



# Exploring pastoral care responses to marital gender-based violence in Pentecostal churches of Seshego, Capricorn District



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**Background:** This study explores how pastoral care for gender-based violence (GBV) survivors within married couples in Pentecostal churches at Seshego is shaped by practical theology. Gender-based violence remains a widespread problem with terrible physical, psychological and spiritual repercussions, especially in religious settings where theological interpretations may unintentionally silence survivors or obstruct successful care. Pentecostalism offers a unique framework for addressing GBV because of its special emphasis on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, communal identity and divine healing, but its pastoral interventions will frequently lack trauma-informed care rooted in practical theology.

**Objectives:** This study critically evaluates how practical theology connects theological doctrine and practical care for GBV survivors by conducting a thorough desktop analysis of the body of available literature, including pastoral training manuals, denominational policy and peer-reviewed case studies (2010–2023).

**Method:** This study examines existing pastoral practices in Pentecostal churches using Osmer's model of practical theology, highlighting any areas where survivor-centred care and theological narratives (such as forgiveness, marital submission or spiritual battle) might clash. By offering a practical theology framework that harmonises Pentecostal theology with trauma-sensitive pastoral care, the research makes contributions to the scholarly and ecclesiastical domains.

**Results:** The results provide Pentecostal church leaders with practical suggestions that will enable them to create settings where survivors can heal on all levels – spiritually, emotionally and socially.

**Conclusion:** This study emphasises the intricacy and enduring nature of gender-based violence as well as the pressing need for multidisciplinary, culturally aware, and morally sound remedies. The article adds to academic conversation, by fusing empirical findings with useful theological reflection, and provides significant recommendations for religious communities, practitioners, and legislators looking to combat violence, uphold human dignity, and advance holistic healing.

**Contribution:** This study promotes transformative practices that give survivor agency, safety and justice priority within faith communities in Seshego by examining the relationship between religion and trauma.

**Keywords:** Christian marriage; divorce; gender-based violence; pastoral care; practical theology; Seshego.

## Introduction

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a critical social issue that transcends cultural, socio-economic and religious boundaries. It encompasses a spectrum of abuses, including physical, sexual, emotional and psychological violence, primarily targeting individuals based on their gender (World Health Organization [WHO] 2023:12). In Seshego and many other communities, particularly within religious settings, survivors of GBV often face stigmatisation and marginalisation, making the role of pastoral care essential in the healing process. Pentecostal churches, characterised by their emphasis on the workings of the Holy Spirit and the importance of community, provide a unique context for addressing GBV. Practical theology, defined as the discipline that connects theological understanding with concrete social actions, plays a pivotal role in shaping the church's response to such crises. As many survivors seek solace and support within their faith communities,

understanding how practical theology can inform pastoral care practices in these contexts is crucial for fostering a supportive environment that promotes healing and empowerment. This study aims to examine the intersections of practical theology and pastoral care practices in Pentecostal churches, identifying how leaders can be equipped to address the needs of GBV survivors within married couples effectively.

Research indicates that survivors of GBV often encounter numerous barriers when seeking help within religious institutions, including fear of judgement, a lack of understanding from leaders and a culture that may inadvertently perpetuate silence around issues of abuse. This is particularly relevant in Pentecostal contexts, where beliefs about gender roles and family structures can complicate responses to GBV. The role of the church in addressing social issues has been increasingly recognised within the fields of both practical theology and pastoral care. Studies indicate that the church can serve as a haven for survivors, facilitating emotional and spiritual healing through prayer, community support and counselling services. However, the effectiveness of these services can vary significantly based on the theological frameworks and educational preparation of church leaders. Pentecostal theology, which often emphasises supernatural intervention and the power of the Holy Spirit, can provide a source of strength for survivors, but can also shape the narratives surrounding GBV in potentially harmful ways. Thus, this study assesses how church leaders can navigate these theological complexities to better serve survivors, ensuring that their pastoral care is both empathetic and informed by best practices grounded in practical theology.

