

## **The Pentecostal Theology and Gender-Based Violence**

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### **Abstract**

Discourses about violence against women draw from diverse multi-faceted challenges they are going through in life. Accordingly, this study argues that marriage is the most renowned institution in the church, yet it is the incubator of violence sustains both the gender-based violence (GBV). The problem is that the Pentecostal theology of marriage views this institution as holy, sacred, a heavenly paradise thereby hides subtle forms of violence. This study explores how the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) theology of marriage perpetuate GBV. The study used feminist post-structuralism as a theoretical framework and data were gathered through questionnaire and participant observations. Results of the study showed that the AFM theology of marriage which is through expressed through institutionalised rituals, beliefs, myths and legends perpetuate GBV. In conclusion, the study recommends a deconstruction of the Pentecostal theology of marriage by delineating marital cultural practices interwoven with AFM liturgical expression.

**Keywords:** Gender-Based Violence, marriage, Pentecostalism, Apostolic Faith Mission.

## **Introduction**

The challenge of violence is global, cutting across all gender, race, educational background, economic status, religion and location (Zimbabwe Women's Resource Centre and Network, 2011). Nonetheless, women, in particular, are on the receiving end. Moreover, although research shows that women also assault their partners at similar rates, they remain the primary victims due to the more significant physical, financial, and emotional force that their male partners can exercise (Archer, 2000). Substantial research on violence against women shows that the cause of violence is often rooted in poverty, political instability and patriarchal structures.

Many government and non-governmental societies have attempted to proffer programs to mitigate violence against women. So yet, gender-based violence (GBV) on women remains unchallenged in all its forms in the Pentecostal churches like the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM). Therefore, the forms of GBV should be interpreted within a specific institutional context. Violence is not only physical but also include emotional and psychological harm. Theologians and scholars in religious studies have come up with an array of causes ranging from socio-economic, religious and cultural perspectives. Since time immemorial women have experienced the evil of violence from a broad spectrum of life. The most cunning one is gender-based violence (GBV). The complexity is how it is dealt with in Pentecostal churches, where it is orchestrated and wrapped in the aura of love presented in the marriage institution.

GBV is conceptualized as coercive behavior which includes but not limited to physical violence, sexual violence, abusive behavior and intimidation (Chamberlain and Levenson, 2010). Consequently, this study draws on two sources to define violence and sexual-based violence. As put by Nieser (2000:13) violence is an attempt by individuals or groups to impose their will on others through non-verbal or physical means that inflict psychological or physical injury. It is essential to pay attention to how the United Nations General Assembly (1994:3) defined GBV as any act of gender-based violence that results in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats such as acts, coercion or arbitrary depriving liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The problem is that GBV has some long-term effects of hatred, psychological trauma, and even death. Regardless of these, Christian churches often do not recognise this violence. What is alarming from the statistics is that, when it comes to GBV, it is generally women and girls in the church who are on the receiving end of the violence. However, it is essential to accept that GBV does not exclude gender. In the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM), arguably the mother of Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe because of its uppermost membership numbers, women constitute the majority of the membership. One would expect church like this to offer a solution to the problem of violence against women. One would also expect the church neither to advocate nor to tolerate GBV. Yet behind the façade of being holy, sacred and moral and being an example of heavenly bliss on earth, the church hides and thus enables subtle forms GBV against women. Accordingly, GBV is sustained in the marriage institution. The study suggests that the Pentecostal theology of marriage is covered with elusive beliefs, rituals, myths and legends which influences both the interpretation and the meaning of violence against women. Accordingly, this study explores how the Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) theology of marriage perpetuate GBV.

### **Theoretical Framework and the Methodology Underpinnings**

Issues of women in the context of the Bible and gender needs a feminist perspective. Thus, the study takes a post-feminist approach to examine how the Pentecostal theology of marriage constructs a hidden reality of GBV against women. Most GBV is the result of an intrinsic conflict between married people. The study argues that the emotional women's view of love, marriage and family makes women to be a victim of GBV. Therefore, this study used a post-feminist perspective as a form of liberation theology. The liberation nuances deal with the structure of marriage institution and the intersectionality theology that promote both liberation, reconciliation and peace in marriages.

