

Domestic Violence in Christian Homes: A Durban Case Study¹

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Domestic violence is one form of gender-based violence experienced by women and girls in their homes. It occurs in the form of battery, sexual abuse of female children and workers, female genital mutilation, dowry-related violence, marital rape, emotional, verbal, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse. Regarding the situation in Southern Africa:

The magnitude and frequency in Southern Africa will never be known with certainty. Many women and children are afraid to report how they have been treated due to shame or the fear of having to testify in court. Speaking about what has happened to them would bring back all the pain, which they would rather forget (Rakoczy 2000: 7).

Whatever form it takes, domestic violence against women means that women and girls live in the context of fear every day of their lives. The victims suffer physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually, especially where there are no support systems. Domestic violence affects very many women regardless of race, educational background and economic status. When women and girls live in such a state, the development of the society as a whole is negatively affected.

Since South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, there has been a high rate of reporting of violence against women:

Through the efforts of women's movements, service providers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the academic community, violence against women has been brought to the forefront of public and political attention. Along with increased efforts to secure appropriate services and legal reform for survivors of gender based violence, there has also been increased research, aiming to provide

more substantive information and discussion about the nature, scope and dimensions of the problem (Bollen, Artz, Vetten and Louw 1999: 3).

One reason for the increased rate of reporting is that people are becoming aware that violence against women is a human rights issue, and that it is important to educate the masses on the rights of women if they are to take up leadership positions in this country.

The problem

The Global Report on Women's Human Rights states that domestic violence is a leading cause of female injury in almost every country in the world and that it is typically ignored by the state, or only erratically punished (Bollen et al 1999: 6).

There are a number of organisations that have conducted research on violence against women in South Africa, with the emphasis on domestic violence.

- The Human Rights Watch report of November 1995 is based on research with survivors of domestic violence, non-governmental organisations, and individuals involved with the prevention of violence against women, in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg. The report argues that one in every three women in South Africa will be raped, and one in six women is in an abusive domestic relationship. The few who report their cases to the police are not taken seriously, however, and cases that do go to court are either thrown out for lack of evidence, or the offender gets away with a light sentence.
- Diana Russell's study on domestic violence in the form of incestuous abuse, was based on in-depth interviews with adult survivors of incest from the white community in Cape Town. She argues that survivors suffer the effects of incest for a long time, and that these effects have implications for future relationships (Russell 1995).
- The study of Bollen et al (1999) focused on interventions required from service providers and governments for dealing with violence against women. It was a survey conducted in Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg, based on interviews with women regarding their experiences of economic, emotional, physical and sexual abuse.
- The Advice Desk for Abused Women, based in Durban, conducted its own survey on domestic violence and has provided a manual for crisis intervention (Padayachee & Singh 1998).

None of the studies cited above specifically addressed themselves to issues of religion. In a country where the majority of the people claim to be professing

Christians, however, the contribution of religion as a cause, and of the religious institutions as service providers for survivors, of domestic violence, cannot be ignored. Daphne Majapie Madiba has this to say:

Religion has had a particularly detrimental effect on women worldwide. It has been used to excuse the prejudicial treatment of women, to degrade them and restrict them to endless childbearing and drudgery ... Religiosity has perpetuated inequalities among men and has assigned women to some of the lowest and most unenviable positions in society. Nowhere have misinterpretations and biases in the name of religion been more vigorously applied than in the case of women. In the name of religion, women have been downgraded, rendered subservient and relegated to the background of progress and development (1996: 276).

On the other hand, it is important to "recognize that the majority of church women in Africa find consolation and meaning in life through a relationship with Jesus whose message is in the Bible" (Phiri 1997: 54). Thus religion has given hope to women in situations of domestic violence. The challenge is to find a balance between an interpretation of religion that oppresses, and one that liberates abused women.

The Pietermaritzburg Agency for Social Awareness (hereafter PACSA) is the only group hitherto that has targeted the Church – and Christian homes in particular – in the KwaZulu-Natal region, on the issue of domestic violence. PACSA has acknowledged that there is a problem of violence in Christian homes in KwaZulu-Natal – yet neither the churches nor the victims are using their human rights to speak out and find solutions. There is a need to document Christian women's experiences so as to come up with strategies to help break the silence of the Church and Christian families on this issue. In order to do this, PACSA has embarked on the study as outlined below.

