



The Paradox of Safety Between Pastors and Female Congregants

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Abstract

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, gender-based violence, which was already a major global issue before the pandemic, has become more severe. Many women have been locked with their abusers and cut off from social contact and support networks due to lockdowns and other mobility restrictions. The capacity of many women to flee abusive situations has been further hampered by rising economic precariat. The likelihood of child marriage, female genital mutilation, and human trafficking will also increase as a result of the economic and social instability brought on by COVID. Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a world concern; however, in South Africa it has been declared as a national crisis that is embedded in the social-cultural context and history of the country. Some pastors take advantage of these individuals either by asking them to plant a “seed” (money) or taking advantage of them sexually. The aim of this article to find out how the cycle of perpetrators among pastors can be broken and what role can pastoral counsellors’ play regarding to change history and assure female congregants of their safety. The findings may be important for policy, practice, theory, subsequent research and help in protecting women who are being taken advantage of in the modern society as well as provide awareness towards the possibility of abuse in churches. This research will be conducted by means of a review of various literature. This highlighted Pastoral sexual misconduct can be used to create awareness around abuse of women in the Church by the pastors. However, this might be a challenge to implement when the one who is supposed to take a lead in implementing them is the perpetrators. Through literature review this article challenges theology and the church to break cycle of perpetrators among pastors and for the church to identify what role can pastoral counsellors’ play regarding both victims and offenders to prevent history from repeating itself, so the church can be a safe place for women to seek healing without fear of being victimised by their pastors. This article will be an Inter-disciplines study which will involve the Practical Theology and Policing.

Keywords: Church; congregants; gender-based violence; pastors; perpetrators; power; safety; women.

Abstrak

Sejak wabah COVID-19, kekerasan berbasis gender, yang sudah menjadi isu global utama sebelum pandemi, menjadi lebih parah. Banyak wanita telah dikunci dengan pelakunya dan terputus dari kontak sosial dan jaringan dukungan karena penguncian dan pembatasan mobilitas lainnya. Kapasitas banyak perempuan untuk melarikan diri dari situasi yang melecehkan telah lebih jauh terhambat oleh meningkatnya precariat ekonomi. Kemungkinan pernikahan anak, mutilasi alat kelamin perempuan, dan perdagangan manusia juga akan meningkat sebagai akibat dari ketidakstabilan ekonomi dan sosial yang disebabkan oleh COVID. Kekerasan Berbasis Gender (GBV) menjadi perhatian dunia; namun, di Afrika Selatan telah dinyatakan sebagai krisis nasional yang tertanam dalam konteks sosial budaya dan sejarah negara tersebut. Beberapa pendeta mengambil keuntungan dari orang-orang ini baik dengan meminta mereka untuk menanam “benih” (uang) atau mengambil keuntungan dari mereka secara seksual. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui bagaimana siklus pelaku di kalangan pendeta dapat diputus dan peran apa yang dapat dimainkan oleh konselor pastoral dalam mengubah sejarah dan menjamin keselamatan jemaah wanita. Temuan ini mungkin penting untuk kebijakan, praktik, teori, penelitian selanjutnya dan membantu dalam melindungi perempuan yang dimanfaatkan dalam masyarakat modern serta memberikan kesadaran terhadap kemungkinan pelecehan di gereja-gereja. Penelitian ini akan dilakukan dengan cara review dari berbagai literatur. Pelanggaran seksual Pastoral yang disorot ini dapat digunakan untuk menciptakan kesadaran seputar pelecehan wanita di Gereja oleh para pendeta. Namun, ini mungkin menjadi tantangan untuk diterapkan ketika yang seharusnya memimpin implementasinya adalah para pelakunya. Melalui tinjauan pustaka artikel ini menantang teologi dan gereja untuk memutus siklus pelaku di antara para pendeta dan bagi gereja untuk mengidentifikasi peran apa yang dapat dimainkan oleh

konselor pastoral terhadap korban dan pelaku untuk mencegah terulangnya sejarah, sehingga gereja dapat menjadi tempat yang aman bagi perempuan untuk mencari kesembuhan tanpa takut menjadi korban oleh pendeta mereka. Artikel ini akan menjadi kajian Interdisipliner yang akan melibatkan Teologi Praktis dan Pemolisian.