Methodologically, data was collected through questionnaires and participant observations. The questionnaire was distributed to seventy married women in the AFM. A questionnaire was chosen because a study on sexuality, intimacy and violence necessitate raising a couple of critical methodological and ethical questions: how one can gain access to what is construed as invisible, and to marital issues that are considered private and personal. The author's personal experience as clergy in the AFM gave me an opportunity to collect data through participant observation. The author used the AFM activities relating to issues of marital relationships like sermons, marriage seminars and counselling sessions. The author observed that issues to do with GBV were skirted around and most teachings and participants were very reticent to broach this topic.

### **Sources of Gender-Based Violence in Zimbabwe**

The impact of GBV cannot be underestimated and the violence affects all humanity. In situations of conflict, male combatants use rape as a weapon of war. Violence against women in the domestic and public spheres prevents women from expressing their capabilities and thus hinders social development. According to Levitti (2008) argued that despite increased knowledge of understanding intimate partner violence, it continues to be practiced. The result has been grave with physical injury, psychological distress, economic and spiritual upheaval. Generally, there is an oversight of looking at institutions like the church to be exonerated for such evils especially GBV. In Zimbabwe violence against women has been deeply rooted in the history of the country. Not only are rape and sexual violence widespread, but they are also widely accepted and endorsed, with little possibility of recourse for the victims (Chirongoma, 2016). Ravelo-Hoerson (2006:98), violence and the fear of violence limit women's choices in virtually all spheres of their lives. They have short-term, as well as long-term, negative consequences for women's ability to gain an education, earn a livelihood, develop human relationships, and participate in public activities. An example of this is the unfaithfulness of a man who, by negotiating condom sex, are the ones who decide on when and how to have sex (Moyo, 2004:72-78). The corollary of this is the near impossibility for women in the church to negotiate for condom sex.

For a long time already, patriarchy has been identified as the primary source of violence against women. What follows, is an attempt to demystify this social phenomenon. Patriarchy is the 'father rule' in which rule by men over women is validated through society's legal, economic and social system. Gendered domination is systemic in every aspect of society, down to shaping the manner in which a woman experiences her everyday experience. In this structural manner, findings by Rakoczy (2004:23) showed that patriarchy is a form of violence against women

because it affects women's dignity and place in society. In Christian circles patriarchy has been long considered as sanctioned and ordained by God, and as embedded in the structure of human creation. Rakoczy argued that there is an insidious link between patriarchy, violence and Christianity.

Christianity and Judaism alike teach peace and peace-making, but both religions are often violent and warlike, whether on the battlefield or in the homes (29). Patriarchy is central to Christian beliefs and structures and undergirds violence against women which necessary to maintain patriarchal institutions. Millett argues that patriarchal force relies on various forms of violence, and especially on rape, to assert itself. Rape is characterized by aggression, hatred, contempt and the desire to break or violate a person. The assumption of a birthright priority for men to rule women thus forms the interior colonisation of violence (Millett, 1998).

The Bible does not, however, give explicitly, permission for the perpetration of violence against women. The following passages are examples to consider: a close analysis shows that they offer some loopholes for interpretation, allowing them to be used both to support patriarchal understanding of relationships as well as more woman-focused ones. According to Gal 3:28, the Bible brings the concept of equality which should first be understood from a spiritual position but also manifest in the physical gender equality. The submission of women to husbands as explained in Col 3:18 and Eph 5:21-23 should act as a model of how the church submits to Christ in the form of reverence and not an opportunity for violating each other.