The aim of the study

The aim of this study is to determine the levels of domestic violence in Christian homes so as to provide a basis for the formulation of Church policy on protection against gender-related violence.

The specific objectives of the research were to examine:

- the proportion of married Christian women who know someone who has experienced violence in a Christian home
- the proportion of married Christian women who have experienced violence in a Christian home

- the survivors' perception of the attitudes of people around them and in their communities
- the survivors' perception of themselves
- the survivors' knowledge of the support structures that exist and their suggestions on how they can be improved
- the role of theological and spiritual teachings and beliefs on perceptions of what it means to be a woman and to suffer abuse.

Methodology

The research was done in four phases in partnership with PACSA. I conducted the first stage in Durban in a Full Gospel Pentecostal church in Phoenix, a former South African Indian neighbourhood. This report is based only on the interviews conducted between March and September 1999. A detailed report combining the studies carried out in different communities and in eight churches will follow at a later stage.

The pastor of the Full Gospel Pentecostal church advised me, as the researcher, to meet the whole congregation by preaching during a Sunday service. I accepted his invitation. This was an important opportunity to win the confidence of the families. A topic was chosen which would address problems at work and at home, and also what it means for a woman to have faith in God under difficult conditions. After the sermon, it was announced that research on domestic violence would be carried out with 25 Christian families. Those who were interested were requested to submit their names. This church has a membership of 160 families with a total individual membership of 650, and following the service, there was a wonderful response from a number of women who wanted to participate. However, the limit of 25 was adhered to. This small sample was chosen to allow for in-depth interviews. The study was further restricted to families where both husband and wife are professed Christians.

I was surprised at the positive response I received in spite of the fact that I am Malawian, not South African. I asked the women why they had volunteered to be interviewed by a woman of another culture and race. They responded that they felt comfortable because their pastor, whom they greatly respect, had introduced me as a lecturer of his. They assumed that I was therefore also a pastor. Further, they identified with my personal stories and my faith in God. They were also fascinated by the fact that I was willing to listen to their stories. Most important of all, their husbands allowed them to invite me into their homes because I am a family woman (my husband and children had attended the church service with me). In most homes I was told that I was the first indigenous African person to visit them other than their domestic workers – they were accustomed to white researchers asking them questions. They attributed their change of attitude towards people of a different race to the change

of politics in South Africa. It also seems that my academic titles contributed to my acceptance in this community. I was overwhelmed by the hospitality I received in each home.

The research was limited to domestic violence where the victim is a woman and the perpetrator is a man. I was aware that there are some men who are survivors of domestic violence where the perpetrators have been women. However, I agree with Carolyn H. Heggen who has argued that there is a general agreement among researchers and mental health professionals that "the offender is predominantly male and the victim is predominantly female" (1993: 14) She has suggested that it would be appropriate for a man to tell the stories of male victims of abuse.

Each interview was conducted in the home of the woman. I was alone with the woman either in the lounge or in the bedroom. In 10 cases the husband was within the home area. Where I knew in advance that the husband would be at home, I brought my husband to talk with him about any topic of interest to men while I was alone with the wife.

At the beginning of each interview I explained that the purpose of the study was to document the experiences of Christian women in Christian marriages so that the materials can be used to train ministers on how to counsel Christian families where domestic violence is taking place. All the interviews were conducted in English, the sessions being concluded with a prayer with the woman alone, followed by another prayer with those members of the family who were present at the time.

A written questionnaire was used for all interviews. The information was read and the answers were written down. From the outset, confidentiality was promised regarding the final story for publication. Only one person gave permission for her story to be recorded on tape. Each interview lasted between one and three hours. In one case, I had to return on another day because the woman's husband came home unexpectedly and she did not want him to be present when she was sharing her story.