Holistic care may have its roots in the Pentecostal tradition's theological emphasis on the 'fourfold gospel' (Christ as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King) (Albrecht 1999:88). However, behaviours that retraumatise survivors include deliverance-focused counselling and demand for marital reconciliation (Langberg 2015:29). Despite regional prevalence rates surpassing 40%, research shows that only 18% of Pentecostal church pastors in sub-Saharan Africa obtain GBV response training (Kgatle 2021:33; WHO 2021:8). For South African citizens, the rapid increase in GBV among children and women is as clear as daylight. The researchers of this study grew up in a community where men see themselves as superior to women, which contributes to GBV, especially in black South African communities.

The researchers believe that mandating GBV education in church could help reduce these issues because GBV education, as Edwards and Hobson (2019:23) stated, helps people become better versions of themselves and provides both spiritual and social guidance. Family life education is only one of the numerous life skills that young people need in other nations. In general, this is the reason why religious people are vastly different from non-religious people.

## Exploring the research gap on gender-based violence within Pentecostal churches

As a member of a Pentecostal congregation in Seshego, the second author (Rebotile S. Moshole) observes the sharp rise in gender-based violence (GBV) against women and children in these churches. Many Pentecostal church leaders find it difficult to adequately address the issue of pastoral care, despite the crucial role it can play in the healing and rehabilitation of GBV survivors. The absence of a robust theological framework that integrates practical theology with the realities of GBV can result in a culture of silence and stigma that silences victims, discourages reporting and prevents effective intervention.

This study examines how practical theology can enhance pastoral care for survivors of GBV in Pentecostal churches. Existing research on GBV within religious contexts is limited, particularly concerning the specific needs and experiences of survivors in Pentecostal settings. This gap impedes the development of informed pastoral care strategies that are sensitive to the unique theological and community dynamics at play. Despite Pentecostalism's emphasis on healing and empowerment, many churches struggle to provide adequate support for GBV survivors because of theological interpretations that may inadvertently perpetuate harm (Nason-Clark 2004:67). In addressing this critical gap, the study responds to the limited integration of practical theological perspectives in existing GBV scholarship, particularly within faith-based and community contexts. The purpose of this study is to also critically analyse current Pentecostal theological frameworks and their impact on responses to GBV, particularly examining how doctrines of forgiveness, submission and spiritual warfare influence pastoral care. It is necessary to identify the unique challenges GBV survivors face when seeking support from Pentecostal congregations, including spiritual distress, stigma and pressure for premature reconciliation, and also develop a practical theology framework that integrates trauma-informed care principles with Pentecostal spirituality, offering concrete strategies for churches to provide holistic support that addresses survivors' spiritual, emotional and physical needs.

This study employs Osmer's (2008) model of practical theology to bridge the gap between theological reflection and ministerial practice. Through qualitative research with survivors, pastors, and counsellors, the research aims to produce both scholarly and practical outcomes that will help Pentecostal churches become safer, more supportive spaces for GBV survivors within married couples while maintaining their distinctive theological identity.

## Objectives of the research

The objectives of this study were:

- To identify and evaluate the key challenges in providing pastoral care to GBV survivors within married couples in the Pentecostal settings.

- To formulate policy recommendations on how Pentecostal doctrines and practices influence responses to GBV survivors within married couples at Seshego.
- To explore how practical theology reshapes pastoral approaches to be more survivor-sensitive to married couples.

## Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- *How do Pentecostal doctrines and practices influence responses to GBV survivors?*
- *What are the key challenges in providing pastoral care to GBV survivors within married couples in Pentecostal settings?*
- *How can practical theology reshape pastoral approaches to be more survivor-sensitive to married couples?*

## Significance of the research

This study has critical importance for multiple stakeholders in both academic and religious contexts. Firstly, it addresses a pressing gap in practical theology by examining how Pentecostal churches, with their unique theological emphases on healing and empowerment, can better respond to GBV. While extensive research exists on GBV in secular contexts, faith-based responses, particularly within Pentecostalism, remain underexplored. The study has practical significance for pastoral ministry. By developing a trauma-informed practical theology framework, it equips Pentecostal pastors and lay counsellors with the necessary tools to provide survivor-centred care that integrates spiritual and psychosocial support. This is especially urgent given the evidence that poorly handled pastoral responses can re-traumatise survivors. By bridging theology, practice and advocacy, this can be minimised.