The only challenge is that the Bible does not explicitly reject the cultural vices of male supremacy. In Shona culture, for example, the father enjoys the privilege of taking decisions autonomously about the fate of his children especially, of girls. As a result, women and girls have historically been abused in the Shona family setup. The religious belief that place a husband is the head of the household the primary decision-making powers and wives is the primary caretaker of the children strengthen these cultural practices. It limits a woman's vocational and economic position and forces her into submission towards her husband (Fortune, 1987). On the other hand, Fiorenza (1983:269) argued that theological paradigm reinforces the patriarchal cultural pattern of subordination in Christianity and church.

Violence in the context of intimacy is the most difficult to recognise as its manifestations, especially against women in the church, are often camouflaged by indigenous culture. Cultural norms are developed over time to justify, sustain and perpetuate men's sexual coercion of women. Hence, jealousy and violence are taken as signs of husband's commitment to sexual intimacy. On the other hand, Chitando (2007), argued that the construct of masculinity in our culture has long been studied concerning religion and GBV. What these studies show is that cultural beliefs create a climate in which men are expected to dominate their spouses and control their resources. Instead of the Bible to disrupt this notion, it sustains by encouraging women to be like Sarah obeyed Abraham and called her husband 'lord' (1 Peter 3:6).

### **The African and Pentecostal Meaning of Marriage**

The source of GBV in the church is both embedded in how the marriage institution is conceptualized in both the African indigenous culture and Pentecostal theology. There is a

permeation between some cultural practices and Pentecostal practices in Zimbabwe. Sande (2017a:50) argued that to remain relevant to the people Pentecostals churches in Zimbabwe use indigenous culture to analyze and interpret the spiritual world. So, to understand the AFM theology there is a need to compare the Pentecostal theology of marriage and the indigenous culture of marriage.

The indigenous culture in Zimbabwe gives reverence to marriage. The marital covenant involves the participation of the ancestral spirits. As put by Magesa (1998:110) marriage makes people and families involve one people and this means that the partner's responsibilities go to the extended family. The focus of marriage in indigenous culture is to extend the families. Traditionally marriage was intended to produce children who would be a source of security and economic empowerment. Being unmarried is frowned upon, and some people may be dedicated to 'goblins'. There are peer, family and community pressure exerted upon the people when they are late in getting married.

Shona culture is guided by proverbs that emphasise the necessity of safeguarding family and marriage secrets. The result of this, Chirongoma (2016) has argued, is that even when a husband is brutally violent, the wife sees it as essential to bear it. One such proverb is '*Chafukidza dzimba matenga*' (what shields a house is the roof), implying that whatever happens inside the house should be confined within those walls and never be revealed outside them. The proverb, '*Nhumbu mukadzi mukuru, hairevi chayadya*' (the stomach is like an elderly woman, it does not reveal what it has swallowed) suggests that just as the stomach would never reveal to anyone it had swallowed so a woman should never reveal whether she encountered good or bad encounters in her marriage. It is quite unheard of in Shona culture for a wife to report her husband to a court of law; it would be tantamount to revoking his authority as the family head. Members of the community would shun such a woman and accuse her of '*Kuzvifukura hapwa*' (uncovering or exposing one's armpits): just as nobody would expose her smelly armpits, so a woman should not expose such deep family secrets to anyone else. In this manner, Shaba (2005:75) argued that Shona proverbs expose the and existence of violence within it.

Beauvoir (1998) described women as slaves or vassals in families dominated by fathers and brothers. Dowry and inheritance enslave them, structurally pushing them to prefer marriage to a career, and making them follow their husband wherever they go. Lerher extended this to argue that is women's reproductive capacity that is the basis of the exchange of women in marriage. Consequently, this has critical consequences in terms of the epidemic of sexual violence against women since it allows women to be viewed as a possession that ranges from the payment of lobola for daughters to men viewing women as an object for their own gratification. Women's responsibilities for children and their need for physical and economic protection, as well as their lack of other educational and work opportunities, have forced them to participate in their subordination. Lerher (1986:213) argued that women often stay in abusive relationships because their existence is often dominated by fear, coercion, poverty, economic dependence and submission domination. Nieser (2000) confirmed the interpretation by finding that the cycle of violence is high in sub-Saharan Africa because women are devalued economically, socially and religiously. They are undereducated due to a high prevalence of maternal mortality. In contrast, men are masochistic in relying on religion to guide their moral compass of dominance. Nieser

(2000:13) argued that religious teachings make women subservient. The origins of women's cultural subordination lie in the cultural rule where women are given to other clans at marriage in order to prevent incest.

