

Faith-Based Organizations and Gender-Based Violence: Towards an Understanding of Workable Measures

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ABSTRACT

The study explores the role played by Faith-Based Organizations in curbing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) through their influential basis pegged on faith and community values. Structural functionalism theory guided this research. The paper deployed a qualitative library-based research approach to review and synthesis existing literature on the role of Faith-Based Organizations in curbing Gender-Based Violence. The analysis established that FBOs can help mitigate GBV through offering support services, theological reflections and reforms, collaboration with other agencies of interest and engagement of boys and men in various gender programs. The study thus concludes that FBOs should take an active role in disseminating their duties as they hold a distinctive position of influence in the community which can amply the fight against GBV. The study, thus, recommends that deliberate efforts by the government and other well-wishers should be put in place to help strengthen FBOs in fighting GBVs through a coordinated and collaborated approach. Finally, the leadership of various churches should question the doctrinal background against Gender-based violence and see how to harmonize the two, which seem to be working against each other.

Keywords: Collaboration, Faith-Based Organizations, Gender-Based Violence, Theological Reforms

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any form of violence, harm, or discrimination directed at individuals based on their gender or perceived gender identity. Though it can affect men too, GBV is a pervasive and deeply ingrained issue that disproportionately affects women and individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms. Having a wide scope, GBV encompasses various forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence and exemplified by domestic violence, sexual assault, female trafficking, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, cyber harassment, honor killings, economic abuse, and street harassment (Russo & Pirlott, 2006). GBV is a violation of human rights with serious physical, psychological, and social consequences for survivors, requiring concerted efforts from various actors like Faith-based Organizations, government, justice institutions, and activists to combat it and promote gender equality (Terry, 2007).

Unlike other issues normally affecting developing nations, GBV has equally been deemed an issue of concern in developed countries like America and Europe (Pulido et al., 2021). Statistics indicate that in the United States, 17% of women experience rape or attempted rape. Additionally, 1 out of 5 women go through abuse from their partners in various forms. Similarly, in England, reports of women being harassed at the workplace, sexually assaulted, and domestically mistreated continue to rise. However, one of the takeaway points in developed nations is the law governing GBV, which, in its capacity, has helped to control the cases that may be otherwise very high (Sande, 2019).

African region, a region where the maturity and functionality of the rule of law is still growing, has experienced challenges in GBV emanating from the causes experienced on the global scale and uniquely culture. The culture of most of the African nations even though subsiding, still puts women in a compromised state of affairs. Among the culturally related factors putting women in a compromising state include male mobility, forced marriages, patriarchal structures, and female genital mutilation. These, among other interplay of complex factors, define why cases of GBV in Africa continue to increase at an alarming rate (Parkers et al., 2016).

Going by statistics, in Zimbabwe, 1 out of 3 women in the age bracket of 15-49 is said to have gone through a form of physical violence and 1 out of 4 women experienced sexual violence. In yet another finding, on average, 114 rape cases are reported daily in South Africa to police (Wamue-Ngare et al., 2023). Still, in Ghana, more than 109,000 cases of violence against women were reported in 2010, and at least 33.6% of women in Ghana experienced domestic

violence. Such statistics have caught the eye of the African Union (AU), which is working tirelessly alongside other players to see the situation curbed (Chauke, 2021).

Kenya, like other nations of the world, is no exception regarding GBV. Statics on GBV indicate that 39%-47% of women in Kenya experience GBV-related cases. This area has attracted concerted efforts in research to unearth and curb various forms of GBV as the scope is wide (Victor, 2016). To a great extent, traditional culture in Kenya has contributed to the perpetuation of GBV. For instance, in Maasai culture, traditional GBV is practiced very often. One of the types of traditional GBV leading the line is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Similarly, cases of sexual GBV are rampant, as exemplified by rape cases. In the year 2018, the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) indicated that over 200 people had suffered sexual assault in nine (9) counties according to the reports they received, implying that the number could be even higher if the survey is carried out (Sande, 2019). Research has focused on the causes of GBV in Kenya, and most of the findings mirror the general causes from a global perspective. Various causes of GBV in Kenya point to a number of factors, including financial insecurity, personality and psychiatric problems, alcohol and drug abuse, societal disorders, cultural factors, historical factors, and relationship-related issues (Meehan, 2021).

