



Predictors of Violence against Women in African Christian Marriage in Kenya: A Case of ACK Cathedral Voi

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Abstract

Recent events suggest that women in Christian marriages in Kenya may be at risk of experiencing violence, despite the belief that such marriages are less violent. This research examined predictors of violence against women in Christian marriages at ACK Cathedral Voi. The main aim of this research was to investigate violence against women in Christian marriages at ACK Cathedral church in Voi. The research was guided by the social learning theory. A design of descriptive research was utilized. The study employed stratified simple random sampling. A structured survey was given to the participants and the Likert scale was employed to evaluate their answers, with data analysis performed using SPSS-26 software and Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The study reveals violence against women in Christian marriages is primarily physical, verbal, and sexual, influenced by poverty, lack of education, cultural practices, gender discrimination, and economic instability. It suggests religious leaders provide mediation, counselling, mentorship, coaching, seminars, and team-building programs to address these issues. The church should also collaborate with the government for educational programs.

Introduction

The term predictors of violence refer to the situational factors that encourage aggression, injustice, oppression, and victimisation. Violence against women occurs at an alarming rate that reflects significant risk to the health of women and families. This happens due to low levels of support for gender equality and adherence to unequal distribution of power and rigidly defined gender roles and identities. The African society maintains the patriarchal family structure and cultural contexts, which normalises violence. Violence against women is often associated with individual, relationship, and community-level predictors such as alcohol abuse, growing under family violence, marital controlling behaviours, fear of partner and acceptance of wife beating in society. It violates women's rights by denying them equality, security, dignity, worth and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. Violence against women is experienced worldwide. Christians understand marriage as a monogamous lifelong union between a man and a woman, which God ordains for intimate companionship. This study will discuss violence against women in African Christian marriages.

Violence against women is a major health and human rights concern affecting a significant number of women worldwide, regardless of their ethnicity, culture, social status or education level. It is a scourge which has implications for the physical and mental health of women and society as a



whole. Factors such as education, economic empowerment, and alcohol consumption fuel violence against women.

The latest report by the World Health Organization (2024) indicates that 30% of women worldwide have been victims of violence, equating to one out of every three women being subjected to daily abuse. The results indicate that violence is experienced by 22% of women in Europe, 25% in the Americas according to WHO, 31% in Africa, and 33% in Asia.

The European goal for gender equality (2020-2025) plan states that violence towards women in Christian marriages displays prejudice against women, covering various forms of gender-based violence resulting in sexual, psychological, financial, or physical harm for women in Christian marriages.

Africa has experienced significant human rights abuses since colonisation, including massacres, genocides, political oppression, socio-economic neglect, and violence (Orago & Nassali, 2018). Women have been subjugated culturally and religiously, subjected to harmful traditions, and limited access to resources. This violence affects the emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual, social, and financial aspects of life (Makhanya, 2022). Church-going women may be forced to believe their abuse is God's will, focusing on husbands' views and practices.

The Kenya health survey and demographic data from 2014, presented by Dibaba Wako on October 19th, 2021, shows that approximately 25% of women experience partner abuse annually, suggesting it may be more common than previously believed. This equates to 40% of married women facing violence in their relationships. This report shows that violence against women is not accurately reported due to the lack of current data on its frequency. A report from the Kenya Gender-Based Violence Service Gap analysis in the County region (2018) revealed that close to half of married women in Kenya have faced intimate partner violence at some point in their lives.

Violence perpetrated against women can be championed by several factors, such as religious, cultural, psychological, and sociological factors. Historically, most societies have been patriarchal, and in such systems, violence against women by their spouses has been regarded as an accepted norm. It was not until women's movements, such as the Coalition on Violence Against Women (2009), began to advocate for women's rights that substantial changes in social attitudes towards gender-based violence were realised. This reform process liberated women by advocating for their rights through legislation, community services, education, and law enforcement. Despite the reforms, some form of violence against women still exists. The major determinants are patriarchy, misinterpretation of the scriptures, and toxic theologies.

The permanence of Christian marriage

Ikenye (2013) notes that Christian marriage is a divine lifelong union between a wife and husband where commitment, loyalty and trust are essential to Christian marriage. Marriage in the African context has undergone paradigm shifts shaped by ethos for marriage and family. This created a reactionist culture that affected marriage and family systems by creating a reactive and marital familial system of liberation, which gave birth to violence against women in Christian marriages. Although the process of enculturation of marriage and family was developed, patriarchy and misinterpretation of scriptures have continued to propel violence against women in Christian marriages.