The Pentecostal theology view marriage as a sacrament. Marriage is a covenant instituted by God. The bed is viewed as holy. The theology of sexuality in marriage is strictly heterosexual. The marriage is sacred between husband and wife. Pentecostal teach that the marriage institution is only dissolved through death. Marriage signifies the union of Christ and the church. As such, this commitment to marriage is placed highly as many believers want to live at the same level as Christ and the church. There are prayer vigils, fasting that is done for people to be married in the church. In this case, the causes of being unmarried are 'devils' spiritual husband. As such, people need to be delivered. Thus marriage is the 'norm' and at times there are match-making, spying from other Pentecostal churches for potential candidates. Although, the unmarried people have pressure to get married, but Pentecostal preach that age is not important since Sarah had a child in her old age (Gen 18:11). The Pentecostal claim by faith their marriage and it is God who chooses who to marry.

Understanding marriage in Pentecostalism links the aspects of gender roles in marriage. The AFM teachings draw on the thinking developed by some of the most significant theologians of the past. One of these is St Augustine who claimed in his work *De Trinitate*, published around AD-400, that women are not a full image of God by themselves, but only through their husbands (Rakoczy). Thomas Aquinas struggles in 1274 to explain how women were made in the image of God. He argued instead that man was naturally superior to a woman because his soul was ordered for intellectual activity, while the woman, though having a rational soul, was created to help a man in the work of procreation. This dualism and the manner in which it denigrates women's dignity continue to shape Christian attitudes towards women even today. This understanding is pivotal for giving man superiority over a woman, allowing the abuse of the latter. The Bible has many narratives that put men as superior. Consequently, men use both religion and culture to justify dangerous sexual behavior, to support acts of violence against women and children.

### **The AFM Theological Response to GBV**

Critically, the problem of how the AFM respond to GBV is a theological issue. Pentecostalism is a diverse movement which is unique in a different context. Both Maxwell (2007) and Musoni (2013), have observed Pentecostalism is a vibrant brand of Christianity, celebrating the 'gifts of the Holy Spirit', miracles, prayer and fasting. Such spiritualism and claim of divine encounters make members and staff have a sense of pretence that GBV does not exist amongst the people affiliated with a church. In fact, even victims often deny the reality of abuse in the faith and hope that God would intervene to stop it. Indeed, the AFM has not formulated a clear definition of what it understands by gender sexual violence, often rather looking outside for explanations. It seems to be hesitant to capture the meaning of something that is not mentioned explicitly in the Bible. The church's hesitance could be the result of a too literal reading of the Bible when others instead argue for the need to read the Spirit and read with the human spirit so that our biblical interpretations are empowering rather than oppressive (Fowler, 1998).

The discourse of GBV has received little attention in the AFM. Yet, the institution of marriage and how the AFM teach about it perpetuate violence. Over the last decades, there has been a growing appreciation that Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe empowers women (Machingura, 2013). However, women have little social and economic power within the AFM. According to Sande (2016b) argued that very few women are in meaningful leadership positions and those few met hostility from men and women in the church. The AFM literal reading of the Bible contributes to the selective interpretation of scripture that militates against women. Thus, this attitude makes the AFM slow to shape gender beliefs that perpetuate GBV.