Perceived as a social issue, a call for social institutions to up their involvement and concern is getting louder day by day. Social institutions have an upper hand as they interact, share, and, by extension, offer help services to the GBV victims, hence giving them firsthand experience. For instance, Faith-based organizations have been perceived to be among the leading social institutions that deal with societal issues on a daily basis, including GBV. Within their mandated operations, victims and perpetrators of GBV all find themselves within the FBO circle, either seeking spiritual or physical interventions. In this regard, therefore, FBOs are deemed as one of the key pillars in the fight against GBV (Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

However, debates on the role of FBOs in the fight against GBV have taken center stage at equal measures in that some FBOs are perceived to be promoting or concealing what they ought to mitigate. Based on some doctrinal issues, inter alia, the place of a woman in marriage, family, and society and the role of a woman within religious duties have been deemed to promote GBV more as opposed to promoting gender balance and the rights of women. Additionally, existing literature on the subject in context lacks a compact analysis of various approaches that FBOs have instituted to curb GBV. Based on these two arguments, there is a need for a study to be done to fill the gap, hence the current study.

1.2 Research Objective

To explore the workable measures deployed by Faith-Based Organizations in curbing Gender-Based Violence.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

Structural functionalism is a sociology theory that puts its emphasis on the aspect of integration and interdependence of various structures or institutions of the society. The theory was first proposed by Emile Durkheim 1958-1917 and advanced by various scholars, including Talcott Parsons between 1902 and 1979 and Robert Merton between 1910-2003, all three being sociologists (Brouer, 2014). The theory is pegged upon the fact that social order, survivability, and stability can be realized through strengthened relationships among societal institutions like family, education, government, region, and organizations, which perform various functions that focus on a common goal. The theory portrays society as a system whose structures are interconnected and provide rules, principles, guidelines, and values that the society tends to reflect upon as a mirror for its operation.

Gender-based violence is a societal phenomenon that calls upon various structures within the society to come together and work towards the common good of curbing the phenomenon. Functionalists argue that the FBO have what it takes to disseminate their duties of shaping social norms, attitudes, behaviors, and vices that are gender related to bringing sanity to society. However, FBOs, on the one hand, have been lauded for having worked its steps toward dealing with the issue of gender-based violence. On the other hand, some issues within the FBOs still lead to the conclusion that the church has contributed to the aspect of gender-based violence implying both functional and dysfunction as depicted by structural functional theory. In the context of the current study, Structural functionalism theory structural functionalism theory dives into both the functional and dysfunction of FBOs in curbing GBV.

2.2 Empirical Review

Various scholars, when trying to explain or define what faith-based organization is, agree on some aspects and likewise differ in some, hence leaving no acceptable definition. However, the term has mostly been used to refer to

organizations or religious institutions influenced by faith or emanating from faith-related foundations. Given that they serve diversely, they may operate as a church, a mosque, a temple, or a nonprofit organization outside the three aforementioned religious outfits but roots and affirmations are based on them. Therefore, the aspect of being rooted in a given faith gives FBOs a value-based aura that separates them from other non-profit organizations (Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017).

Most of the people in the world belong to faith-based organizations of their choice, given that 80% of the world's population claims to have a religious affiliation or belief in some kind of religion. One of the unique characteristics of faith-based organizations is that they are treated with some sought of reverence given that they are religious, as most people point their faith to God or "god" whom they revere. Generally, FBOs serve society both locally and internationally through charitable work and aids, sharing of faith-based tenets, advocating for justice, equality, and peace, deepening relationships, and reconciliation of various cases of conflict (Wamue-Ngare et al., 2023).