Kata Kunci: Gereja; jemaah; kekerasan berbasis gender; pendeta; pelaku; kekuasaan; keamanan; wanita.

INTRODUCTION

The Church is supposed to be a place of safety and healing for all those who belong to it and to the outside community. Pastors are also referring to as pastoral counsellors, who are trained to offer counselling to those who need healing including to victims of GBV. Davies and Dreyer (2014, p. 1) declares that “guidance given by a pastoral counsellor focuses on helping individuals to function at an acceptable cognitive and moral level in their thinking, attitudes, emotions, and behaviour. In organizational terms, knowledge is typically understood to be know-how, applied information, information with judgment, or the capacity for effective action. This is true despite gender-based violence because knowledge is intrinsically linked to people and can therefore be either individual or collective. Finding patterns that are intriguing can be difficult since novelty is frequently a key factor in what makes anything interesting. However, finding patterns that are more effectively use prior knowledge can also be challenging because doing so involves novelty.

A lot of research has been done in this area The distribution of power and responsibilities still favors more men than women. Hence, women remain hampered to become emancipators of their lives (March, Smyth, & Mukhopadhyay, 1999). The pastor is mostly approached when a situation that has already escalated and the emotions are complex, when emotions are complex, the victim is valuable and can easily be taken advantage of by whomever is in power, in the case of the Church, the pastor is the one in position of power. Davies and Dreyer (2014, p. 1) argues that Pastoral counselling should comprise both spiritual and emotional support professionally. Vaughan (1987, p. 17) states that a pastoral care counsellor is often looked upon as an ordained person of faith, who is expected to be committed and trustworthy. The authors of this study believe that satisfaction with immature theologians should be major factor that aids in maintaining the silence about domestic abuse among clergy. Batchelor (2013, p. xv) reports to Columbia Theological Seminary’s Pamela Cooper-White, that between 90 to 95 percent of victims of clergy sexual misconduct were female congregants. The authors argue that is these influences by the view that women are the most valuable in the church and most trusting of their pastors especially when faced with personal and social difficulty situations. According to Landa, Zhou, and Tshotsho (2019, p. 4) the subject problem of the abuse of young girls and women has received a lot of attention over the past years.

This research objectives include:

- To challenge theology and the church on how the cycle of perpetrators among pastors can be broken
- To find what role can pastoral counsellors’ play regarding both victims and offenders to prevent history from repeating itself
- To investigate ways, assure female congregants of their safety in church,

However, the abuse of women and young girls specifically by the pastors, has not received as much special attention as GBV and domestic violence. There has been debate on how the Church perceives GBV, Maluleke and Nadar (2002, p. 11) found that the church tend to discourage women from leaving their abusive marriages by encouraging them to endure to save their marriages because of the biblical

interpretation that divorce against God's will, therefore a sin. Miles (2000) states that, "One of the most challenging aspects of helping clergy and other pastoral ministers enhance their pastoral skills on this topic (GBV17) is the fact that some deny the problem exists within their congregations". Writers from other disciplines acknowledge the prevalence of GBV in religion and are inviting churches to work with organisations to curb the phenomenon (Damron & Johnson, 2015, p. 3).

Working in an office is a fact of life for many spiritual leaders including Pastors and for a growing number of female congregants, who perform various supporting roles as office administrators, too. It is so much a part of everyday life that many of us tend to take it for granted. We get up, go to work, leave work, go home, sleep, and go to work again. It takes up one third of our 24 hours in a day. Female congregants visit their clergy and or pastoral ministers seeking pastoral care or go to the office to work with little thought of being victims of sexual assaults or rape by those entrusted with highway to morality, Pastors. "In the church, the lack of true leadership gives rise to the proliferation of sin and evil as well as false church leaders" (Heward-Mills, 2015, p. 1).