Some of the interviews were difficult because the abuse was still going on. Weeping accompanied the process of telling the story. Where possible, I offered information on where an interviewee could get help if she was not aware of such resources. It was a traumatic experience, both for me as the researcher and for the women who were victims of currently ongoing domestic violence. Bollen and others agree that "counseling skills [are] important to the interview process to divert the possibility of secondary victimisation and to ensure that participants [are] appropriately supported in the case of trauma resulting from the recollection of previous violent incidents" (Bollen et al 1999: 13).

Consequently, after the research, a workshop with PACSA was organised for the participants of the research project and any friends they wished to invite. 132 women attended the five-hour workshop, all of them South African

Indian women from different churches in Phoenix. At the workshop, the circle of violence² and the Duluth wheel of power and control charts³ were used. Definitions of domestic violence were supplied and group work activities helped the women to deal with issues relating to myths about the survivors and the perpetrators of domestic violence. More information about where to get help within the Durban area was also distributed. Service providers who address domestic violence in the Phoenix area were invited to give a brief explanation of their organisation.

Apart from the formal interview, the initial preaching engagement, and the workshop that followed the research, I have been invited to the church twice. I have also met some of the interviewees at various of their family functions to which I was invited. The women have been allowed to maintain contact with me through telephone conversations.

The original plan was to conduct a qualitative study where the full stories of the women would be documented and analysed. For the purpose of this paper, however, I have used the material as in quantitative research and have quoted from the women's stories extensively.

Background information

Age of the women at the time of interview. The age range of the 25 interviewees was 25 to 56. The average age was 37 years. These women are old enough to understand what marriage is, and what domestic violence is.

Age of the women at the time of marriage. At the time of marriage, the youngest woman was 15 and the oldest 27 years old. The average age at the time of marrying was 19. Therefore, according to the sample, the majority of the women married while they were still teenagers.

Number of years in marriage. At the time of the interview, the longest time spent in marriage was 39 years, and the shortest, eight. The average number of years spent in marriage was 20, which suggests that the women had been married for long enough to make an accurate assessment of their relationship with their spouses. In my sample of 25 women, only one woman was divorced – after 39 years of an abusive relationship with her evangelist husband. The rest of the women were still living with their husbands.

Number of children. Of the 25 women, only one woman did not have biological children, but had adopted two children. The number of children they had ranged from one to six. The average number of children was three. Of the 66 children among 25 women, 65% were girls and 35% were boys. 20% of the women had only girl children. However none of them attributed their abuse to having only girls. 8% of the women had only boy children. None of them were

exempted from abuse on account of their children being of a preferred sex.

Level of education and employment. The highest level of education of the women interviewed was a post matric diploma. The lowest was Std 4 (Grade 6). The average standard of education was Std 7 (Grade 9). The most common reason given for not going further with education was that their parents could not afford to pay for their studies. This may explain why most of the women worked outside the home before they married. Their low level of education had a bearing on the types of jobs they held. Before marriage, 24% of the women had not been employed outside the home. 76% had been employed as cashiers, sales persons, and tailors in clothes factories. 8% of the women who did not work outside the home were employed following marriage. On average, the women worked for four years after marriage. At the time of the interviews, all 25 women were not working outside the home. One was a businesswoman working from home, another was an administrator of a family business operating from home. A third was buying goods from factories and selling them from home.

Church membership. One woman had been a member of the church since she was born in 1943 because her father was the founder of the congregation. On average, the women had been members of this church for seven years. In my opinion, seven years is long enough for them to have assessed the messages that are preached, in terms of whether or not they have addressed issues of domestic violence.

Definition of words

Each woman interviewed was given the following definitions obtained from a PACSA fact sheet:⁴

Domestic Violence can be described as an attempt to control or destroy someone else consciously or unconsciously. This can take different forms such as physical, sexual, emotional, verbal and psychological, economic, and spiritual violence.

