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Breaking chains: The impact of Pentecostalism on culture and gender-based violence in Rushinga, Zimbabwe

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Background: In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence remains a pressing challenge deeply rooted in historical, cultural and socio-economic factors. Traditional beliefs about gender roles and patriarchal structures continue to perpetuate violence against women and marginalised groups.

Aim: The study aims to explore the complex interplay between Pentecostal beliefs and cultural dynamics in addressing gender-based violence (GBV).

Setting: The study investigates whether Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) challenges or alters existing beliefs and cultural practices related to gender roles and addresses issues of violence against women. It assesses how Pentecostalism interacts with local perceptions and cultural practices surrounding GBV.

Methods: The study employs a womanist theological approach that focuses on the experiences and struggles of black women, emphasising the intersectionality of gender and class while also addressing cultural contexts. Focusing on the role of ZAOGA, one of the prominent Pentecostal churches in Rushinga, this research utilises desktop analysis methods and published sources to gather information.

Results: The study results in insights into how Pentecostalism influences cultural norms surrounding gender roles and violence, empowers women and alters community attitudes towards gender-based violence. Additionally, it provides recommendations for policymakers on collaborating with religious communities to address gender-based violence effectively.

Conclusion: This study concludes that the church integrates gender-sensitive teachings and practices into its activities and programmes to promote a culture of respect and equality. Lastly, the church is reminded to be concerned about the welfare of women and to stop harmful traditional rituals and replace them with the church's rites rather than allowing them to operate side by side.

Contribution: Overall, this work aims to contribute to broader discussions on religious influence in societal dynamics and the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: breaking chains; culture; gender-based violence; Pentecostalism; Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Although the government of Zimbabwe enacted the *Domestic Violence Act* in 2007 to protect women against gender-based violence (GBV), such violence continues to happen. The legislation was enacted nearly two decades ago, yet GBV is still a major problem in Zimbabwe today. Monitoring by the World Health Organization (WHO) has indicated that women continue to suffer because of the abuse imposed on them (WHO 2013). Although the rate at which it occurs in Zimbabwe looks concerning, the report demonstrates that this condition is neither new nor unique to Zimbabwe (WHO 2013). With a 56% incidence rate, Rushinga has the highest percentage of GBV incidents among Zimbabwe's 10 provinces (Mrewa 2022). According to police records, females are being mistreated due to their gender (Mrewa 2022). The United Nations (UN) Women Global Database on 'Violence against Women' confirms the current situation in Zimbabwe. According to the database, 37.6% of women in Zimbabwe have experienced physical violence at some point in their lives, while 19.9% have experienced sexual intimate abuse (UN Women 2016). Cultural conceptions of what it means to be a woman versus a man are the root cause of these statistics.

Pentecostalism has emerged as a significant force in the cultural setting of contemporary Zimbabwe. This vibrant religious movement not only offers spiritual sustenance to its followers, but also engages with complex social issues, including GBV. Women are suppressed by almost every religion in the world; the only distinction is the severity of this suppression. Maseno (2021) is of the view that the doctrine of each African church determines the many ways in which women are suppressed. Some African men interpret the Bible's creation of man as an excuse to mistreat women, and patriarchal relations lead to the inability to relate to the cries of the underprivileged and downtrodden (Maseno 2021). As the Rushinga community grapples with deeply entrenched norms and practices, the influence of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) beliefs and values brings both challenges and opportunities for change. This study explores how this faith not only shapes individual lives, but also redefines cultural narratives around gender. Thus, this study, using a womanist theological approach, explores traditional and cultural practices that exacerbate violence towards women. Tarugarira and Moyo (2020) aptly remark:

> Religion has historically played a significant role in the suppression of women in society; nonetheless, it has also been a critical universal source for the feminist and womanist movement and other social and political movements advocating for human rights. (p. 2)

Thus, the study investigates the influence of ZAOGA towards the issues of culture and GBV, and weigh if the church perpetuates or challenges the cultural and traditional practices that are against women in Rushinga.