Religion and Toxic Theologies

Ayanga (2016) emphasises that religion, in collaboration with toxic theologies, performs a task in maintaining assault towards women within Christian marriages. These toxic theologies are often characterised by sexism and patriarchal ideologies, contributing to injustices that inflict more harm than healing. Women congregants, as a result, endure suffering in silence and shame. Adimiluka (2021) points out that harmful consequences arise from biblical interpretations, translations, and



the language promoting submission and male dominance in many religious doctrines. These toxic narratives extend beyond religious institutions, influencing families and wider society.

Traditional practices, cultural norms and stereotyping

The COVAW project baseline report (2020) states that traditional practices, cultural norms, and stereotypes increase women's susceptibility to abuse and sexual exploitation. Onyango (2018), harmful cultural practices are traditional forms of violence against women deeply rooted in different societies and communities, so ingrained that they are seen as accepted cultural norms. These offences include practices like inheriting widows, female genital mutilation, demands for dowry payments, getting married early, and physical abuse.

Power imbalances and Inequality

According to Sande (2019), Churches have started to enable violence against women in Christian marriages by establishing a hierarchy that gives men more power than women. Despite having the chance to hold prominent positions within the church, such as becoming priests and bishops, women are still expected to be submissive to men due to cultural influences.

Christian spiritualism and divine encounters

Banik et al. (2023) suggest that violence against women in Christian marriages is not reported and often not fully documented and can result in physical, social, sexual, and psychological consequences for women. The presence of Christian spirituality, personal interactions with the divine, and cultural influences lead members to falsely believe that there is no violence against women in Christian marriages.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Learning Theory guided the research. Developed by American psychologist Albert Bandura in 1973, the theory outlined by Richard Gross (2020) posits that human behaviour is acquired through reinforcement and imitation.

Social Learning Theory emphasises learning through observation, imitation, and modelling, highlighting the role of environment and cognitive processes. Its strengths include explaining how behaviours are acquired and promoting an understanding of the influence of role models. It is applicable in diverse contexts, such as education and therapy. However, its weaknesses involve underestimating biological influences and sometimes over-emphasizing environmental factors. Additionally, it may not fully account for individual differences in behaviours that aren't easily explained by observation alone.

The environment where a person grows up plays a vital role in shaping the character. However, it is worth noting that an individual's life is shaped by both nature and nurture. This theory ignores the nature part, which is vital because biological factors contribute towards shaping an individual's life, and if ignored, wrong conclusions are made.

Research Methodology

The study employed a descriptive research design that allowed the study to examine better violence against women in Christian marriages in ACK Cathedral church Voi. This method guided the researcher towards making accurate predictions of its outcome by identifying and observing the characteristics of the population, thus naturally gathering data without swaying respondents. The target group for this study were married women who were church members. The church holds three Sunday worship services. According to ACK St. Peter's Cathedral church marriage register (2008) marriage register, the combined number of married women in the three branches was 300 individuals. The research also focused on the church's three hundred women and four male clergy.



Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study followed Mugenda and Mugenda's (2003) recommendation of using 10-30 per cent sampling to choose participants. Hence, the study included 60 married Christian women, representing 20% of the population. The research employed stratified simple random sampling. This required choosing participants from ACK Cathedral Church in Voi. Stratified random sampling improved the efficiency of the sample, ensuring sufficient data for analysing and offering a detailed analysis of the factors contributing to abuse against women in Christian marriages.

Research Instruments

Primary data was collected through a structured questionnaire and an interview guide. The questionnaire gathered data from married Christian women, focusing on forms of violence, reasons for violence, theological and pastoral approaches to mitigating violence, and ethnocultural and Christian perspectives on Christian marriages. Meanwhile, the interview guide gathered qualitative data from clergy, delving into similar themes. Interviews provided in-depth insights into the underlying reasons for violence against women in Christian marriages at ACK Cathedral Voi.

Data analysis and interpretation and Discussion

Data manipulation and examination required comparing data entries, making inferences, and tackling the research inquiries. The report highlighted the study's findings using direct quotes and participant comments. Data obtained from detailed interviews was transcribed, categorised, and analysed thematically. Distinct coding templates were devised for individual datasets to recognise and analyse patterns efficiently. Every recorded interview was transcribed and translated into English, with any terms mentioned during the interviews included exactly as spoken. This systematic method guaranteed precision and comprehensiveness in evaluating the data, allowing the researcher to obtain valuable insights and draw conclusions from the sources.