The teaching that women should submit to their 'own husbands' Col 3:18-4:1, conditions women for GBV. Shaba (2005:75) proposed that women internalised violence as the norm and that many of them believe that husbands are justified to beat wives who refuse to have sex with them. In the context of HIV and AIDS, the AFM have not developed a clear theology which deals with such aspects. In fact, there are no theological teachings permitting women in the church to bargain for condom sex, despite the context of HIV and AIDS. In this case, the HIV epidemics has manifested itself as linked to gender-based violence: who endure domestic violence are more vulnerable to HIV (Musasa Project, 2003). A recently married AFM woman explained that she had not received any teachings about how to deal with intimate sexual violence during her bridal 'kitchen tea party'. The main emphasis had rather been on how to prepare food and how to handle her husband and treating him as a king. Notable is the use of words like 'king' that are used in these gathering, presupposing a man to be superior to his wife. It is in this regard that the church has failed to address the inequality, making it easy for women to be sexually violated. I observed during one AFM conference where the preacher was saying 'It does not matter even if you live with an abusive husband, what is important is that you have Jesus.' In this case, sermon genres are full information about how beliefs structure shape and impact the believers about the GBV.

In the sermons, the AFM preachers called on men not to beat their wives as God would disapprove this practice. Such teaching presupposes the existence of this practice. Stories in the AFM show that there are pastors who abuse their wives while preaching against it. However, if a pastor were to be caught doing this, the church would counsel the pastor in internal grievances processes. The AFM encourage Paul idea of solve issues using the church structures than secular courts (1 Cor 6:1-18). So, it is likely that the Church would not bring GBV issues to the attention of the police. As a result, there are many unreported cases of GBV because women feel that nobody would take them seriously if he or she reported the abuse. Moreover, indeed, if they do so, they are generally ridiculed by the community of faith. Also, some people do not like to be subjected to rigorous and humiliating interrogation at the hands of the police. The destructive effects of rape on women are demonstrated by a young woman who attends the AFM, 'I feel raped, by my husband, but it hurts a lot because no one seems to believe me and at times I just want to kill myself'. Such sentiments suggest not only the existence of GBV but also unavailability of open structures to solve the problems.

The AFM theology legitimizes GBV. The theology of suffering shows that Christians should suffer many things like a window for their spiritual elevation. Hence, the pain of GBV is psychologically internalized and accepted as normal. Women relate GBV as the as sharing in Christ's suffering, thus reinforcing the power of violence. The teachings boast that women

cannot break and suffering is deemed a virtue. According to Phiri (2000) the church have socialized women to see themselves as suffering servants. As a result, women endure GBV, in the spirit of practising a virtue and participating in the suffering of Christ. The AFM preachers use the triumphalist theology and promise deliverance and better days to those who have faith. Women in the AFM tend to give the church vast amounts of money in order to make the GBV against them disappear. Findings by Biri and Togarasei (2013:84) showed that the Pentecostal preachers in Zimbabwe promise church members that their suffering would end if they would contribute to the tithes and offerings.

The AFM ritual of prayer and fasting is popularized as a weapon central to finding solutions for problems. According to (H.Masiwa, personal communication, October, 26, 2015) the wife of an AFM pastor women who experience challenges in their marriages, are encouraged to pray and fast. The AFM believer that the cause of the GBV in the activities of demons and unclean spirits that need to be exorcised. In this manner, female church members have been persuaded to see GBV as something supernatural that needs to be dealt with spiritually. Such thinking pacifies women and makes them turn away from possible help offered on the basis of a human rights agenda.

The AFM claim that '*tiri chechi yemweya*' (we are a church led by the Holy Spirit) give women to be complacency that the Holy Spirit will solve everything on their behalf. Chitando, Gunda and Kugler (2013:9) have observed that in Zimbabwe since 2009, a wave of young Pentecostal preachers, with a 'prophetic craze' has been witnessed. Musoni (2013:75) echoes that 'Pentecostal churches attract adherents like a 'hot potato' and thereby become relevant in mitigating mundane problems of the 'here and now' today. As such, the inability of the church women to challenge GBV is cemented by the of the prophetic voice and miracles to transform lives. One preacher said "*ndakuregedzera kuzodza kunoshandura murume wako*" (I am releasing an anointing that transforms your husband). Such prophetic declarations does not only perpetuate GBV but they make the AFM a church with a big quest for miracles and manifestations of the supernatural solutions. The challenge brought by this that the church is a spiritual giant but does not show pragmatic solutions to address social injustices and abuse. Thus, the AFM shun confronting GBV and hide in the spiritual cocoon. Indeed, this pursuit is so intense that Preece and Baxter (2000:1147) have argued that the present is the most 'superstitious age ever'.