As much as there are scientific articles that address the decay in morality on the decline of family structures, business world reflecting on management and leadership styles, strategies, attitudes for increasing employees moral and sense of duty. The same could be said on the unique dynamics of the church offices and relationships in that area where not only spiritual leaders work, but female congregants visit or spend so much of their time as well. There are many female congregants, who might suffer in silence as victims of sexual assaults or rape, as they would rather, avoid tarnishing the image or integrity of clergy and or pastoral ministers (Kaiser, O'Neal, & Spohn, 2017, p. 297). In literature, sexual abuse is often described as driven by mechanisms other than sexual motives, for example aggression (Wegner, Abbey, Pierce, Pegram, & Woerner, 2015, p. 1018).

RESEARCH METHODS

The research will examine the current situation of GBV in South Africa through existing literature based on GBV in the Church. Research that is, documentary analysis. The study will be limited to the South African realities of GBV, especially in relationship to pastors of the Christian Churches and female congregants. The society will benefit from this research because the investigators will be better skilled and competent which will result in an increased prosecution and in a better conviction rate of GBV perpetrators. The South African community will do by providing information with regards to the subject under investigation, empower individuals with knowledge and stimulate one's way of reasoning and thinking about the effects of effectively taking statements about GBV against women in places of worship. The South African law enforcement industry with investigative capabilities would benefit from this research where SAPS investigators will acquire more knowledge, improved skills, methods, and techniques in terms of taking a complainant's statement on GBV against female congregants' cases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In patriarchy, women do not have control over their sexuality, and they are often powerless in a culture where patriarchy is viewed as the natural order of life (Pillay, 2015). Thus, the way we think about sexuality and gender in society is often influenced by one's cultural beliefs and practices. Cultural beliefs and practices towards women in any given culture are among the most difficult to challenge (Dawit & Busia, 1995, p. 7). Some pastors have made it clear that wife beating and clashes in marriage are normal, the authors have collaborated with pastors who also share this view. A literature survey (Clarion, 2007;

Jackowski, 2004; Jewell, 2006, pp. 23–24; Shupe, 2007) indicates that ministers of the word/pastors may sometimes use their position in the church and use their supposed spiritually elevated placement to manipulate young girls and women into having sexual intercourse with them. Some of those women and young girls were told that they needed to sleep with the pastors to free them from demons and bad spirits. As literature indicates, in African communities, church leaders are among the most trusted leaders (Ferret, 2005) to whom many congregants, including females turn to for solace, counselling, representation in peace talks, and all kinds of negotiations. However, this trust-relationship is sometimes abused by some pastors within those communities. Batchelor (2013, p. xv) Clergy sexual abuse of children has received global media and public attention and has resulted in many changes that will protect children in churches however some congregants still choose to protect their pastors and continue to victimise the victim by calling them lairs and used by the devil for the downfall of their pastors. Yet little has been written about the more widespread of GBB by the pastors in the Church. This is devastating phenomenon of abuse of women by pastors—a silent killer within Christian churches around the world. The authors will highlight two of many cases reported by the media in South Africa regarding abuse cases by pastors.

An article written by Bambalele (2020), state:

“A Cape Town pastor whose video has been trending on Facebook for allegedly “assaulting his wife,” denies that he was a violent man. In the video that has clocked 200,000 views, the pastor who also preaches on Umhlobo Wenene on Sundays, is seen in front of his house and he is insulted by a group of women. In the commotion the video has captures, police can be seen while neighbors are heard shouting that the pastor has been assaulting his wife for many years.” Speaking to SowetanLIVE, the pastor said his wife was a social worker and both were against gender-based violence or domestic violence. He said he was made aware by friends and family that he was trending on social media. However, he does not deny that on the day the police were called in after he had clashed with his wife.