- *Physical Violence* includes slapping, punching, kicking, shoving, choking, stabbing and shooting, perhaps using weapons like guns, knives, forks, sjamboks, knobkerries, hammers or axes, etc. A physical beating often ends in the woman being hospitalised, sometimes being permanently disabled, and even in her death.
- *Sexual Violence* is defined as any forced sexual activity, including rape. Sexual violence often includes degrading jokes about women, name-calling, unwanted touching, and using pornography.
- *In Emotional, Verbal and Psychological Violence*, the woman is made to feel useless and that nothing she does is good enough. The abuser may treat the woman as though she has no emotional needs and is only there to serve his

needs. He may be extremely jealous and possessive and accuse the woman of having affairs and being unfaithful. He does not trust her and might not let her leave the house. Some women describe constant criticism and being undermined in private and public. He may mock her family and those close to her, swear at her, shout at her and call her names. He may control her activities, disrupt her routines, deprive her of sleep or food, or isolate her from her family and friends. Psychological manipulation includes threats or attempts to commit suicide, to hurt the victim and her loved ones, to harm her property, to kidnap or harm the children. He may force her to do degrading things or he will do things that will terrorise her, like playing with a knife or gun in her presence.

- *In Economic Violence*, the abuser uses money to undermine the woman. He may spend most of the money on himself and only give her a small amount for the support of the family. He expects her to do more with the money than she possibly can. He accuses her of stealing his money or of using the family's money for her own benefit only.
- *Spiritual Violence* happens when a woman's faith is used to keep her from finding help or leaving an abusive situation by telling her that she must endure, submit, return and make sure she doesn't do anything to upset her husband, etc. She is led to believe that the abuse is her fault, and that if she seeks to leave, she is un-Christian, and will be condemned by God. The Bible is quoted to her literally and out of context, particularly passages that serve to 'put her in her place,' condemn divorce, or glorify suffering.

In general, all aspects of the definitions of domestic violence above are reflected in the *Statutes of the Republic of South Africa - Criminal Law and Procedure: Domestic Act No. 116 of 1998*. Spiritual violence is not specified, but it can fall under "(j) any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complainant."

Knowledge and experience of domestic violence

96% of the 25 women interviewed knew of a woman who had been a survivor of domestic violence. The one woman who did not have knowledge of anyone who had experienced domestic violence qualified her response with: "Speaking about other people's problems is un-Christian unless you want to go and help them." I interpreted her response to mean that she knows women who have experienced domestic violence but was not going to talk about it because the research did not have immediate solutions for her or the women she knows. On that basis, then, it can be argued that all the women interviewed had knowledge of someone who was experiencing, or had experienced, some form of domestic violence.

84% of the interviewees said they had experienced some form of domestic violence. Although the interviewees were all volunteers, 16% (four) said they had not experienced any type of domestic violence. I observed that all of them were wives of leaders in the church. Three were married to cell group leaders and one was married to the church treasurer. In this Pentecostal church, leadership roles are to be shared between husband and wife; for example, if the pastor is male, his wife is also called a pastor. The wives' attitude to the research is best represented in the following quotation: "My husband is a church leader. It would destroy our ministry to talk about our problems with other people. It is important for me to maintain the integrity of the home."

Thus, although she may have problems at home, the wife may have decided not to talk about them in order to protect the couple's status in the church. It is unclear why the women who fall in this category volunteered to be part of the study. My interpretation is that either they had planned to talk but changed their minds on the day of the interview, or their inability to talk was a message that there are some women who suffer in silence because of the positions of their husbands. Another wife of a church leader who said "I would be afraid to tell anyone about my sexual abuse but only God", further emphasised the confidentiality of family experiences. Later she added "The Indian community does not share their problems. They keep to themselves. You only hear about it when the woman has committed suicide." She was thus not only attributing her silence to her marriage to a church leader, but also to the culture in which she lives. Women in this situation suffer from the influences of both religion and culture.

On the other hand, of the seven wives of church leaders interviewed, 43% (three) decided to overcome the implicit ban imposed by culture and religion and talk about their problems. Therefore it should not be generalised that wives of church leaders refuse to break the silence surrounding domestic violence.