When dealing with the issue of gender-based violence, it is imperative to take into consideration the fact that most of the perpetrators and even victors belong to a certain religion or rather faith. This is true given at least 80% of the world population claims to be attached to a religion or certain faith. In this regard, one keeps asking himself/herself whether or not religion has a role to play in the fight against gender-based violence, a phenomenon that is on the rise (Chirongoma et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the efforts put in by various religious leaders in curbing gender-based violence are commendable despite various background differences. It is indeed true to accept that when various religious leaders come together, the network they form brings on board various ideas that can be discussed and implemented for change. Religion has been deemed to be more of a spiritual and social endeavor, hence proving a point on why it is a major player in the fight against gender-based violence, especially when religious differences are set aside. Today, it is easy to see Muslims, Christians and members of other religions like Indigenous African Religion sitting at the same table to discuss gender-based violence (Chirongoma et al., 2022).

For instance, in the USA, the Interfaith Coalition Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is a national interfaith coalition that has done a commendable job in the fight against gender-based violence comprising of Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Bahai faith backgrounds. The coalition brings together over 38 national faith organizations to advocate for the recognition of gender-based violence as a societal issue by the government and taking the necessary steps towards curbing it (Pulido et al., 2021). One of the areas that the organization has been so successful in helping in national legislation and enacting policies that endeavor the fight against GBV. Additionally, the government has recognized the organization through its initiatives, such as conducting societal awareness briefings and sponsoring gender-based events. The organization is motivated by the fact that most victims of gender-based violence end up seeking help from houses of worship besides seeking help from the government. As a result, a proper linkage between the government and the church on matters of GBV is to be established to help the victims hence the coalition (McLeigh & Taylor, 2020).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study deployed a qualitative library-based research design where secondary sources relating to the concepts in context were extensively reviewed. These sources include books, peer-reviewed journals, existing case studies and government and NGOs reports relating to aspects of FBOs and GBV. This approach was considered by the researcher due to its ability to synthesize and analyze the available knowledge on the role played by FBOs in mitigating GBV, hence putting into perspective the subject matter.

To achieve the desired results, the researcher selected sources to be reviewed depending on relevance to the concepts, credibility and the objective in context. However, the study excluded outdated literature as it did not consider more than 15 years of sources. The data collected from various sources was systematically analyzed through the thematic analysis technique. During the analysis, themes were identified grounded on recurring concepts within the literature and analyzed in relation to their contribution to addressing the GBV phenomenon.

This, therefore, resulted in a coherent narrative that highlighted various strategies that have proved to work as FBOs endeavor to mitigate GBV. While this approach is imperative and relevant to the study as it offers a broader perspective of existing literature, it is worth noting that it presents a critical limitation, too. The limitation emanates from its inability to incorporate primary data, which would offer more insights into the matter at hand, an aspect that future research should consider.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Combating Gender-Based Violence and Promoting Gender Equality

It is within the domain of various religious communities to deal effectively with the issue of gender-based violence as it does not only portray the spirit of progress but also the spirit of goodwill. To date, most religious organizations, in many aspects, still render women powerless in some positions, which solicit discussions on what really

gender roles in society are about women (Victor, 2016). In such a context where women have been deemed unequal to men, a change in propagating gender-based violence has not only been achieved, but also the aspect of fighting GBV has been compromised (Ademiluka, 2018). The current study's findings are organized thematically to highlight the measures the FBOs are implementing to curb GBV. The approach for thematization of the measures was used to provide a clear framework for understanding the measures.

However, Faith-based organizations have emerged as influential actors in curbing gender-based violence (GBV), contributing to broader efforts to promote gender equality and foster safer communities for women. These organizations, rooted in religious values and principles, harness their unique capacities to address the underlying causes of GBV, provide support to survivors, challenge harmful social norms, and champion women's rights in various ways (Ademiluka, 2018).