This was reported by News24 (2020):

A pastor, who raped and sexually assaulted young men, will spend 30 years in jail. Sthembiso Nathaniel Kubheka, 38, was sentenced in the Witbank Regional Court on Monday, Khubeka preyed on young men by portraying himself as a reliable pastor. He hosted revival crusades in different areas across the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga.

These stories are among the many of the stories of pastors who abuse women in church, there are cases that never made it to the media, those that never made it to the police stations, those never told in church, it is either victims would leave the church, not believed, or did not have enough “evidence’.” Estimates of the number of unknown cases usually include self-reports in which respondents state whether they had reported the abuse to authorities. These estimates differ across countries and depend to some degree on the specific questions asked” (Rudolfsson, 2015, p. 7). This phenomenon of suffering in silence, could be a product of preconceived biasness by the church members, who are perceived as difficult to hearken an ear, for the victims’ side of story. To affirm this Chisale (Chisale, 2018, p. 1) says that the socialisation of women into self-silencing by religion or religious bodies has complicated pastoral care interventions for the female victims of domestic violence. Studies are also consistent that women make up most members in any church and the most trusting towards their pastors with regardless to challenges that they may face (Kasomo, 2010; Phiri, 1997).

The possibility of entering a dialogue with those considered to be of high moral ground and sharing power with the ministers they look up to for moral and spiritual support might be too much to bear by the victims, and the state to convince victims to seek justice within the current punitive paradigm of criminal justice. Social exchange posits that humans are rational, economic analysts of relationships. Essentially, we

weigh both the costs and rewards of maintaining, repairing, or dissolving a relationship (Borton, 2012). Borton (2012, p. 399) posits that “we seek to begin, develop, and continue relationships we determine to be profitable (e.g., socially, sexually, emotionally, etc.). Alternately, we seek to minimize relationships when the metaphoric scale tips too far toward costs and too far away from rewards. We tend to be satisfied in relationships that provide more rewards than costs.” This makes sense why “women have had difficulty sharing their experiences of sexual violence for fear of the consequences” (Sigurdardottir & Halldorsdottir, 2021, p. 1849) and Rosetti (1995) studies with victims of clergy sexual abuse cited in Gavrielides (2013, p. 21), indicated the manifestation of a strong emotional impact and various spiritual effects. Noncoercive procedures as prescribed by the Bible to seek an of confession and repentance, through an expression of accountability by the perpetrator such as but not limited to face-to-face meeting between mediator, abused and abuser.

However, the Faith and Order Commission (2017, p. 14) posits that “the hope of ultimate reconciliation in Christ is a distinctive hope of the church, but the implied resumption of relationship with the abuser can be disturbing for those who have suffered traumatic and shattering consequences of abuse and is certainly not something that should be forced on a survivor of abuse”. Thus, the abused or survivor, often is left with a feeling a void in their sense of resolution and restoration, they chose traditional criminal justice procedures and mediation. Over the years, the media has been consistent to report isolated stories about female congregants, who became victims of sexual assaults in the hands of spiritual leaders and, thus suffer in silence due to traumatic revictimization without justice, counselling and thus, stress and depression (Peckham, 2018; Smith & Freyd, 2014).

Power in Pastoral counselling

During pastoral counselling the pastor is in a position of power, his word has the power to be heard and to heal. Even though the view of women ordination is slowly changing for most churches, majority of pastors are of the male gender and more respect is given to male pastors in the church comparatively to female pastors. The belief that men are superior to and dominant over women is not only confined to traditional cultures but is also found in religion. The distribution of power and responsibilities is not equally distributed as it still favors more men than women. According to Magezi and Manzang (2019, p. 3) Women and girls remain disadvantaged and vulnerable. Gender-based violence within the church in Zimbabwe is also appalling. Magezi and Manzang (2019, p. 3) referred to *The News Day* (2013) paper stated, ‘Recent media reports were awash with stories of pastors who sexually assaulted their female congregates’ (Samukange, 2013). The abuse of women and girls by individuals in authority remains a subject of complex debates in both social and academic discourses. Garland and Argueta (Garland & Argueta, 2010, pp. 1–27) indicate that pastors manipulate young girls and women by using grooming approach, which refers to a calculated long-term development of a close relationship with their targeted victims before abusing them.