The AFM displays a lack of theological stamina to deal with GBV. In fact, the subject is muted, with members very shy to discuss sexuality and GBV in public forum in the church. If it is discussed, then there is an overuse of analogies, idioms, and coded language. Even invited guests tended to speak in this manner, as I witnessed at a number of couples' meetings I attended where, the guests, were invited guests to speak about Christian marriage. In these meetings, GBV was hardly addressed, not even how to mitigate it. The reaction was preferable that church people should not discuss like the secular people address subjects of sexuality, nor should they use a sexual framework to speak about it. Sexual activities were portrayed as involving two partners who share a bed and a home, thus implying that violence is a matter internal to that relationship and not something that needed could be addressed externally. Sande (2016c) argued that the AFM shun to confront issues of sexual orientation including the space and worship of homosexuality.

There is a lot of religious hypocrisy when dealing with issues of GBV in the church. According to (H. Manyanga, personal communication, October 14, 2015) a senior pastor in the AFM, stated that during his 20 years of pastoral ministry and counselling, he never saw a couple whose case of GBV was reported to the police. Such quietness is alarming but deducing from his counselling experiences and from prayer request there are a lot GBV among AFM church members. The challenge is that couples are reticent of bringing GBV to the surface. The reason he suggested, is that the church is a place where people want to be seen to be saved and saintly, and as unable to wrong a brother, let alone a spouse. To him, this was the reason why the church does not have open structures in which to discuss cases of GBV. The church paint marriage as happy institution and believer for fear of victimization or being labelled as being used by the devil choose to suffer in silence. As such, the silence surrounding abuse makes it all the more difficult to recognize and address the violence in the church. Ascribing the causes of intimate violence to evil powers makes the perpetrators hide from their actions. Gifford (1998) argued that Pentecostal spirituality focuses on the theology of deliverance from demons.

It is correct to accept that by far the most perpetrators of the GBV are men. However, in the AFM most individuals coming for counselling are women. The result is that, in the AFM, the perpetrators of the violence are left out of the counselling process. Especially when the counsellor himself is also male, such a structure often prevents the truth about the relationship to come out. As in Christian churches in general, which have overwhelmingly hierarchal structures with gradations of office from the highest (pope or bishops) to the lowest members (Fiorenza, 1993). The AFM has a hierarchy with men dominating the apex and the normal members being made up of women. Women have not yet taken their rightful place in the AFM's leadership structures. Nadar (2004) explained that although women's domestic roles have been transposed into Christian churches, their emancipated roles have not. In other words, AFM ordained women are not yet in a position to address and transform the challenges of violence that female church members are facing.

### **Conclusion**

The study presented here shows that there is no space to discuss issues of intimacy, sexuality and GBV in the AFM openly. In fact, these kinds of discussions are either excluded, and privatised, or, when addressed are handled as if pornographic in nature and thus declared taboo. The study showed that in the AFM, GBV is a theological issue. Likewise, the church leadership is not keen to discuss GBV but treats marriage as holy matrimony, painted rosy and sacred. As such, it complicates the recognition of GBV. Also, the church is viewed as a place of solace, a home and a pillar for the broken-hearted, yet it does not recognise how GBV is elusively sustained in the AFM rituals, beliefs, myths and legends mobilising and influencing congregation attitude towards GBV against women. Therefore, much of the GBV that finds space in the AFM comes not only from the Bible, but also indigenous cultural paradigms held by its members. In this case, the GBV must be seen as being sustained by the amalgamation of the indigenous culture and the Pentecostal theology.

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