4.2 Coordination and Collaboration with Other Agencies

The fight against gender-based violence is not an issue that can be achieved with one institution but requires efforts from different parties of concern. It is worth noting that collaboration that is done between FBOs and other organizations brings to the table a myriad of benefits to the survivors of GBV. Specialized knowledge when dealing with various issues of concern in combating GBV is required, some of which may not be at the disposal of members within an FBO. This collaboration implies that FBOs have knowledge of their shortcomings in areas like law enforcement, healthcare, resources, and spiritual attention, emotional and psychological services, which can only be achieved through a multi-sectorial working strategy.

Law and order enforcement agencies, human rights movements, activists and other non-governmental organizations all play an imperative role in the fight against gender-based violence in society. As Kamwengo and Magasu (2021) opine, success in fighting gender-based violence is based on the efforts of faith-based organizations working hand in hand with law enforcement agencies and other organizations of goodwill. They further argue that FBOs have what it takes to bring together various agencies and organizations to strengthen their efforts in dealing with issues of gender-based violence.

Manzanga (2020) puts across the fact that the church as an FBO can engage government officers, human rights activists and other organizations in carrying out campaigns against gender-based violence in society. Through creating workshops, conferences and other meetings, the church can enhance its operation in dealing with GBV by soliciting financial and human resources from other interested parties and the government. For instance, Imarisha, an FBO in Nairobi County, has worked hand in hand with other organizations to provide support services to the victims of gender-based violence. In 2017-2020, Imarisha reached over 130 women who had undergone various challenges relating to GBV and helped 27 victims get justice from the judicial wing of the government. The organization works with other churches, women's groups, and local administration for referrals of victims, after which they disseminate resources, they get from other supporting organizations and individuals to help the victims on the right course of action (McInn, 2016).

4.3 Creating Awareness and Educating the Public

Talking about GBV requires a platform with an audience that can listen and understand the case being presented. Faith-based organizations always have this kind of platform to use spiritual influence to create awareness and educate their congregants on various issues about GBV. In a study conducted by Le Roux and Brower-Due (2017), the importance of FBOs in using their platforms to create awareness and educate their followers is discussed, emphasizing that the leaders in various FBOs have a voice over their followers.

Musodza (2015) posit that victims and perpetrators of GBV are members of various religious institutions, and reaching almost each one of them in such a setting for awareness and education on GBV is easier and more convenient. It is through awareness that the unknown factors like causes and effects of GBV can be discussed to enlighten the public, who, in most cases may not be fully aware of GBV as a societal phenomenon. Le Roux and Bowers-Du Toit (2017) reported that the perception of various victims and perpetrators of GBV in society can be easily changed through the faith approach, which will not only prevent the occurrence of such cases but also help the victims to come out of their hiding and seek necessary help.

Meehan (2021) reasons that the church's voice in creating awareness and educating the public on GBV impacts the response of other players like government agencies and non-governmental organizations like human rights organizations and other social institutions on matters GBV. Victor (2016) supports the Meehan argument. He adds that through the FBO's initiatives, like encouraging the victims to come out and speak out on societal ills, various dysfunctions of relevant institutions are clearly put across, hence, calling them to order as required both by law and societal moral standing.

As Musodza (2015) reiterate, FBOs' action through awareness and education on matters of GBV goes a long way in helping the victims break their silence. Gender-based violence has long thrived in an environment characterized by secrecy, shame, and trauma, a culture that ought to be broken. As Brouer (2014) posits, building on such organizations

can bring together individuals who can create a platform that can be used to discourage secrecy and shame and heal trauma through sessions that encourage sharing and opening up on various GBV experiences that one might have gone through.

