
Edidiong Ibanga*
Silvia Diazzi*
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**RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GHANA:
CONCERNS FOR INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT**



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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality has been broadly discussed in recent times, yet its impact on inclusive development remains a subject not commonly considered. This paper aims to seek out and understand the relationship between gender inequality and inclusive development. Our consideration of gender inequality is limited to domestic violence against women. We use the concept of inclusivity here to mean emphasizing the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized people (in this case, women), capacity building to enable the marginalized to use their opportunities, and the redistribution of power to allow for redistribution of resources. The study focuses on Ghana in West Africa and captures the religious elements that inform practices that demonstrate an imbalanced view of the male and female genders. Ghana constitutes a relevant case study given that religion penetrates the way Ghanaians formulate their worldview. Our interest is to look into the impact that religion, Charismatic Christianity in particular, has on domestic violence perpetration. At the same time, this paper does not mean to create a sole critique of religious and cultural interpretations. On the contrary, we seek to identify the opportunity for leaders and authorities to contribute to women's empowerment, as we firmly believe that religion and inclusive development can and must coexist and collaborate for the prosperity of society as a whole.

Keywords: Gender inequality, inclusive development, religion, domestic violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality has become popular within academic discourses in contemporary times. The goal of reducing gender inequality has held a prominent place in international organizations and in national strategy statements. The term inclusive development has also emerged in the 21st century. There is a growing recognition among policymakers in both developed and developing countries that high and persistent levels of inequality pose not only a moral challenge but also can be a source of economic instability and a drag on growth (UNCTAD, 2012). While growth and development are closely associated and often used interchangeably, we have developed a narrow focus, honing in on how gender inequality affects the practice of inclusive development.. For the purpose of this paper, we consider the case of women; however, we acknowledge that other categories of people do indeed experience inequalities and discriminations in various forms. Our decision to study domestic violence against women is based on personal experiences and recurring statistics of violence against women, presented in the media.

Our focus is on domestic violence, and especially, its prevalence within the Ghanaian society. Ghana is an important case study because religion influences almost every aspect of life. It belongs to a geographical area that manifests a high occurrence of physical domestic violence (Campbell, 2002). As reported on the UN Women Count, in 2008 19% of Ghanaians women between 15 and 49 years old had experienced physical or sexual violence episodes by a current or previous partner in the timeframe of 1 year (UN Women Count, 2020). Such information reveals the relevance and priority of analysing the factors lying behind the surface of domestic violence, such as religious and cultural dimensions, which are at the centre of our inquiry.

The questions for consideration are: Does Charismatic Christianity in Ghana reinforce or curb domestic violence towards women? How does this impact the idea and practice of inclusive development in Ghana? Different scholars have presented varied perspectives on these issues, and these are highlighted in this discourse.



2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is built on the framework of the concepts of gender inequality, specifically the issue of domestic violence and inclusive development. Charismatic Christianity is also an important concept, and definitions of these concepts are provided, as well as and their relationship within the context of this study.

2.1 GENDER INEQUALITY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Gender inequality is a violation of human rights and a significant barrier to the social, political and economic development of specific individuals compared to the "dominant ones" since it enables creating hierarchies among genders and marginalisation (UNDP, 2013). Gender equality, as outlined by the WHO, is "the absence of discrimination based on a person's sex in opportunities, the allocation of resources and benefits, or access to services". In this paper, we focus on the concept of gender from the women's perspective, even if we acknowledge that it is a complex and incredibly diverse universe to explore.

Gender equality is recognised formally as a human right; however, it is far from being enforced and embedded as a shared principle. Domestic violence is a major barrier to gender equality and it constitutes a vital scope to concentrate on since it is the most common form of physical or sexual violence that one in three women experiences globally (UN Women, 2020). It is one of the primary barriers of women's opportunities to achieve high well-being levels.

Siemieniuk et al. (2010:763) described domestic violence as a set of behavioural patterns that one person uses to coerce the partner to maintain a position of dominance and control. The mechanisms utilised by the abusive individual include (among many others) "psychological, physical, social, emotional, sexual, and economic" abuses (Siemieniuk et al., 2010:763). Domestic violence is one factor that prevents women's proactive and dynamic participation in society, with tragic consequences on their health and their entire families (UN Women, 2020).