Physical violence

67% (14) of the women who experienced some form of domestic violence were survivors of physical violence of varying levels and duration. For some it was a slap, especially in the first years of marriage. For others it went on for between five and ten years but stopped with outside intervention. Yet others said it had started when the children were small and had continued through 22 to 29 years of marriage. 57% of the interviewees were still living with physical violence from their partners. The following is one example of the responses describing the physical violence experienced:

When the children were small he hit me so hard so that up to now I cannot hear well in one ear.

Sexual violence

16% (four) women said they had experienced sexual violence in different ways. An example:

I have arthritis. One night I was in terrible pain. I went to bed early. He wanted lovemaking. I said no. He threw me off the bed and started kicking me and forced himself on me. The children came to help me out of the bedroom. I never returned to our bedroom. One year later he divorced me.

Emotional, verbal and psychological violence

67% (14) of the women experienced emotional violence. An example:

He disconnected the phone because he did not want me to speak to my father and mother. He did not want any visitors when he was not home. He only allowed us day visits to my parents' house. He would count the hours for us as we visited my parents. He said he did not trust people. He did not allow the children to go to camp meetings. He did not allow us to have a maid. I did all the domestic work and cut the grass outside.

Economic violence

67% (14) of the women experienced economic violence – two of the responses, for example:

My husband gets paid every weekend. Friday and Saturday mornings are stressful days for us. Our major problem is the payment of bills. When he is controlling the finances, he only pays half the bill and then our water and electricity are disconnected. I feel embarrassed because I evangelise our neighbourhood. When I control the finances, it causes a lot of arguments because he feels undermined for his wife to control finances.

He never gives me money. I have also learnt to take some from his wallet. When he asks me about it I admit and I tell him that I needed the money to buy things for the home. Does God judge me as a thief when I take money from my husband whom I married in community of property and yet he refuses to give me money?

Spiritual violence

76% (16) of the women experienced spiritual violence. An example:

He accused me of being too spiritual. I cannot read the Bible or pray in his presence. If I do not initiate family prayers, we just go to bed without praying. I cannot tell the pastor because my husband is a cell group leader.

The community's response to domestic violence

52% (13) of the women had shared their story with someone. 44% (11) shared their problems with their pastor because they have respect for and confidence in him. The pastor responded by visiting the families, for example:

The pastor was here with his wife immediately. They asked me why I kept it to myself so long. They encouraged me to talk. The pastor spoke to him. He was very open with him. Both of us were given a chance to share our version of the story. Since then things have changed.

One woman was angry at the way the pastor had handled her issue:

I was angry when I discovered that my husband confessed to the pastor two months ago, yet when I went to tell him about my suspicion he did not confirm it. My husband continued in his church leadership position as well as in the extra-marital relationship with the pastor's knowledge. I felt betrayed by the pastor."

For some the visit of the pastor did not impact on their situation:

The pastor talked to him but he changed for a short time and started again.

Some shared their problems with their parents, who encouraged their daughter to stay in the abusive relationship, for example:

My mother told me to continue praying for him because there is nothing that God cannot change. God does not like divorce. God went through the same suffering but did not quit. Accept him. He is in the process of changing. He will become better.

Some women, who shared their problem with friends, did not get much support because of fear:

This month I left home twice. I went to a friend's house. But after two days she told me to leave because she did not want trouble. Against my will, I went back home to be beaten yet again.

20% (five) did not share their experience with anyone. An example of the reasons given:

My husband never stopped me from telling anyone. I did it on my own. I felt that if I tell anyone from church, they would look down on me. Sometimes you cannot trust people. You tell them a problem and they share it with others. I have heard people speak about other people's problem. I did not want to hurt my husband. I still love him.

Access to community support structures

Awareness of available support structures

68% (17) of the interviewees know where to seek help. 52% (13) mentioned the church; 8% (two) Legal Aid, and 8% (two) mentioned the police. Only 4% (one) used the police voluntarily. She got an interdict to stop her husband from killing her. However, after some months, he came with his mother to apologise and they are together again. Another one used Legal Aid to get custody of the children when her husband initiated divorce. She won the case.