Pastoral as perpetrators

The Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities Commission (CRL Rights Commission) presented its recommendations to prevent the commercialisation of religion and the abuse and exploitation of people’s belief systems. The CRL was concerned by the lack of proper regulation to control churches that are operating outside of the law. The CRL recommended that Municipality by-laws should be enforced. Legislation should be put in place to allow for the accountability, transparency, registration and regulation of churches and religious leaders. There was a suggestion to

make use of a peer review system by the CRL to prevent abuse. There is a gender problem in the Church and women are at the bottom of the church ranks. Due to unemployment, inequality and poverty, people are desperate and believe in the promises made in the Church. The poor economic state of the country is playing a significant role. Children who graduate and are unemployed are being taken advantage of as they resort to these churches hence exploitation takes places when they are told: "God said this."

Victims of abuse by pastors find it difficult to report the abuse, for others they are not even aware of the abuse. When they realize that they have been violated, which is usually after a long time (Fortune, 2009) due to the fear of condemnation and being blames victims often find it difficult to seek help (Benyei, 1998; Garland & Argueta, 2010; Gravelin, Biernat, & Bucher, 2019; Landa et al., 2019). Landa, Zhou, and Tshotsho (2019, p. 14) shares a case of a particular woman that was raped five times by the same pastor. Even with knowledge of previous abuses by the same man, the woman agreed to go with that pastor to a house without the company of anybody else, this shows the effect of the language of deception and power pastors have on their victims. Heggen (2015, p. 82) Studies of ecumenical groups of clergies have found that 38.6 percent of pastors self-report a sexual involvement they consider inappropriate with members of their congregation. Additionally, 76.5 percent of those surveyed said they knew a fellow pastor colleague who had been sexually involved with a member of their congregation. The silence of about Pastoral as perpetrators makes it difficult for victims to get the help they need and the statistics on victims of abuse in church by pastors is higher than the known.

The paradox of safety between pastors and female congregants

Although culture is said to be dynamic, this dynamism has been slow when it comes to issues of male dominance. The culture is patriarchal in nature and favour males in all spheres of family and non-family life, this culture is seen in the home, religion, school, industry, government. Ushie (2015: 106) states, "Religious programming also binds women into accepting humiliation as if it is the same as the Christian virtue of humbleness". it is the practice of many African Initiated Churches (AICs) that a menstruating woman may not mingle with other congregants due to her 'uncleanliness' caused by the menstrual flow. Heggen (2015, p. 81).

Sexual abuse by a church leader is an egregious violation of professional ethics and a serious misuse of the power of the pastor/teacher role. The resultant trauma for victims affects all aspects of their lives. Churches and their institutions have not consistently responded in appropriate ways to reports of abuse and have too often, by their denial or lack of effective intervention and care, further traumatized victims. Congregations can be places of healing if they believe victims and respond appropriately, if their worship is sensitive to victims, if they provide ongoing accompaniment for victims and those who love them, and if they make a commitment to work diligently to prevent further abuse.