2.1.2 CHARISMATIC CHRISTIANITY

According to Bawa (2019:65), the term Charismatic Christianity refers to those Pentecostal churches that have evolved rapidly in Ghana's religious communities (but also in other African countries) as an alternative theological approach compared to the traditionally established mainstream Christian churches (Bawa, 2019:65).

2.1.3 INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT

Gupta et al. (2015:546) define inclusive development as development that includes marginalized people, sectors and countries in social, political and economic processes for increased human well-being, social and environmental sustainability, and empowerment. They further assert that inclusiveness focuses attention on the poorest (in income), vulnerable (in terms also of age, sex and location) and the most marginalized or disadvantaged people (in terms of caste, sect, creed). It includes a gender-sensitive focus on income and assets, unemployment, broader conceptions of poverty and ill-being and gender inequality, and is non-discriminatory in nature (Gupta et al., 2015:546). It is this gender-sensitive focus that this paper explores.

Inclusive development refers to development with a sense of belonging. It benefits the masses by making them feel valued, empowers them and enables them to participate in the development process. Inclusive development goes against discrimination and exclusion. While some scholars and policymakers interpret inclusive development as helping the poor in a patronizing manner, others argue that it is much more about empowering the poor through rights, creating equal opportunities and ensuring redistributive justice. Thus, inclusive development is about social, environmental and relational inclusiveness, and defines development as enhancing ecological and social well-being rather than as growth (Pouw & McGregor, 2014:2).

3. FINDINGS: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN GHANA

Domestic violence is prevalent in societies worldwide. It is one of the most pervasive human rights violations, denying women equity, security, dignity, equality, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms and self-worth (Ajayi & Soyinka-Airewele, 2018:4097). From the religious perspective, it is essential to understand motivations and reasons behind domestic violence, since religion permeates every aspect of society in Ghana, as observed by Nukunya (2003:55). Therefore, religion has a significant impact on each singular individual.

Takyi & Lamptey (2020:27) opine that it is not only religious doctrines and belief systems that potentially create an environment for DV to occur, but that past research has also linked religion to the social construction of masculinity. Their socialization argument contends that religion provides a similar belief system given its strong emphasis on submissiveness. The emphasis on submissiveness and staying in matrimonial homes, makes it extremely difficult in some cases for highly religious women to leave abusive relationships (Nason-Clark, 2004:305). From their research, they observe that much of the evidence in support of the possible link between religion and DV in Ghana draws on ideologies about male supremacy and domination that permeate religious doctrines, sermons, and practices in the country. For example, some of the teachings and preaching (based on traditional, Christian, and Islamic beliefs) all emphasize that men have the responsibility to discipline their wives when they err—which some Ghanaian men take as “license” to “punish” their partners for a variety of offenses. Findings from their study (Takyi and Mann, 2006) also show men’s attitudes toward abuse, reporting that a significant number of Ghanaian men said it was acceptable to beat their wives under certain conditions: if she went out without telling him, neglected the children, argued with him, refused to have sex with him, and burnt the food. With existing studies indicating that male dominance is a cofactor in the incidence of Intimate Partner Violence, these



scholars assume that religion may have something to do with various forms of DV in Ghana.

Owusu (2016), on the other hand, observes that the role of religious interpretations and how individuals transpose them into their secular lives unquestionably impacts their perceptions and reactions. According to him, the Bible has been read, studied and interpreted in a range of indefinite forms, and constitutes fertile ground for people to find justifications of their behaviours, even when they operate against the respect of human rights. For instance, the Christian Bible is often accused of supporting phallogocentric positions and providing room for interpretation that sees husbands, and in general, men as dominant as compared to women. Owusu (2016) further reports from his research, that women can accept physical, psychological or sexual abuse from their husbands solely because the Lord has blessed their union. Therefore it would be the behaviour of a bad wife to report the actions of her own husband.