Predictors of violence against women in Christian marriages

The study sought to establish the predictors and forms of violence against women in Christian marriages. From the findings, it was found that 86% of respondents experienced or witnessed violence in Christian marriages, including physical, verbal, emotional, sexual, domestic, and religious abuse. This highlights the ongoing disparity between men and women in Christian marriages, leading to women being subjected to violence by men. The issue of violence against women in Christian marriages is a serious concern that should not be overlooked, as it has been present in three different Kenyan systems throughout history and has experienced or witnessed a form of violence. This is illustrated in Figure 1.1.

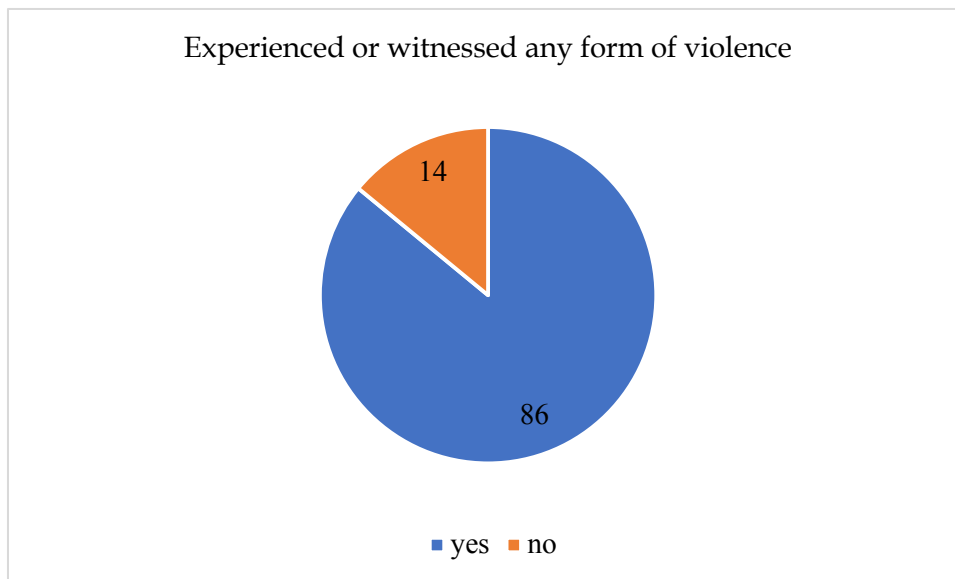


Fig 1.1: Experience or witness of any form of violence

The study established that patriarchy remained deeply entrenched within the social fabric of contemporary society; this subjugates women to the rulership of men, leading to extreme suffering and psycho-emotional trauma. Power inequalities played a major role in orchestrating violence against women because of the hierarchical systems in various settings that disempower women.

The respondents stated that some societies still practice retrogressive cultural practices in secrecy. Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation and early and forced marriages fuel violence against women to a greater impact. Alcohol and drug abuse, from a cultural point of view, causes a high rate of abuse among women.

As a centre of Christian faith, the church depends on the biblical scriptures for its teaching. However, it was noted that religion has been a strong collaborator that perpetuates violence against women in Christian marriage. This was occasioned by misinterpretation of scriptures and toxic theologies advocating male headship and women's submission, even in unwanted practices.

Reasons for violence against Women in Christian marriages

The study sought to determine the reasons for violence against women in Christian marriages. It was established that lack of education, cultural practices, gender discrimination, and economic factors contribute to the domestic abuse of women in Christian marriages. These findings were consistent with what Adimiluka (2021) reported on African women theologians acknowledging the violence experienced by some women but advising them to return home and address their family issues. Some women are blamed for the abuse and urged to conform to societal expectations, leading to their silence. This silence is often preferable to further victimisation by the church, as it allows them to provide for their families. Despite the church's awareness of the violence faced by women, many women remain silent.

The study explored how cultural and religious beliefs influenced societal attitudes towards violence. Respondents noted that these beliefs either encouraged or discouraged violence. Examples of cultures glorifying violence for conflict resolution, while others emphasise non-violent communication. Religious teachings were cited as either condoning or condemning violence based on interpretation. Cultural norms dictated that violated women should not speak out, with elders often resolving extreme cases. Some cultures justified women's physical punishment by equating them to children. Beliefs either prevented or endorsed violence, with religion promoting love and compassion in relationships.