History of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa

Known as Forward in Faith Ministries International a prominent Pentecostal denomination in Zimbabwe, founded by Ezekiel Guti in the 1960s. The church was formed by a prayer band of youths that broke away from the Apostolic Faith Mission in 1956, and Ezekiel Guti became the prominent leader of this group (Biri 2018). Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa became known for its commitment to the 'undiluted gospel', emphasising biblical teachings and a hands-on approach to evangelism. The church has played a significant role in shaping the spiritual and cultural landscape of Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas like Rushinga. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa's teachings provide a transformative lens through which its members can navigate cultural practices and confront issues such as GBV. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa emerged during a time of social and political upheaval in Zimbabwe, capitalising on the need for spiritual rejuvenation and hope among the local population. The church focuses on personal salvation, healing and empowerment through the Holy Spirit, which resonates strongly with individuals seeking relief from socio-economic challenges (Maringwa 2025).

Guti's dedication to prayer and his vision for a global ministry led to the establishment of Forward in Faith Ministries International (FIFMI), also called ZAOGA, in Southern Africa (FIFMI.ORG). Throughout the ensuing decades, the church gained momentum, emphasising the importance of a transformative spiritual experience akin to that of Pentecost. By the time of Guti's passing on 05 July, 2023, at the age of 100, ZAOGA had grown exponentially, establishing a presence in over 175 countries worldwide. The organisation is known for its unwavering commitment to the original theological foundations laid by its founder, promoting unity, love and a steadfast doctrine among its followers. Today, ZAOGA continues to uphold Guti's legacy, focusing on discipleship and practical ministry while remaining grounded in the teachings that defined its inception (Mawire 2025).

Theoretical framework

This study is informed by Womanist theology, which centres on the experiences and voices of black women (Phillips 2006), which is essential for comprehending Zimbabwe's unique cultural and gender dynamics. This perspective makes it possible to analyse how gender and class connect, which is essential for understanding the intricacies of GBV in a Pentecostal setting. Womanist theology highlights the spiritual lives of black women and often draws on African American religious traditions, emphasising the role of faith in social activism. Womanist theology advocates for social change, aims to confront structural inequities and advance equity for all marginalised groups (Mitchem 2014). It seeks to empower and elevate women by appreciating their perspectives and experiences in theological debates as well as more general social discussions.

Thus, it places a strong emphasis on the fight for freedom from oppressive systems. The goals of Pentecostal movements, which frequently aim to promote social transformation and spiritual healing, are in line with this emphasis. Using this approach, this article investigates how ZAOGA either perpetuates or challenges patriarchal norms and GBV in the Rushinga community. The womanist theological perspective speaks to the hearts of all oppressed black women; it is way closer to home, thus making it the best model to use in this study. This theory uncovers and evaluates those aspects of African culture that are not life-sustaining to women and regains those facets that give life to women. This is supported by Le Roux (2012), who said womanist theology is a gendered approach to theology that acknowledges that people construct culture and that our cultural practices or the cultural practices in the Bible, should, therefore, not be confused with the will of God (Le Roux 2012).

The theoretical framework used is justified on the basis that the available literature indicates that the majority of women in Rushinga are exploited and mistreated as a result of cultural and traditional views that minimise gender differences, women's concerns and ultimately lead to GBV. Consequently, this justifies the application of a womanist theology perspective to investigate the oppression

of women and offer strategies for their liberation. Furthermore, this study aims to give a wake-up call to women that they need to resist traditional practices that hinder their progress. This article focuses much on women's struggle with culture, religion and patriarchy, and the church's take on such issues. The article also considers the womanist interpretation of the Bible, how the Bible speaks to them and their experiences. Due to these struggles, Oduyoye (2001), Kanyoro (2002) and Dube and Kanyoro (eds. 2004) have developed theories that address women's experiences. These women theologians critique how culture and the Bible have been used as oppressive tools among African women.

Methods

This study employs desktop analysis methods and published sources to gather information and relies on material related to women who were marginalised by cultural norms, and ZAOGA's role in either perpetuating or challenging GBV and culture. The study makes use of documents from websites, books, libraries and data from surveys carried out. The study aims to understand the complexities women go through in the name of culture and religion, which then cultivate into GBV, and is dedicated to addressing these issues. It recognises the diverse experiences of Zimbabwean women traversing culture and GBV.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Review findings

Acts 12:7b says: '"Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists.' From this discussion, the main issue is to analyse whether the church is doing what the Angel of God did to Peter, to rescue him from the chains that tied him. The article explores the teachings of ZAOGA on women, culture, GBV issues and analyses whether the church propagates or condemns violence in its teachings. *Is ZAOGA 'breaking the chains' that 'tie' women? Is it setting free those in bondage to cultural practices and GBV?* This is explained below. As indicated previously, the church is viewed as a double-edged sword; this article highlights this in two categories.