There is a trend of underreporting DV in Ghana (Owusu, 2016); it is significant to understand the religious dimension that discourages women who are domestic violence victims from reporting their husbands. The victims' silence becomes itself, a perpetuating mechanism of violence and preservation of the status quo. Practically, episodes often occur in a closed-door environment, which prevents outsiders from being witnesses to what happens. Therefore, victims must be willing to denounce their husbands publicly to stop the violence. The Ghanaian society considers marriage as an achievement and the most meaningful life's purpose for a woman. Unmarried women are often perceived as anomalies (Gyekye, 1996, cited in Owusu, 2016). Therefore, reporting domestic violence and other abuse constitutes a substantial risk that can lead to social marginalisation since independent and single women do not enjoy approval from the community. From the findings of Owusu's (2016), the primary religious dimension behind the acceptance of domestic violence and the refusal to report it to the authorities, especially from women's perspective, is the high regard accorded marriage as an institution, and its consideration as a life goal.





The case of the Charismatic Churches is peculiar when considering approaches to domestic violence in Ghana. In particular, women's responses, views, and reactions to issues of gender equality, women empowerment and women's rights are worthy of consideration. Bawa (2019) takes on a different approach in her consideration of the paradoxical role that the church plays and still upholds in supporting women's independence and empowerment. In her research, Bawa (2019) interviewed Ghanaian women from charismatic churches who considered themselves feminists. One of the participants, for instance, describes how, thanks to her respected position in the church, she has the conditions to advance her activist work and promote gender equality and women empowerment principles (Bawa, 2019:60).

Other findings demonstrate how churches, in their physical and spiritual role for the community, are the environment in which women can self-organise and prepare group activities to acquire the power to act and be more independent (Bawa, 2019:60). Church-related groups are safe spaces where women feel free to gather, act as a group, and find empowerment from their friendships. On a more internal and spiritual level, activists openly explain how their deeply rooted faith and system of personal beliefs help them find the strength to continue their social battles against domestic violence and marginalisation (Bawa, 2019:59).

The participants from Bawa's research, illustrate how they rebel against the patriarchate's mainstream interpretations of gender roles that have been traditionally used to marginalise women with its own weapon, the Bible. The participants describe how they use the Bible to subvert women's oppression and challenge gender inequality common arguments related to men's dominant role and female submissive behavioural duties (Bawa, 2019:58). They biblically rebel against the typical interpretation of scriptures that patriarchal approaches have commonly used to establish men's dominance over women. An example of this biblical subversion is how activists use passages and characters from the Bible and explain how their behaviours are archetypes supporting gender equality and women empowerment cases (Bawa, 2019:61).



Participants blame religious interpretations for the helper role in which mainstream sermons relegate them (Bawa, 2019:61). It represents a supplementary channel for men to perpetuate marginalisation and justify violence. For instance, they suggest reacting to this controversial vision by seeing how biblical teachings fit into the current cultural system in use (Bawa, 2019:61). One participant explains how to interpret the helper's role, not to view the person as a less-important, secondary individual. On the contrary, the fact that someone needs help implies that it is necessary to establish a collaborative partnership to fulfil tasks and community goals (Bawa, 2019:61).

"you don't look down on somebody who is coming to help you because if you need a helper then it presupposes that you can't do the thing on your own, you need that person to reach the goal that you want to attain." (participant's reply from Bawa, 2019:61)

Bawa's research thus identifies the lack of understanding, as well as the impact that the African traditional cultural beliefs have on religious sermons and practices (Bawa, 2019:63).

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, there is abundant evidence that domestic violence exists in the Ghanaian society. While domestic violence, perpetrated in any form, is not the sole preserve of any particular community or society, it is important to note that its impact does indeed have far reaching effects. Inequality, as we have examined in this study, goes against the idea of inclusive development. It presupposes that a particular group of people - in this case, men or males - are more powerful than others, hence resulting in unequal opportunities for participation in development initiatives for women, but also for who does not fit the dominant conception of masculinity. Our findings show that gender inequality seems to be institutionalised and deeply embedded in the religious and cultural fabrics of the Ghanaian society, whether consciously or unintentionally. The impact of domestic violence and gender inequality largely, is multi-dimensional.

