostal church. The reason for the lack of support from the church is that domestic violence incidents are not reported to police in African countries. There is a common belief that the church is a place where people feel to be saved. Therefore, the church does not have transparent and open structures to discuss domestic violence in Africa. According to (Chamberlain & Levenson, 2010), it is the responsibility of the church to portray marriage as a happy institution. Therefore, it becomes difficult to acknowledge and discuss domestic violence in the church.

However, it does not mean that Pentecostal churches have entirely failed in doing so. It is observed that during different religious sermons, the Pentecostal pastors preach to men not to beat their wives as God disapproves of this practice. In this way, different types of counselling and teaching are practised through internal grievances processes to ensure that men are aware of the correct interpretation of the bible.

**Conclusion**

Domestic violence against women in marriage is very prevalent in Africa. The high prevalence rate is due to African indigenous culture and Pentecostal theology, where the bible is quoted to defend the abuse. It is found that the bible condemns the violence by husband against wife. However, Pentecostal churches have failed to communicate the message. Different counselling and education programmes can effectively train both prospect husband and wife before marriage to learn how husbands should treat their wives.

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