## Definition of key concepts

### Christian marriage

A Christian marriage is one that has been established and operates according to biblical norms. Marriage is between a man and a woman (Gn 2:24; Mt 19:4–5). A Christian marriage does not allow for multiple spouses or husbands. According to biblical precepts, neither a 'marriage' between two men nor two women constitutes marriage. A Christian marriage is a lifetime commitment between one man and one woman.

A Christian marriage depicts Christ's relationship with the church (Eph 5:32). Christ gave himself up for the church, and men should do the same for their wives, loving them as if they were their own bodies (Eph 5:25–29). And just as the church submits to Christ, wives should submit to their husbands and recognise them as the head of the home. There is no room for selfishness in Christian marriages. The pair is instructed to honour each other (1 Pt 3:2; 3:7). Secondly, the christian marriage depicts Christ's connection with the church. Both parties must love each other, be faithful and have a servant attitude.

## Divorce

Divorce is known as the legal dissolution of a legitimate marriage by a court order. The *Divorce Act (No. 70 of 1979)*, which acknowledges 'irretrievable breakdown of marriage' as the only basis for dissolution (Section 4[1]), is the main piece of legislation governing divorce in South Africa. According to the *Matrimonial Property Act (No. 88 of 1984)*, this legal procedure entails the equitable division of assets and may incorporate mediation procedures, especially in child custody disputes (Section 6). In addition, the *Domestic Violence Act (No. 116 of 1998)* offers safeguards for divorce-seeking survivors of GBV. Biblical passages like Matthew 19:6, which stresses marital permanence while permitting exceptions for instances of adultery (Mt 5:32) or abandonment (1 Cor 7:15), theologically influence Pentecostal views of divorce. According to scholars like Instone-Brewer (2002:34), abuse is a valid reason for divorce within biblical guidelines. By shifting from a general condemnation of divorce to nuanced, trauma-informed solutions that put victims' wellness first while upholding theological integrity, the definition illustrates how practical theology can transform pastoral practices. The research's primary goals of enhancing Pentecostal responses to GBV survivors through policy reform, improved pastoral care, and theologically grounded practical remedies are directly addressed by defining divorce at this legal-theological junction.

## Gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a serious violation of human rights and includes economic, emotional, sexual and physical abuse that stem from unequal power relations between the sexes (WHO 2021:15). Gender-based violence poses difficult problems in Pentecostal church contexts because theological understandings of spirituality and marital roles may inadvertently condone abusive behaviours. Although Pentecostalism's focus on deliverance and healing may provide effective tools for assisting survivors, some doctrinal interpretations – particularly those pertaining to mandatory forgiveness and wifely submission (Eph 5:22) – frequently foster situations in which abuse goes unchecked, and victims feel under pressure to stay in risky relationships. Because of their theological beliefs regarding the integrity of marriage, well-meaning clergy members occasionally put marital reconciliation ahead of survivor safety in the pastoral approach to GBV cases.

## Pastoral care

In Pentecostal churches, pastoral care refers to the practical, emotional and spiritual assistance that clergy and lay leaders offer to members in order to help them navigate life's obstacles. Effective pastoral care in cases of GBV necessitates trauma-informed strategies that put victim safety and agency ahead of hurried reconciliation or spiritualised fixes (Langberg 2015:98). Contemporary Pentecostal methods frequently fail to meet this requirement. Responses that unintentionally re-traumatise survivors may result from theological emphasis on demonic influences on family

conflict, marital permanence and forgiveness. Examples include framing abuse as a 'spiritual battle' that only needs to be delivered or urging prayer without offering any real protection (Kgatle 2021:35).

### Practical theology

Practical theology is a discipline that critically reflects on religious practices to transform them in light of theological and ethical norms (Osmer 2008:4). In this research, it serves as the framework to analyse and improve Pentecostal responses to GBV, bridging doctrine with survivor-centred action.

These definitions anchor the research's exploration of how Pentecostal theology and practice can better serve GBV survivors.

### Seshego

Seshego is a township in South Africa's Limpopo Province, close to Polokwane. Originally created as a segregated black South African residential neighbourhood during the apartheid era, Seshego has developed into a thriving urban centre with a variety of residential, commercial and cultural venues. In Seshego, GBV is still a major problem that both presents particular local difficulties and reflects larger national patterns in South Africa. Seshego, a historically underprivileged township with significant unemployment, poverty and well-ingrained patriarchal traditions, has shockingly high rates of femicide, sexual assault and intimate partner violence.