It is common for the Church to deny reports of pastoral misconduct and often blame the victim (Kennedy, 2003; Lind, 2005). Sentilles (2008, p. 17) states, "Women endure sexual harassment, individual discrimination, and systemic discrimination on a regular basis. And yet, when asked, most congregants do not think sexism is a problem in the church." Church leaders can be very articulate when speaking about the Christian message of love, forgiveness, healing, justice, and mercy. Yet in sexual abuse by its their pastors, church leaders and congregants frequently get caught up in protecting the perpetrator and the institution and engaging in behavior that further harms the victims. South Africa is not safe for women, they are not safe at work, and they have been several sexual harassments cases reported by women in the workplace. They are not safe at home; they have been number of cases of women murdered in their own

homes by their intimate partners. This study also argues the safety of women in the hands of male pastors. Phiri (1997) argues that religion got away was tolerate towards domestic violence through naive Biblical interpretations. There is a “Big Man” syndrome. Men are taking control of churches and they are looked upon as men of God. The man is everything in the church and women find themselves abused in the name of “I am protecting you.” De Beer (2007, p. 6) declares that South Africa has been declared as the second most unsafe country out of all forty-eight countries south of the Sahara.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Sexual Assault Investigations

Section Nine of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 guarantees equality before the law and freedom from discrimination to the people of South Africa. This equality right is the first right that is listed in the Bill of Rights. It prohibits both the discrimination by the government and the discrimination by private persons; however, it also allows for affirmative action to be taken to redress the past unfair discrimination. In conditions of social justice, people are equal before the law and they are “not to be discriminated against, nor their welfare and well-being constrained or prejudiced on the basis of gender, sexuality, religion, political affiliations, age, race, belief, disability, location, social class, socioeconomic circumstances, or other characteristic of background or group membership” (Giddings, 2013, p. 44).

However, research indicates that a lack of police interference is a reason for not reporting because the victims that they are not taken seriously, and the process of reporting is tiring (Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018). It is only recently that domestic violence has been considered a violation of the law. The criminal justice system includes a wide range of activities from the investigation of a possible crime to a legal determination of guilt or innocence (Mofokeng, 2018, p. 354). The process of going through the criminal justice system can seem overwhelming at times because there are so many moving pieces and players. Understanding a few key aspects of the process can take away some of the unknowns and help you feel more prepared (Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018; Spohn & Tellis, 2012).

After the initial report is made to law enforcement, a survivor can decide whether they would like to move forward with the investigation, a process referred to as pressing charges. Ultimately, the decision to press criminal charges is up to the state. It’s possible, though uncommon, that a prosecutor may move forward with charges based solely on the available evidence, even if the survivor chooses not to be involved (Spohn & Tellis, 2012). It is argued that criminal justice system the world over, has a long history of not investigating and prosecuting the crime of sexual assault, as <3% of reported assaults result in a conviction (Lonsway & Archambault, 2012; Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018; Spohn, 2020). Victims of sexual assaults consistently describe their experiences reporting to the police as re-traumatizing and hurtful as they endure victim-blaming questions about their credibility, integrity, and character (Kaiser et al., 2017; Magadla, Mofokeng, & Mabunda, 2021; Morabito, Williams, & Pattavina, 2019; Spohn & Tellis, 2012; Venema, 2016). The Justice Management Institute (2015, p. 4) highlights the dilemma of victims:

“Prosecution of sexual violence is unlike prosecution of other crimes. These crimes pose unique challenges for prosecutors and other professionals in the criminal justice system and often involve uniquely vulnerable victims. The crimes themselves how they happen, who commits them, who is victimized are widely misunderstood by those who have not been educated about perpetrator victim dynamics and the behavior of victims in response to the trauma of these devastating crimes is often misconstrued. While many criminal justice professionals have educated themselves about these dynamics and behaviors, the public (including jurors) continue to be influenced by myths and misconceptions. Too often, law enforcement and prosecutors “weed out” the more difficult cases along the way, based on a perception that the cases will prove to be “unwinnable” that the legal and factual challenges are insurmountable. Disappointingly few cases make it to the

courtroom and even fewer result in conviction. Moreover, the problem is self-perpetuating: to the extent that police and prosecutors are not vigorously pursuing more challenging cases, they are not developing and honing the skills necessary to build sexual assault cases that will result in convictions.”