When domestic violence is perceived as a normal event in a married couple's life (Adu-Gyamfi E., 2014 cited in Dickson, 2020), it means that at least one or both wife and husband internalised it. The perpetuated DV mechanisms inflict dangerous consequences on the victims, especially on their physical and psychological health. Depression, anxieties and phobias, and many others, are direct consequences of DV (Campbell et al., 2002 cited in Dickson, 2020). The victims' mental and physical instability stands as fertile soil for them to internalise feelings of inferiority. Thus, their marginalisation in society is a direct impact of domestic violence.

Domestic violence does indeed impact inclusive development. It exacerbates gender inequalities in labour market participation and can contribute to widening the gap between what men and women earn. It also has significant economic costs in terms of expenditures on service provision, lost income for women and their families, decreased productivity, and negative impacts on future human capital formation. Studies point to the key role that psychological and emotional abuse, threats of violence, and stalking can play in women's ability to achieve or maintain employment. As stated earlier, the



resultant impact on mental, physical and psychological well being impedes development among women. It limits their chances and the opportunities they engage, if not outrightly hindering them from accessing such opportunities.

There are also second generation costs of domestic violence. This includes the effects on children and impact on human capital formation. Children raised in violent homes mirror these vices or respond in a way that limits their potential or ability to access opportunities for growth and development. Domestic violence against female children, for instance, sets them back in educationally and socially, and places them at a disadvantaged position compared to their male counterparts. There is also the issue of loss of autonomy, confidence and self-esteem; social isolation, premature mortality, as a result of domestic violence. These are all inimical to inclusive development and limits or completely eliminates the chances of women who are victims of acts of violence, whether physical or otherwise (Oliver et al., 2019).

With the need to ensure that development activities are also inclusive, comes the need for a reorientation and education. Perhaps the greater effort of educating the citizens should be focused on the male gender, to ensure that long standing views and beliefs that are misogynistic are rooted out from the minds (and subsequently actions) of the male gender. The reason why this must be treated as important is that religion constitutes a powerful tool for socialization, especially for youths. It contributes to moulding the ideologies and perceptions of children, and grooming them to be adults. Whatever beliefs they hold on to and practice at the age of maturation, is representative of the nature of socialization received from religious institutions, among others. As we have stated earlier, we firmly believe that religion and inclusive development can coexist and collaborate for the prosperity of the society as a whole. Development must be all-inclusive and not discriminatory by reason of gender or other factors. Every person has a role to play in the society, and communal or individual growth and development must not be jeopardized on the basis of gender.





The need for a more equal society cannot be overemphasized. In fact, while one may argue that an absolutely equal and fair society may be difficult to achieve and requires radical systemic changes, we advocate for an active reduction in the prejudices against women. The truth remains that the resultant exclusion of women from development initiatives, especially on the basis of their gender, whether implicitly or explicitly, is myopic and shortsighted. If history is anything to go by, women remain a force to reckon with in any community's advancement and development. The narratives of religion must begin to change, after all, change is the only constant variable in life.

It is essential to understand that solutions need to be local-based, and they need to sparkle from the social values already subsisting in a community. The global issue of gender equality might have (and for sure it does) solutions arising from different factors, which need to be peculiar and relevant to the local realities in which they are applied. This approach to problems refers to sustainability's concept of "think global, act locally".

As reported, religious leaders have great potential to contribute to women's empowerment and spread awareness of domestic violence, its effects on women and their children and how to eliminate it from everyday life (Doku, 2015, cited in Dickson et al., 2020). First of all, women congregate and find strength in each other through activities and groups that they form within the church setting. Secondly, as we focus on charismatic churches, their leaders and authorities can share information on domestic violence's consequences on gender equality and inclusive development.

This paper is not a critique against traditional religious interpretations of the Bible and the gender roles. On the contrary, as relevant research findings suggest, the religious dimension behind endorsement or approval of domestic violence is far more nuanced and multifaceted than common opinions may offer (Forman-Rabinovici, 2017). Although our research limits itself to domestic violence and the religious dimensions that inform the perpetration of domestic violence in Ghana, these are not the only factors to be considered. Religion is one major part of culture and the cultural values that impact society. Culture is made up of many facets; therefore, further research on the





interrelation and reciprocal influence of other layers of culture could be conducted. One significance of this study is its potential to open up other areas for consideration and further research.

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