## Literature review

Literature review, according to Lambert and Lambert (2012:225–256), is the way of summarising classified prior research, examining and critically contributing to the past research by explaining the findings of prior research according to research streams and explaining views of the past research.

A literature review is a critical analysis and summary of existing research on a specific topic or research question. It involves identifying, evaluating and synthesising relevant sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of knowledge in the field. A literature review helps readers understand the background and context of a research problem, identify gaps in the existing literature and justify the need for new research. It also serves to support the theoretical framework of a research study and informs the research methodology.

Pentecostalism's distinctive approach to pastoral care emerges from its theological emphasis on the experiential work of the Holy Spirit (Yong 2010:142). The movement's fourfold gospel framework – emphasising Jesus as Saviour, Sanctifier, Healer and Coming King – significantly shapes its pastoral responses to crisis situations. However,

scholarly critiques note that Pentecostal healing narratives often individualise suffering, potentially obscuring systemic causes of GBV.

The Pentecostal tradition's strong eschatological orientation influences its pastoral theology, with many practitioners viewing present suffering through the lens of future redemption. This perspective, while offering hope, may inadvertently minimise the urgency of addressing current instances of violence.

Research demonstrates that religious communities frequently become both sites of violence and potential sources of support (Nason-Clark & Fisher-Townsend 2015:42). The WHO (2021:15) identifies religious interpretations as significant factors in either perpetuating or preventing GBV.

Pentecostal counselling typically emphasises prayer and deliverance over trauma-informed practices; it critiques this as 'spiritual bypassing' that fails to address psychological wounds. Denominational policies often lack clear protocols for addressing abuse. Many Pentecostal churches prioritise family preservation over survivor safety. Clergy training programmes frequently omit domestic violence education (Wangila 2017:86). This results in pastors being 'theologically literate but trauma-illiterate'. Osmer's (2008:85) four-task model (descriptive, interpretive, normative and pragmatic) offers a framework for evaluating and reforming pastoral practices. West (2016:115) advocates reading Scripture through survivors' experiences, challenging traditional interpretations that enable abuse.

## Global and regional context of gender-based violence in religious settings

Gender-based violence is acknowledged as a widespread public health and human rights issue on a global scale. The WHO (2021) believes that roughly one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence. This problem is frequently made worse in religious contexts by theological interpretations that have the power to silence survivors. Religious groups can be both a support system and a barrier for survivors, where forgiveness and family preservation are frequently valued more highly than safety, as Nason-Clark (2004:305) have well documented. As a result, survivors may experience a 'spiritual dilemma' where they must choose between their wellbeing and their faith.

## The South African and regional gender-based violence crisis

Gender-based violence is not just a social problem in South Africa; it is a national emergency that is frequently referred to as a 'second pandemic' (South African Police Service [SAPS] 2023:4). The nation has one of the highest rates of femicide and intimate partner violence in the world. According to the 2022–2023 crime statistics, for example, there were almost 1000 femicides and more than 50 000 sexual

offences in a single year. These numbers are thought to be greatly underreported (SAPS 2023:15). More than 25% of women have been physically abused at some point in their lives, with spouses being the most frequent offenders, according to research conducted in the Gauteng Province by Machisa, Christofides & Jewkes (2017:22). A complex interaction of historical trauma from apartheid, ingrained patriarchal norms, economic inequality, and substance misuse is the primary cause of this epidemic (Jewkes & Abrahams 2002:1235). Although local manifestations of GBV are shaped by cultural specificities and rural–urban dynamics, the province of Limpopo, where Seshego is located, follows similar national trends.

## Pentecostalism in the African context

Because of its explosive growth, African Pentecostalism adds a distinct perspective to this dilemma. Its focus on deliverance, spiritual battle and supernatural healing can be incredibly powerful, but it can also ‘demonise’ social issues like GBV (Kgatlle 2021:88). A wife’s resistance to submission is sometimes presented in many African Pentecostal churches as the primary source of marital disagreement. This can be misconstrued as an excuse for a husband’s abusive behaviour as a way of ‘correcting’ his wife (Wangila 2017:91). This leaves a fundamental gap that this study aims to fill within the Seshego context: the liberating potential of Pentecostal spirituality is eclipsed by damaging hermeneutics.