Meanwhile, actual progress on the investigation is so slow or non-existent it “feels like nothing” is being done to investigate the reported crime (Greeson, Campbell, & Fehler-Cabral, 2016, p. 103). This is supported by the study of Felson *et al.* (2002) which states that sometimes the abuser is otherwise well respected or mild mannered, so the victim’s concerns are not taken seriously. Often the abuser is violent only with the victim and frequently concludes that there is something wrong with the victim. Felson *et al.* (2002, p. 618) note that when an abusive partner constantly puts someone down and blames them for the abuse, it can be easy for the victim to believe those statements and think that the abuse is their fault. Sometimes the abuser is otherwise well respected or mild mannered, so the victim’s concerns are not taken seriously. Often the abuser is violent only with the victim and frequently concludes there is something wrong with the victim. Krantz (2002, p. 243) confirms that in cases of emotional abuse, the victims often begin to doubt themselves and second-guess all their decisions. This can prevent them from getting the help they so desperately need. There is a form of emotional abuse known as gas lighting where the victim is manipulated into doubting their own memories of what happened and wondering if they are crazy. Sometimes the victims are even convinced that what is happening is normal, or even their fault (Magadlela *et al.*, 2021).

Victim-shaming is when the victim of abuse is somehow made to feel like they are responsible for their abuse. It prevents people from healing from their trauma because they either do not believe them or imply that they were somehow at fault (Felson *et al.*, 2002, p. 619). It is often difficult for women to admit that they have been abused. They may feel they have done something wrong by becoming involved with an abusive partner (Krantz, 2002, p. 242).

Cultural, gender, physical disability, language barriers and response by the criminal justice system

The traditional gender roles supported by someone’s culture or religion may influence them to stay rather than end the relationship for fear of bringing shame upon their family (World Health Organisation, 2017, p. 55). The Justice Management Institute (The Justice Management Institute, 2015, p. 6) posits that “negative experiences with police or prosecutors discourage many victims from proceeding with the process. Their reports may be viewed with skepticism or outright victim-blaming. Victims may be cross-examined the first time they sit down for an interview or asked to explain themselves and their actions to the satisfaction of the officer or prosecutor.” These women may think that their well-being is connected to the relationship with the Church and spiritual leaders. This dependency could heavily influence their decision to stay in an abusive relationship (Nkwana & Mofokeng, 2018).

Consequently, if a woman is an undocumented immigrant, she may fear that reporting the abuse will affect their immigration status. Also, if their first language is not English, it can be difficult to express the depth of their situation to others (World Health Organisation, 2017, p. 55). Similarly, a victim’s criminal conduct, whether committed around the time of their assault or long prior, particularly arrests for prostitution-related crimes, may be used as a basis to dismiss their allegations, causing further mistrust of the system (The Justice Management Institute, 2015, p. 6). The above statement is supported by Markey, Scott, Daye, and Strom (2021, p. 2), that “sexual assault investigations are unlike other types of criminal investigations, as they involve complex and highly personal and sensitive topics. Victim engagement,

evidence collection and processing, identifying and interviewing suspects and witnesses, and establishing criminal intent, especially in non-stranger cases, are just some of the issues that must be addressed as part of sexual assault investigations, which, compared to other crimes, are less likely to result in arrest.” Such grounds for discounting the victim’s report overlook the fact that perpetrators commonly select victims for their vulnerabilities, which they then exploit. To the extent perpetrators intentionally target “imperfect” victims, justice is foreclosed for those victims and the attackers escape accountability, remaining free to victimize others (The Justice Management Institute, 2015, p. 7). Being vulnerable, according to *Webster’s* means to be “capable of being physically or emotionally wounded; open to attack or damage; assailable.”