Furthermore, the FBOs, through creating awareness and educating the public on GBV matters, help the victims understand and get relevant financial and psychological aid. Most funders are encouraged to fund victims of gender-based violence through organizations like FBOs. For instance, various FBOs have been geared towards creating awareness and educating society on various issues of GBV, inter alia, World Vision, Islamic Relief Worldwide, Tear Fund and Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network have been at the forefront in helping the victims with financial, material and psychological support at the same time (Sande, 2019).

4.4 Provision of Support Services to the Victims

Faith-based Organisations play an important role in ensuring that the survivors and victims of gender-based violence get proper support services. In the first place, the places of worship can provide a safe and welcoming space for the victims and survivors of GBV who sometimes lack somewhere to run to. Places of worship that are well established or any other FBO can designate specific areas within the church buildings to accommodate victims of gender-based violence who may not have where to run to in case of problems. Additionally, FBOs may collaborate with local organizations that specialize in offering support services to direct the victims through the safety and recuperation process, which takes time and requires resources. Specifically, the collaboration can see services like medical services, shelter and legal aid provided for victims or survivors. Still, the church can also help relay their grievances, which they are mostly shy to share, to the relevant agencies for action to be taken for the perpetrators (Mombo & Joziase, 2022).

Gender-based violence survivors require proper mental and psychological care but may be inhibited by a lack of knowledge and resources to get the services. However, with the involvement of FBOs, survivors of GBV can get counseling and emotional support to ensure that they heal and move on with life. Given that the church has a pool of resourceful people which may include counselors, voluntary deployment of skills and expertise ensures that the GBV survivors get proper psychological and emotional care through counseling services. Additionally, the clergy, given their expertise in dealing with different issues that emanate within their congregation, may play an important role in ensuring GBV survivors get the best emotional and psychological care through pastoral counseling services. Just as Mclinn (2016) posits, “pastors and servants of God are not just there to take people to heaven only, they are also vessels that God uses to better people's lives spiritually, psychologically, emotionally and physically so that His people may be sober as they walk through the narrow path full of tribulations.”

Furthermore, the church may come in and help curb gender-based violence through advocacy and empowerment of the victims. Churches can work hand in hand with the relevant bodies to enact policies and legislation that aim at protecting the victims and defining the course of action for the perpetrators. Only through church platforms and humanitarian organizations can the voices of the oppressed be heard in society (Meehan, 2021). FBOs, especially the church, can be at the forefront in partnering with humanitarian organizations to advocate for gender equality in society to save women from suffering GBV at home, in the workplace, and in religious institutions. In addition to policies and legislation, FBOs can also come up with various programs that aim at enhancing the livelihoods of victims and women who are preyed upon by GBV predators. By joining forces with other interested parties, FBOs can run skills development programs to help vulnerable women and victims make their own money to sustain their livelihoods and those of their dependents (Mclinn, 2016).

4.5 Theological and Doctrinal Reflection and Reforms

Studies indicate that gender-based violence occurs even in the church and, worse still, at the pulpit that is otherwise deemed holy and sacred (Chirongoma et al., 2022; Sande, 2019 & Manzanga, 2020). One of the major issues that have caused religious institutions to be criticized in the fight against GBV is theological and doctrinal affiliated matters. Wrong theology and doctrine, which may be rooted in patriarchal texts, can significantly contribute to the perpetuation of GBV (Mombo & Joziase, 2022). Though denominations differ on various theological and doctrinal issues, most agree on the issue of male dominance concerning religious duties. In the real sense, they practice control over women, fostering an environment in which abusive behaviour can thrive. This inaccurate theology may ratify harmful gender stereotypes and injustice in matters of power and cause women suppression which eventually creates a ground for GBV to thrive. There ought to be deliberate efforts to counter and challenge these misinterpretations by promoting a more inclusive, open, and compassionate understanding of religious fundamentals, emphasizing equality and dignity of every human being, regardless of gender, and denouncing any form of violence or discrimination (Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017).