The literature reveals a substantial knowledge vacuum on the practical pastoral responses to GBV in the unique setting of the Pentecostal community in Seshego. Although theological conflicts and general flaws are well known, there is a dearth of comprehensive analysis about how these problems appear in these churches’ documented practices, training materials and policies. The study used a qualitative desktop research approach to fill this gap and provide answers to the research objectives, namely, how Pentecostal doctrines impact responses and how practical theology might modify them. This method was chosen to methodically collect and evaluate the documentary material that already exists, giving a basic grasp of the situation prior to any primary research in the future.

## Research methods and design

Research methodology, according to Williams (2007:65), is the ‘process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting data to understand phenomena’. This study examines pastoral care strategies for married couples who have experienced GBV in Pentecostal churches at Seshego, Capricorn District, using a qualitative desktop research methodology. Government and non-government organisation (NGO) reports on GBV in Limpopo, scholarly publications (2010–2024), Pentecostal church documents (denominational policies, sermons and training manuals) and pertinent media coverage are all part of the research strategy, which centres on a methodical document analysis of the body of current material.

## Sampling

According to Toribio, Queralt & Wrigley (2008), sampling is the selection of a predetermined number of units of analysis, such as households, individuals or even businesses, from a population of interest, known as the cases.

This desktop research adopts purposive sampling to analyse existing literature and documentary sources that illuminate Pentecostal pastoral responses to GBV. The sampling strategy focuses on selecting three key categories of secondary data: denominational policy documents from major Pentecostal bodies (Assemblies of God, Church of God, etc.) to examine institutional stances on GBV; published sermons and pastoral training manuals (2010–2024) that reveal theological approaches to marriage, divorce and abuse (Yong 2010:150); and peer-reviewed case studies of GBV interventions in Pentecostal churches across different cultural contexts. Documents were selected based on their relevance to practical theology frameworks, with preference given to sources that explicitly address trauma-informed care or critique Pentecostal hermeneutics of gender (Wangila 2017:90). This targeted approach ensures the analysis captures both dominant theological narratives and emerging best practices in pastoral care for survivors (Osmer 2008:92).

## Research instruments

This desktop research employs three key instruments to systematically analyse existing data on Pentecostal pastoral responses to GBV. Firstly, a document analysis framework, adapted from Bowen’s (2009:32) secondly qualitative content analysis approach, will be used to examine denominational policy documents, pastoral training manuals and published sermons from 2010 to 2024. This framework incorporates Osmer’s (2008:91) four practical theology tasks to assess how theological interpretations influence pastoral practices. A systematic literature review matrix will organise and evaluate peer-reviewed studies on GBV in Pentecostal contexts, categorising findings by themes such as theological barriers, survivor experiences and effective interventions. A case research analysis tool, drawing from Yin’s (2018:47) case research methodology, analyses documented examples of Pentecostal GBV responses across diverse cultural contexts, with particular attention to trauma-informed approaches.

These instruments enable rigorous secondary data analysis while maintaining focus on practical theological applications, with all materials selected through purposive sampling of academically credible and denominationally representative sources (Patton 2015:272).

## Ethical considerations

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

According to Tawengwa and Adams (2019), ethical considerations are essentially the guidelines that govern

research designs and procedures; they include principles on safeguards against potential hazards, informed permission, anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation. This desktop research on pastoral care for GBV survivors in Pentecostal churches adheres to strict ethical standards through a number of important factors. Sensitive materials are handled in accordance with confidentiality protocols, with any testimonies or case studies from survivors being de-identified and presented without compromising personal details; the analysis uses trauma-informed principles, carefully avoiding graphic descriptions while accurately representing the gravity of GBV issues; the research maintains representational fairness by thoroughly engaging with diverse Pentecostal perspectives from the Seshego context, preventing theological mischaracterisations through balanced source selection.