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa as perpetuating cultural practices and gender-based violence

Violence is like the proverbial elephant in the room because the church knows what is going on in the community but pretends and attempts to be unaware of it (Testa et al. 2012). By so doing, it is letting the community down. It shows that there are significant difficulties faced by women in the Rushinga community, and church leaders are not doing much to address the issue. The situation on the ground and earlier research indicate that churches could be complicit in GBV matters. In linking what is happening in the church to the rest of the community, it should be noted that the Christian community is not only in the society where GBV is rampant, but it is also a participant in some cases (Le Roux 2012). There are despicable cases of GBV within the church that have come to be expected or treated as standard (Oliver 2011; Ushe 2015). This researcher agrees with Ushe and Oliver that some abusive practices are now taken to be expected even in churches because leaders have designed a tradition where women know that 'this is men's things, that is not for us'. Women have also developed a culture of accepting that men have the final say in matters affecting the church and at home; women will listen and not contribute. Testa et al. (2012) avers that although the church has rejected some cultural practices that undermine gender equality, it has also imposed measures of gender oppression that still make it difficult to achieve gender equality within its ranks.

According to Christianity, a woman was made from Adam rather than from the dust of the earth, as noted by Acker (1987). The author recognises that there are no limits to the oppression of women, whether it occurs in the secular or religious spheres. Grady (2006:67) warns that churches should guard against telling women lies, such as that God created women as inferior beings, destined to serve their husbands, or that God made a helper and helpers are subordinate to the ones they help. These are cultural biases, not spiritual or scientific principles. The church should assist in and should be the first to acknowledge that women are not what society says they are; they are image bearers of God and possess an inherent dignity because of that (Grady 2006:67). Grady quotes a well-known theologian, Fiorenza (2021) who passionately summarises: 'Women are not ladies [*to serve men*], wives [*to bear children*], handmaids, seductresses, or bears of burden but full citizens'. First of all, the church cannot be silent or accept the unequal treatment of persons based on their sex in any form, including unequal treatment in the economic sphere of life (Grady 2006).

Mouton et al. (eds. 2015) argue that the church as an institution should not only participate in public, political and economic discourse but should support and encourage its members to do so well, collectively or individually, at work, at school or wherever people are discriminated against or when injustice is done. Le Roux (2012), like Manyonganise (2015), argues that it is the church's responsibility to liberate women from unjust experiences they go through in the community. The church is a critically important agent in achieving a society in which women's equality and dignity are recognised. Hendriks (2012) is of the view that the church has to identify and side with women, not only to improve the situation of women, but also because it is their Christian duty to be in solidarity with those who are in pain. Some churches are preaching and teaching in various ways that support gender-discriminatory and violent practices. The church is called to listen to the stories told by women, of their experiences of abuse and

pain, of the struggles women go through and how these can be made public to bring positive change. It appears that the Church is contributing to the pain that women already experience in their homes by downgrading the status of women when preaching.

Biri (2015) contends that Pentecostal doctrine upholds the conventional division of cultural roles. Their comprehension, attitude, reading and interpretation of sacred texts all play a role in this. Since women are typically assigned household duties, the majority of African religions are patriarchal in nature. As a result, even if they are aware that the traditional roles and functions of women are oppressive, many women limit themselves out of fear of social rejection for questioning them. The language of ZAOGA is derived from traditional oral Shona literature (Chitando 2013), which is in the form of proverbs, folktales and poems that often serve to socialise girls for a life of passiveness, reinforcing patriarchal norms. These literary genres restrict women's ability to make decisions about their marriages, encourage subservience, diminish their self-worth and reinforce social shame. Additionally, it explains texts using symbols that are frequently utilised by the Shona.

Biri (2015) argues that Shona traditional culture, which is also expressed in the Bible, is the basis of patriarchal views prevalent in Pentecostal groups like ZAOGA. Women are disempowered or dismembered by such ideas, which also foster attitudes that support GBV and its complications. In one of her works, Biri views the lessons found in ZAOGA's Gracious Woman as offering a fertile ground for analysing these disempowering attitudes that work against safe spaces for women while simultaneously elevating men to positions of dominance. Although Gracious Woman's teachings are supposed to empower women in the home and in Christian ministry, she posits that because the church's understanding of women's roles and status is heavily influenced by the Shona traditional paradigm, these teachings really serve to reinforce patriarchy. As a result, conflicting scenarios arise that work against women's complete emancipation and empowerment.