Faith-based organizations can champion women's rights in the church by advocating for theological and doctrinal reflection and reforms on practices that tend to put women in GBV situations. Even though church teachings are centered on the Christian faith, syncretism seems to be in the driving seat, especially in the case of the African

church, which is marred with both cultural issues and faith. The two are intertwined in some regions and cultural norms have become part of the guidelines that guide what women say, do and how to act (Chauke, 2021). Theological reflections and reforms will not only be effective in helping the victims within the church walls but also become a voice to the society at large.

One of the approaches that the church can use to approach theological reflection and reforms is ensuring that they have a policy that encourages preachers to incorporate gender-based information in their summons. Additionally, some churches that hold on to a patriarchal approach to leadership can revise their thresholds and allow women to serve in various designations (Ah Siu-Maliko, 2016). As mentioned earlier, some of the foundational issues in leadership and ministerial roles in the church are pegged on the church leaning too much on what the culture of the land dictates. Even though most churches have more women than men numerically, most of the leadership positions are held by men and church rituals. As the world continues to evolve, it is high time the church reconsiders its position on women's ministry in the church by rewiring the theological dictates to accommodate women, so that it can lead by example on the war against GBV.

4.6 Engaging Boys and Men in Campaigns against Gender-Based Violence

One of the mistakes made by various agencies that deal with issues related to gender-based violence is focusing so much on the victims and failing to mount a campaign and strategies that will help reach out to boys and men, the perpetrators of violence against women. In recent days, cases of GBV have escalated because some of the perpetrators may not be fully aware that whatever they engage in is wrong and may leave a painful experience for the victims or ruin their lives completely. Faith-based organizations can help curb cases of GBV by engaging boys and men on various topical issues of GBV (Chauke, 2021). The church can encourage male leaders in the church to act as role models to the subjects they lead. Such an approach would be ideal to instill values of empathy, equality and non-violence and encourage them to engage in healthy relationships. Sexual violence may be rampant today because of what the youth watch on social media and the internet. Therefore, mentorship programs must be carried out on the boy child to help him understand his boundaries when dealing with girls or women (Parkers et al., 2016).

Faith-based organizations can also engage boys and men to be at the forefront of confronting GBV, help out the victims where necessary instead of stigmatizing them, and encourage them to become ambassadors of good behavior in society. In addition, men and youth must be engaged in training and teachings that help them understand the value of women in society and not just be looked upon as vessels to be used by men for various masculine interests. Research indicates that faith can convict individuals of their mistakes and bring them to real repentance or turn around (Chauke, 2021). Along the same lines, faith can impact someone's behavior and attitude to reflect on issues positively. This implies that FBOs can lean on the potential embedded in faith to drive the agenda of change of behavior and perception towards women, especially with specific topics of discussion that touch the gender issues. When all these are done, the FBOs can greatly impact curbing GBV before it occurs, reducing the number of cases resulting from GBV-related occurrences (Parkers et al., 2016).

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

It is essential to acknowledge that the effectiveness of FBOs in fighting GBV can vary. Some may be more progressive and committed to addressing GBV, while others may hold conservative views that inadvertently perpetuate harmful gender norms. Therefore, it is crucial to encourage FBOs to adopt a holistic, victim-centered, and rights-based approach to addressing GBV. Faith-based organizations have a vital role to play in the fight against Gender-Based Violence. Their unique position within communities, moral authority, and potential to promote positive change make them valuable partners in the broader effort to eliminate GBV and create a more just and equitable society. However, their involvement should be guided by a commitment to gender equality, human rights and a victim-centered approach to ensure the most effective contribution to this critical cause.

5.2 Recommendations

It is in light of the findings of the reviewed literature that the current study recommends that deliberate efforts by the government and other well-wishers should be put in place to help strengthen FBOs in fighting GBVs through a coordinated and collaborated approach. Finally, the leadership of various churches should question the doctrinal background against Gender-based violence and see how to harmonize the two, which seem to be working against each other.



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