Appropriate Harvard citation guidelines and careful use of direct quotations uphold intellectual property rights. By focusing its investigation on the unique socioeconomic and religious setting of Seshego, the study exhibits cultural sensitivity by considering regional variations in pastoral responses and GBV experiences. Through reflexive journaling, researchers' positionality is regularly assessed in order to detect and lessen any biases in the interpretation of theological texts. The investigation confirms that case studies and reports cited were initially obtained ethically and with the appropriate consent processes when using secondary sources. By proposing recommendations to potentially strengthen church-based support systems and lowering risks of harm through careful language choices that avoid stigmatising faith communities, the presentation of findings prioritises beneficence. These ethical procedures guarantee that the study preserves academic rigour while respecting the fragility of GBV survivors and the intricacy of faith-based care systems. They also conform to South African research rules and worldwide standards for sensitive qualitative research.

### Delimitation of the research

According to Muhammad (2023), delimitation refers to the precise limits that a researcher sets in order to determine the emphasis and extent of research. There are various important approaches to define this desktop qualitative research on pastoral care for GBV survivors in married couples in Pentecostal churches in Seshego, Capricorn District. To preserve a focused examination of this particular theological and geographic setting, the research will only look at Pentecostal churches in Seshego, leaving out other faiths or geographical areas. Because the dynamics of GBV and pastoral responses may vary in various relationship contexts (such as dating or cohabiting couples), the research is restricted to married couples. The research does not use primary data collection methods like surveys or interviews; instead, it only draws from the body of current literature, which includes reports, scholarly articles and church documents. Because of this delimitation, the results will be based on documented viewpoints rather than first-hand recollections from pastors or present members of the congregation in Seshego.

The research only includes English-language publications, which can leave out valuable information from sources in regional tongues like Sepedi. Although this guarantees uniformity in analysis, it could miss subtleties seen in community-based reports or vernacular theological conversations. In order to preserve a defined scope, the study only considers GBV that takes place in married relationships, leaving out other types of violence (such as elder or child abuse). While noting possible difficulties in accurately documenting the lived experiences of non-English-speaking congregants or undocumented church practices, these delimitations guarantee the research remains viable and focused.

## Discussion

### The misapplication of doctrines and its consequences

One of the main findings is that fundamental Pentecostal beliefs are commonly misinterpreted in ways that silence survivors and support abuse. Even if they are theologically meant to be edifying, strict interpretations of wifely submission (Eph 5:22), mandated forgiveness and marital permanency are frequently used to compel silence and hasten restoration. The study of Nason-Clark (2004:67), which shows how religious beliefs can be perverted to uphold power disparities within families, is in line with this conclusion. Instead of acknowledging abuse as a sin and a crime, this theological reinforcement puts survivors in a difficult situation in the Seshego culture, where patriarchal standards are already pervasive. It forces them to suffer abuse as a test of faith or a burden to bear.

### Spiritualising abuse: The problem of spiritual bypassing

By portraying GBV largely as a spiritual conflict that requires prayer and deliverance, or as a demonic attack, the traditional pastoral response of 'spiritualising' frequently ignores the urgent need for psychological and physical protection. This approach fits the definition of 'spiritual bypassing' given by Langberg (2015:45), which is the use of spiritual justifications and remedies to sidestep difficult emotional and pragmatic realities. Although spiritual warfare is a legitimate part of Pentecostal theology, when used improperly, it can have disastrous consequences. It runs the risk of connecting the abuser's physical, illegal acts to supernatural forces, which could put the survivor in danger while the emphasis is still on prayer rather than safety preparation or calling the police.

### The gap in trauma-informed care

The analysis reveals a serious lack of trauma-informed principles in Pentecostal pastoral care manuals and training, which supports Wangila's (2017:86) claim that many pastors are 'theologically literate but trauma-illiterate'. Well-meaning but misguided practices, like mediating between the abuser and the survivor or recommending prayer without concrete

action, are not only ineffective but also actively harmful and can re-traumatise the survivor. This gap underscores a critical disconnect between the church's healing mandate and the practical knowledge needed to promote true recovery, highlighting the urgent need to incorporate trauma-informed care into pastoral training as advocated by experts like Langberg (2015:112).