There is a positive definition of vulnerability: openness with people we can trust, along with commitment to the Lord and each other. That is not what we are referring to here. The kind of vulnerability we are talking about is the result of a circumstances, relationship, or change that has left us wounded or weary. “Uncertainty reduction claims that people dislike interacting with unpredictable individuals. To reduce the cognitive stress caused by interacting with erratic others, people use interpersonal communication to predict what someone will do in the future and to explain what they have done in the past” (Borton, 2012, p. 401). When one is vulnerable, is when one feels insecure or there is a prevalence of threatened security and the end of a relationship due to an abuse of authority, is one example. If one perceived to be in danger, then one can try to be prepared. It is often not the case where trust is the center that holds the relationship between pastors and female congregants. It becomes even a double blow when the pastor denies any wrongdoing. In a case where the validity of the victim’s statement is challenged in the court of law, the presence and type of physical evidence might swing to victims favor or influences sexual assault case outcomes (Mofokeng & Mathosa, 2019; Morabito et al., 2019). Though, notwithstanding the incredible utility of forensic evidence, including the value of testing sexual assault kits (SAKs) and the hardship victims endure to provide them—reports from across the country reveal that evidence too frequently goes unused (Campbell, Feeney, Fehler-Cabral, Shaw, & Horsford, 2017; Magaddelela et al., 2021; Mofokeng, 2018).

The Justice Management Institute (2015, p. 7) poses relevant and yet subjective questions, “What causes this gap between reports of sexual assault and actual prosecutions? Is law enforcement failing to investigate or refer cases for prosecution? Are officers “exceptionally clearing” these cases based on perceptions about downstream decision-making? Are cases being referred for prosecution but then declined based on inadequate or inaccurately analyzed investigations? Are triable cases being declined for some other reason?” No easy answers to these questions. However, one of the reasons for difficulty in prosecuting sexual immorality in our times, is that our society is still wrong and punishable to steal and murder as compared with sexual assaults or rape, more so by those in position of power. In cases of law, the criminal justice system, it is wrong and punishable to lie. However, it is not so within the Church where those entrusted with power and authority, can lie, and deny any wrongdoing without a blink, despite with the knowledge that God is watching and hates sin. Lack of punishment, especially in cases of sexual assaults or rape, is a strong motivation for clergy or ministers of the Word, to take advantage of the vulnerable. Those who reported cases of sexual assaults whether to the Church Board or choose the traditional process of approaching the courts, are still perceived by society, more so faith community as with less than desirable character or used by the devil to bring the Church into disrepute. They are not viewed and treated in ways that most of us, want to be viewed.

CONCLUSION

Pastoral sexual abuse occurs when one who is in a position of trust or power takes advantage of someone entrusted to his care. Despite number of research done on abuse of women, many still limit it just physical abuse, however sexual harassment can take many forms, including requests for sexual favors, unwelcome sexual advances, or other conduct of a physical, verbal, or visual nature that is unwelcome and offensive. Block (2016, p. 13) highlighted Pastoral sexual misconduct follows a predictable pattern: “

The topic of tax GBV is a very wide topic with many variables and factors that contribute to it. This study was limited only to the impact of GBV between Pastors and female congregants and is limited due to the limited available time, financial and information resources. Further studies can be done on GB at work and among employer and employee and other setups.

The perpetrator grooms the victim, making them feel important and valued. The perpetrator encourages dependence on him or her, so the victim feels they need this person’s help and support. The perpetrator then convinces the victim that they need the victim. They may say that “no one else understands the stress I’m under.” Or they may violate confidentiality, inappropriately telling the victim about church problems or the personal problems of other counselees.

Gradually, the abusive person introduces sexualized behaviors in a way that the victim may interpret as appropriate, such as ending each counseling session with a hug, gradually increasing the intensity of it. Finally, the perpetrator engages in more blatantly abusive behavior with the victim.”

This highlighted Pastoral sexual misconduct can be used to create awareness around abuse of women in the Church by the pastors. However, this might be a challenge to implement when the one who is supposed to take a lead in implementing them is the perpetrators. Through literature review this article challenges theology and the church to break cycle of perpetrators among pastors and for the church to identify what role can pastoral counsellors’ play regarding both victims and offenders to prevent history from repeating itself, so the church can be a safe place for women to seek healing without fear of being victimised by their pastors.

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