In one of her teachings, Eunor requests cooperation – 'not above him, not under him, but side by side with him with sweet spirit'. Women's intellectual capability is limited when they are denied the ability to question and dispute. Gender-based violence erupts in homes because men will be expecting their women to act like Angels from such teachings, and failure to do so, a woman is abused. According to Guti (2006), a male should think more clearly than a woman. Such lessons are indicative of patriarchy, which is detrimental to women, particularly if they are taught to delegate decision-making to men. The lesson suggests that women's decisions should be determined by men's because of their intellectual limitations (Mwaura 2008). Just before his passing, Guti left a message to men that 'Men must lead', and this has become the talk among the members of the church whenever they want to express that men are leaders. This again cultivates a spirit that men are the only ones capable, and if a woman tries to be above a man, a high chance of violence exploding is possible. According to Guti's teachings, women cannot grow independently without the assistance of men. Nonetheless, numerous women have proven their abilities in both the church and society without men's presence. One church where women have achieved significant positions and organised conferences and conventions without men present is ZAOGA.

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa believes that a woman should imitate the qualities of the Holy Spirit, which are peaceful, kind and persistent; endures, intercedes, carries our burden and takes what he hears from God. This is because the Holy Spirit is a woman's representative. Because women constantly act and behave to appease males, this encourages submissive attitudes and behaviours in them. They persevere through adversity and keep praying that things will improve for them. The demand for deliverance stems from the suspicion of any mindset that questions male behaviour. Because they are trained to obey and follow their husbands' instructions, women do not challenge or quarrel with their spouses (Biri 2015). Women must obey and submit to their husbands because they are the obedient image of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:22ff). Both male and female ZAOGA pastors preach that 'God is not democratic' and that men should be head and wives should be subservient. Men are therefore positioned as dominant and women as subordinate by the idea of headship and submission.

Although ZAOGA offers a men's fellowship where men learn how to manage their homes and show respect for their wives, the lessons are centred around 'soft masculinities' (Chitando 2007). According to Maxwell (2005), ZAOGA does not openly condemn and question aberrant husbands. Instead, ZAOGA emphasise Malachi 2:14–16 that a woman should pray to avoid losing her husband to other women; thus, pray against divorce. Following this, teachings on divorce are another issue that seems to disfavour people in marriages, particularly women. Divorce is prohibited by ZAOGA Rules and Policies, and women are urged to pray. The church bases this ruling on Malachi 2:14–16. Disciplinary action for a marital offence is reviewable after 5 years. However, there is no guarantee that the penalty imposed will be lifted. Divorced women are despised (Biri 2015). However, married women occasionally have marital problems, some of which call for divorce.

Additionally, ZAOGA promotes the idea of 'catch them young'. For this reason, Guti established a youth ministry with fellowships for both boys and girls. The fundamental philosophy of the youth ministry is to develop Christian principles while preparing the boys and girls for adulthood (Biri 2015). Girls are taught that they have the power to keep their future husbands in marriage, or they can be foolish and leave husbands to stray to other men. Thus, the ladies

are taught how to care for their husbands and 'sexual techniques' that deter husbands from 'preying' on other women. Women are always blamed for marriage challenges or marriage failure. This emanates from the Pentecostal ideology that prayer is the solution to every problem. Thus, women bear the brunt of marital challenges because they failed in one way or another to preserve the marriage (Biri 2015). However, these teachings lack reciprocity, particularly when it comes to hard work and marital commitment. Among young people, this is a significant cause of issues (girls' and boys' fellowships). The girl child is given more attention than the boy child, who must play a crucial part in developing into a man or father.

Despite progress made by ZAOGA in women's issues, scholars note that challenges persist regarding fully realising gender equality within the church and society. Tarugarira and Moyo (2020) contend that while Guti has made commendable strides in empowering women, systemic barriers hinder the complete implementation of gender equity principles. These challenges include entrenched cultural norms and resistance from within the church community, which may inadvertently perpetuate gender disparities. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa has failed to strike a balance on teachings on gender. This failure has created several challenges and problems. Men and boys take advantage of the teachings and sermons to dominate girls and women. From an early age, boys expect girls to serve them and look down upon girls as inferior to them. The whole orientation of the girl child is to please men (Biri 2015).