Theological and pastoral ways of mitigating violence against women in Christian marriages

From the findings, it emerged that believers should follow Christian teachings that advise men to love their wives as Christ did and women to submit to their husbands. The women respondents stressed the need to adhere to the true biblical teaching and avoid toxic theologies that treat women as subordinate to men. The Bible's teachings on forgiveness, love, and the role of spouses are seen as crucial in reducing violence against women. Providing pre-marital counselling, pastoral care, and psychotherapy can also help mitigate such violence. The theological and pastoral approaches can cultivate a peaceful mindset and resist violence. Understanding the repercussions of violence is essential for achieving peace in marriages. The teachings of Jesus Christ emphasise non-violence, compassion, and forgiveness, promoting a culture of peace in society. The respondents further suggested the need for men to be mentored through Pastoral care to embrace mutuality in their relationship with their wives, as indicated in (Ephesians 5:21).

Strategies for Aiding Victims

The study investigated how pastoral care, counselling, and psychotherapy aided victims of violence against women. Respondents highlighted that these services assisted in personal and spiritual growth, acceptance of their situation, seeking reconciliation, and finding a way forward. They also provided those affected with emotional support, practical assistance, and vital information. The church was seen as having a crucial role in addressing violence against women, with clergy needing proper training to help victims of domestic violence within Christian marriages effectively. Respondents believed that religious institutions should actively work to mitigate violence against women in Christian marriages by promoting character development and changing mindsets. They noted that people often seek hope and solace in these institutions, which are influential in defining gender norms and preventing conflicts. The Church is encouraged to eliminate discrimination and unite individuals, serving as a source of guidance and support in addressing domestic violence issues. Priests are seen as trustworthy figures whom individuals turn to for advice on such matters, emphasising the importance of the church's involvement in addressing violence against women in Christian marriages.

Religious practices that promote unity and Prevent violence

The study aimed to identify religious practices that promote unity and prevent violence. Shared religious beliefs among couples were found to deter violence in communities. Respondents emphasised the role of religious leaders in educating on non-violence and conflict resolution, suggesting mediation, counselling, and mentoring programs. Leaders were also advised to provide guidance and counselling for victims of violence. Additionally, clergy were urged to address abuse against women in Christian marriages through preaching, counselling, and teaching on the importance of avoiding abuse. Seminars and conferences were recommended to further educate on gender-based violence.

Ethno, cultural and Christian approaches to Christian marriages

The study assessed how cultural expectations affect Christian marriages. Respondents mentioned that cultural beliefs influence views on gender roles, family dynamics, communication styles, and marital roles in religious texts. Some cultures expect wives to focus on homemaking and child-rearing, while husbands are expected to be the main providers. These expectations can clash with the egalitarian principles in Christian teachings on marriage. Cultural norms, like polygamy and gender roles, can disadvantage women in Christian marriages. African marriage has evolved under the influence of Christianization, adopting structural systems from Greek and Roman traditions. This has led to a culture of violence against women in Christian marriages, exacerbated by patriarchal interpretations of scriptures and church hierarchies that privilege men. Despite some progress in women's roles within the church, stereotypes and gender inequalities persist.

The study also investigated the effect of cultural and traditional practices on Christian marriages, with respondents acknowledging both positive and negative effects. Positive practices include respect, mutual support, and community involvement, while negative practices involve rigid



gender roles, familial interference, and pressure to conform. Couples are advised to prioritise cultural practices that align with their values and promote love, understanding, and unity. Cultural traditions also play a role in enhancing community support and family unity but can also perpetuate harmful beliefs such as male domination and female submission. This can lead to violence against women in Christian marriages, reflecting deep-rooted cultural norms that condone such behaviours. The study explored ways the Christian community can support couples facing marriage challenges. Respondents suggested providing counselling, organising marriage enrichment programs, offering mentorship, creating a supportive environment, prayer groups, and encouragement through scripture.

Conclusion

This study established that there are many predictors of violence against women in Christian marriages. The main ones are cultural and biblical patriarchy, retrogressive cultural practices such as female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, and alcohol, drug and substance abuse. The payment of dowry in African societies creates an attitude whereby men own women as their property in marriage, making them suffer and remain voiceless when violence is meted against them by their husbands. Pervasive relationships such as cohabiting (*mpango wa kando* in Kiswahili meaning in English: “alternative plan”) and unfaithfulness in marriage go against the biblical purpose of marriage. However, Christian women are forced to live in such relationships. In addition, the biblical aspect of perseverance and suffering for doing good, together with the whole issue of forgiveness, as illustrated in the bible, is usually abused, making women suffer when their marriages become violent. The misinterpretation of scripture has created toxic theologies which encourage women to suffer in violent marriages.

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