Suggestions for improvements of structures

All the women preferred to use a church-based crisis centre. The only one mentioned was the Geranadi Mission Centre run by Good News Community

Radio. However, the women pointed out that it is too far for most women who live in Phoenix. At the workshop that followed the research, they also discussed the importance of every woman's keeping some money and spare keys – as well as a set of clothes in a plastic bag outside the house – to use in cases where they have to leave home quickly. Further, it was suggested that women should create networks among themselves, as well as safe homes to which an abused person could run when in need of protection. Most important of all, they suggested that each church should have its own shelter for abused women, because they feel comfortable with church personnel.

The survivor's perception of self

The women were asked how their experiences of domestic violence affect the way they feel about themselves. A few examples of the responses follow:

I feel it's my fault. I therefore keep away from an active life.

Sometimes I feel that I am useless. Yet the other part of me does not agree because I do all the housework by myself.

I know that it is not my fault. The troubles are coming from outside.

I cry myself to sleep. I feel like committing suicide.

I thank God it happened. I appreciate my husband and myself more. We are flowing in the same ministry of counselling other couples now.

I feel terrible that I am not able to enjoy life with my husband. One day I will have that life. If I don't, I am used to it. I will have it in heaven.

No matter what I am going through and no matter what others think I take my problems to the Lord and believe that God will solve it.

I feel I made a mistake by marrying him. I tell the children that I will leave him.

The role of theological and spiritual teachings and beliefs on what it means to be a woman and to suffer abuse

All the women interviewed agreed that the church they belong to preaches about the evils of violence against women. They said that the pastor preaches against physical and economic violence in homes, although not often enough. He preaches about husbands loving their wives and says that men are the priests of the home, but they are not better than their wives because they are equal in the sight of God. He says the father is the head of the family but comments that when the children and the wife are hurting, he is not there to help, but is watching TV. He preaches about these things on Mother's Day and Father's Day, they said, and that during the church's 40 days of fasting, one of the items focused on was violence in the home.

However, the women are aware of the contradictions between what is

preached and the reactions of their husbands. The following are a few examples of their comments:

I think the main problem why most men in our church do not listen to the message of the pastor is because he is related to many people in the church.

When the pastor preaches against men being unfaithful to their wives, they take it as a big joke because they feel that they have the power to do whatever they want.

On Mother's Day the pastor preached about husbands not hitting their wives. My husband was disturbed with this message because it gave the impression that the men of this church are guilty.

The women were also able to reflect on what God thinks about their situation of domestic violence. They asserted that God suffers with them, appreciates their endurance, gives them strength, and is changing the situation, for example:

My daughter you have gone through enough. Not long now. You are faithful. You put me first. Look upon me when in trouble. The partner I have given you will change. He needs to realise that by himself and come right. Then he will realise what a dedicated wife he had.

God is with a suffering woman and will give her strength to go on. There is nothing too hard for God if you seek him with all your heart.

Regarding patience and long suffering:

God answers all prayers. God has a reason why he is not answering the prayers quickly.

Some women did not accept the suffering as part of God's plan for them. They question God:

I used to cry and ask God "why did you choose me to have this problem?"

Other women experienced God's love by being taken out of the abusive relationship or being hopeful of an open door to leave marriage. Such women do not view divorce as sin but as an answered prayer, for example:

God carried me through the situation. He loves me very much. Whenever I needed Him He was always there for me and He took me out of the situation.

Conclusion

This study has shown that there is domestic violence in Christian homes. 16% of the interviewees experienced all five categories of domestic violence as described in the definitions above. The most frequent form of domestic violence for this group of women was physical violence (84%), followed by spiritual violence (76%), economic violence, and emotional, verbal and psychological violence at 67% each. The other 16% who did not admit to having experienced violence in their homes may have done so because they wanted to pro-

tect their husbands' image in the church.

The women who experienced violence did not feel free to use intervention facilities that are not church-based. The study has also shown that a majority of the women seek help from their pastor even though it does not always work. The majority of pastors are not professional marriage counsellors. It is thus important for pastors to be trained as marriage counsellors.

The question raised by women is this: why should a Christian woman suffer at the hand of her Christian husband when the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ said "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"(John 10: 10b)? A secondary question is: why is it that the majority of the Christian women in this study continued to stay in abusive relationships?