The presence of paradoxes within ZAOGA is undeniable. Despite professing support for women's economic empowerment, the organisation promotes disempowering ideologies by emphasising femininity within the church. These notions of femininity stem from traditional Shona beliefs and patriarchal interpretations of biblical scriptures (Rwafa 2016). While economic empowerment is praiseworthy, genuine women's emancipation necessitates a proactive approach that challenges the deeply entrenched patriarchal influences within the traditional socio-religious culture. As a result, both tradition and Christianity have the empowerment and advancement of women within ZAOGA. The teachings that encourage women to submit, based on specific passages and cultural norms, are propagated by its pastors and carry validity. However, they lack reciprocity, leading to the marginalisation of women and the legitimisation of men's dominance.

Elements in Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa teachings that condemn cultural practices and gender-based violence

Although it has been stated above that some of the teachings of ZAOGA show the church as perpetuating cultural practices and GBV, there are some instances where the church emphasises a distinct approach to cultural practices, encouraging its congregants to adopt a worldview that integrates Christianity into everyday life. It often critiques traditional customs that are seen as incompatible with biblical teachings. This has led to a re-evaluation of gender roles within the community, as ZAOGA advocates for a more equitable treatment of men and women in both spiritual and social contexts. The church has been proactive in addressing issues of GBV within its teachings and community outreach programmes. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa promotes messages of love, respect and dignity for all individuals, which challenge harmful cultural norms that perpetuate violence against women. Through its teachings, ZAOGA encourages both men and women to reject violence and foster harmonious relationships, grounded in mutual respect and understanding.

Pauw (1974) asserts that the empowerment programmes initiated by ZAOGA not only uplift women, but also challenge existing societal misconceptions regarding gender roles. The church's proactive commitment to integrating gender equality into its ministry reflects its dedication to addressing social issues that impact women in Zimbabwe. Guti's theological framework advocates a comprehensive approach to gender equality encompassing life's spiritual, social and economic dimensions. His writings and sermons frequently emphasise that women's empowerment is essential to divinely ordained societal transformation (Mutigwe & Konyana 2020). It has been mentioned above that the statements presented by Guti reflect a patriarchal mindset that suggests men possess superior clarity in thinking as compared to women, ultimately undermining women's agency by encouraging them to defer decision-making to men. However, it is essential to note that in some of his teachings, the idea is that both men and women are capable of independent thought and decision-making; that is why Guti put women in positions of power, showing that he also valued women's ideas and capacity. Tarugarira and Moyo (2020) posit that Guti's theology articulates the intrinsic connection between women's liberation and the fulfilment of God's mission on Earth, asserting that women possess equal capabilities and callings as men within both ecclesiastical and societal structures.

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa has significantly contributed to levelling the playing field by giving men and women in their church similar chances. The doctrine of the church demands equality for all of its members, regardless of sexual orientation. Since then, this status has made it possible for women to hold powerful positions in the public sphere as well as high-level, authoritative roles within the church. According to the researcher's observations, women in ZAOGA Forward in Faith (FIF) are qualified to serve as deacons, elders, pastors, evangelists, overseers and bishops. This church permits women to serve as marriage officers, preach from the pulpit, and conduct burial services (Charamba, Chikwati & Chidarikire 2024). By doing this, ZAOGA nullifies the cultural tendencies that position only men in influential positions by showing that even women can be leaders too.

In addition, through a men's fellowship, Husband Agape, men are challenged to love their wives and care for their families. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa inhibits sexual promiscuity and infidelity, and it also promotes marital loyalty. This is beneficial to ZAOGA's efforts to strengthen families, prevent their dissolution and inspire men to be good husbands and fathers. Chitando (2007) has also noted and commented on ZAOGA Men's Fellowship similarly. He pointed out that the creation of male fellowships by Pentecostals in Zimbabwe is a significant advancement. This is significant because Husband Agape teaches men to be responsible in their homes and marriages (Guti 1997, 2012).

Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa is doing well in realising and honouring children's rights. Biri (2012) acknowledges and echoes Archbishop E.H. Guti's philosophy within Pentecostalism ideology regarding the emphasis he puts on black pride, dignity, empowerment and nationalism, especially for the benefit of women. Musoni (2013) argues that in trying to curb the gender disparities that marginalised women, Guti introduced the system of matarenda in which women are encouraged and trained to make wealth through the use of their hands. The church-initiated entrepreneurship drive has seen many female Pentecostal devotees coming up with their own businesses and private properties like houses, vehicles and furniture. The study has noted that on the strength of economic power, women have risen through the ranks to assume different administrative offices and duties in the church, society and national fraternities.

In the beginning, matarenda were designed to improve women's status through independent work. It should be mentioned that because of systematic oppression during the colonial era, most women did not have productive employment (Chingarande 2021). In order to close that gap and improve the standing of women in society, the founder of ZAOGA FIF encouraged matarenda. People who attend the school of talents learn how to work hard, take responsibility for their actions and work together as a community (Musoni 2013). This is helping to reduce GBV issues since most cases are a result of a shortage of money or poverty. With women empowered and earning their own money, GBV issues are reduced in homes. As a result, Talents is a type of business that has given women in ZAOGA more influence (Biri 2012). Families have been raised by single women; thus, the cultural perception that men are the only breadwinners does not hold. This also helps shape how women are perceived in society if they can make money as men do. Additionally, Togarasei (2011) highlights and defends the gospel of prosperity among Pentecostals in Zimbabwe by emphasising how the gospel has empowered individuals and contributed to the reduction of poverty.

Lastly, on the other hand, Mwaura (2015) confirms that churches are liberating women through education. Ackerman and Jones (2006) encourage churches to continually convey the message that women and children, their bodies and their humanity, should be honoured. From the perspective of Mwaura, the Church is trying to bring back the dignity of women and children, and these are taught in churches, including ZAOGA.

Implications and recommendations

This section looks at the recommendations suggesting the methods that must be applied or adopted to help curb the problem. The church may become a tool of justice for women by offering them wholeness, healing and emancipation through some realistic pastoral care approaches. Church leaders themselves ought to be well-versed in the issues of gender in their congregations. To guarantee that the church finally becomes gender-responsive, the pastor, with a transformative mindset, could instil the same attitudes in congregations. The minister's altered outlook will impact the congregation. The church should play a key role in changing societal attitudes and behaviours that support discrimination against women. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa can use several conferences and conventions, like Deeper Life Conferences, where all leaders are gathered to unite in the fight against GBV. The study urges Pentecostal leaders to be sensitive to women's sociologically unique experiences. They ought to educate men about their roles as well. Last but not least, the church can implement educational initiatives that raise awareness about the adverse effects of GBV within the context of cultural and religious beliefs. These programmes can promote understanding of healthy relationships, gender equality and the importance of mutual respect. Leaders can use their influence to challenge harmful cultural norms and practices. Moreover, traditional leaders should be included in discussions about GBV and cultural practices. Their role in the community can be pivotal in influencing change and fostering dialogue between traditional beliefs and modern understandings of gender equality. Lastly, initiatives that promote positive masculinity, encouraging men to take active roles in combating GBV, can be created. This could include mentorship programmes that highlight male allies and champions for gender equality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the article found that religion was presented in a manner that could be characterised as a 'two-edged sword' about patriarchy and gender, meaning it was both beneficial and harmful. It was found that religion significantly influenced the nature, structure and practice of harmful masculinities and has legitimised, promoted and supported patriarchal practices. When it came to addressing the realities of GBV, both in terms of prevention and aftercare, religion was systemically lacking. Pentecostalism proved that it may empower people, especially women, by providing a sense of community and spiritual support. It promotes moral behaviour and self-improvement, which can result in constructive social improvements and a decline in violence against women. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa's strong religious beliefs and social justice activism might act

as a stimulus for questioning restrictive gender role norms. Certain teachings in ZAOGA unintentionally encourage violence or enforce strict gender norms that restrict women's freedom and autonomy. This dichotomy highlights the necessity for critical involvement within religious communities by showing how religion can be both a source of empowerment and a control mechanism. Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa's influence on Rushinga's culture and GBV highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of religion as a double-edged sword capable of fostering progress or entrenching inequality. It urges ongoing discussion and introspection to address the potential negative effects of faith while addressing its potential for harm.

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CRediT authorship contribution

Tsitsi Mwapfaa: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft and Writing – review & editing. The author confirms that this work is entirely their own, has reviewed the article, approved the final version for submission and publication and takes full responsibility for the integrity of its findings.

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Data availability

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