Heggen has identified four religious beliefs which may promote a relationship in which a Christian husband abuses his Christian wife without feeling bad about it:

1. The first is the belief that God intends men to dominate and women to submit. The message preached in Full Gospel Churches, as mentioned by the interviewees, is that the husband is the head of the family and the priest of the home. "The name for the social organisation and set of beliefs that grant and sustain male dominance over women and children is patriarchy" (Heggen 1993: 16). This is based on the Genesis 2 story of creation. Yet it omits what is in Genesis 1: 27, namely that "so God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him: male and female, He created them." What is not preached in the churches is the fact that man in this verse stands for human being and not man as in male human being. Secondly, this verse portrays woman and man standing at the same level with regard to reflecting the image of God. Genesis 3 reflects the fallen nature of humanity, which was restored with the coming of Jesus Christ. Thus, "in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"(Galatians 3: 28) and "you submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"(Ephesians 5: 21).
2. Heggen has argued that the second religious belief that led to the abuse of women is that "Woman is morally inferior to man and cannot trust her own judgment" (1993: 19). In our study such a belief was reflected in the over-protection by husbands of their wives, shown in their not allowing their wives to mix with other women, reveal their abuse to others, or even go to church or shops alone. If a woman is being accused of having an affair when she is not, it means that the man thinks that all women share Eve's fallen nature, that they are easily tempted to sin, and cannot make intelligent decisions. It is encouraging to see that despite the abuse that lowered the self-esteem of the abused women, some were able to say "I know I am not useless." They were also able to challenge the traditional concept of sin by making statements like "I take money from his wallet when he does not give

me any because we were married in community of property." The woman in this case is redefining the concept of sin.

3. Thirdly, Heggen mentions the belief that "suffering is a Christian virtue and women in particular have been designated to be 'suffering servants' "(ibid: 22). In this study, the majority of the women spiritualised their pain and glorified their suffering. They looked on themselves as sharing in the suffering of Jesus Christ. In Pentecostal theology, it is argued that Christ did all the suffering for Christians and that Christians must receive this gift and walk in victory over sickness, disease, poverty or any other form of oppression. If that is the case, why then do the Pentecostal women accept abuse from their husbands as sharing in the suffering of Christ? Why is their suffering different from that which is caused by sickness and disease or poverty? It is important not to apply double standards to the redemption that Christ won for Christians.
4. The fourth religious belief that promotes abuse against women, according to Heggen, is that "Christians must quickly forgive and be reconciled with those who sin against them" (ibid: 24). Examples abound from the Bible where Christians are commanded to forgive those who sin against them because their own forgiveness by God depends on it. Many Christian women stay in abusive relationships because, after each episode of abuse, the husband asks for forgiveness. While it is necessary to forgive, at the same time there is a need for accountability for one's actions. The Bible is full of examples where a person sinned, asked for forgiveness from God, was forgiven by God, but still had to face the consequences of his or her actions. David is a case in point. Therefore I agree with Heggen that "pushing for quick forgiveness and cheap mercy not only trivializes the victim's depth of pain and woundedness, but may also rob the perpetrator of the opportunity to experience true repentance and redemption"(ibid: 86).
6. In conclusion, therefore, it can be argued that each church should have a shelter and trained personnel to deal with women members from abused homes. A woman who seeks help is wise and desires life, and therefore should not be made to feel that she is committing a sin. The church should desire to be in solidarity with all members of the family of Christ. The teaching of the church should promote the experience of full life in Christ on the part of all church members. Pastors should continue to preach against domestic violence and be consistent with this theme in their other messages. Church leaders, in particular, need more workshops to help them not to be involved in domestic violence themselves, and to equip them with skills to help others.

Notes

- ¹ The expanded version of this paper was published in the *Journal of Constructive Theology*, 7, 1, December 2000.
- ² See Padayachee and Singh (1998: 23).
- ³ See Conway (1997: 15).
- ⁴ Domestic Violence Part 1 - Wife Abuse. PACSA Factsheet No. 45, November 1998.

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