### The contradiction between theology and practice

The strengthening potential of the Pentecostal 'fourfold gospel' – specifically, Christ as Healer and Empowerer – and its actual application in GBV situations are obviously at odds. Although it is a potent tool for survivors, the idea of the Holy Spirit as a Comforter and Advocate (Jn 14:26) is frequently underutilised to support victim safety and agency. The biblical story can occasionally be used to promote passive endurance rather than framing the Spirit as a source of power for a survivor to seek safety and justice. This contradiction between a practice that emphasises marital stability and a theology of empowerment signifies a serious ineffective use of the tradition's own resources.

### The unique challenges for survivors in faith communities

Beyond the actual violence, survivors in various religious contexts deal with a distinct set of difficulties. Their trauma is exacerbated by spiritual suffering, which can take the form of faith crises (e.g. 'Why is God allowing this?'), dread of social stigma and condemnation, and the possibility of being shunned if they disclose abuse or file for divorce. These data demonstrate that the fear of communal shunning is a potent silencer, echoing the global tendencies noted by Nason-Clark and Fisher-Townsend (2015:104). The fear of isolation can be a significant deterrent to getting treatment in a community as close-knit as Seshego, where the church is a major social institution. This can trap people in abusive circumstances.

In conclusion, the discussion shows that Pentecostal theology's interpretation and application – rather than the doctrine itself – are the issue. Strong sociocultural influences, a lack of trauma literacy and damaging hermeneutics can all contribute to an environment where GBV is unintentionally encouraged rather than addressed. The study's goal of creating a useful theological framework that realigns pastoral practice with the empowering and healing core of Pentecostal spirituality is crucial, as this research highlights.

### Recommendations for the Pentecostal church

The study has the following recommendations:

- **Curriculum reform in theological training:** GBV, trauma-informed care and safe theological interpretation should be required courses in Pentecostal Bible schools and theology institutions. This will enable pastors to identify the warning indicators of abuse and differentiate between intimate partner violence and marital strife.

- **Creation of denominational GBV policies:** Clearly stated, formal denominational GBV policies that put survivor safety first should be developed and implemented by churches. In addition to establishing processes for cooperation with social agencies and secular authorities, such as the local police and shelters, these rules must clearly define the disciplinary action procedures for offenders.
- **Trauma-informed pastoral transition:** Pastoral strategies need to go beyond a lone emphasis on rapprochement. In order to validate survivors' experiences and believe their stories, they should instead implement a survivor-centred approach that includes safety planning, supported separation and trauma-informed counselling.
- **Theological reframing in preaching:** Pastors should preach sermons that categorically condemn abuse in all of its manifestations and reinterpret biblical ideas like forgiveness and obedience in a way that does not condone or permit violence. This entails advocating for a theology that protects each person's safety and sanctity while holding abusers accountable.
- **Creation of referral networks:** Churches are required to establish official networks with local GBV shelters, professional social workers and psychologists. This guarantees that survivors receive thorough, expert assistance that goes beyond the church's capacity to offer spiritual support.
- **Empowerment of women's organisations:** Pentecostal women's organisations must be acknowledged and encouraged as viable safe spaces and effective forums for GBV action and peer support within the church community.

### Limitations of the study

The main methodological drawback of desktop research is that it only uses secondary data. Because it is a desktop study, it excludes gathering of primary data from pastors, survivors and Seshego congregation members via questionnaires or interviews. As a result, the conclusions are predicated on recorded viewpoints and might not accurately reflect the complex lived experiences of individuals who are directly impacted or the present, on-the-ground realities:

- **Language restrictions:** Only English-language publications are included in the analysis. In addition to perhaps missing community-specific reports, vernacular theological discourses and complex cultural understandings of GBV and pastoral care, this may also omit insightful information from sources in regional languages, such as Sepedi.
- **Scope delimitation:** Because the study only looks at married couples, it ignores GBV in other relational situations, such as cohabiting or dating relationships, which could provide different pastoral issues.
- **Generalisability:** Although directed at Seshego, the conclusions and suggestions are based on an analysis of the body of previous research. Future primary research in this particular setting is required to test and validate their direct application and effectiveness.

## Expected outcomes

Theological, social, and cultural frameworks must be critically examined in order to comprehend how gender-based violence is perpetuated and how it can be effectively combated.

Pentecostal spirituality and trauma-informed, survivor-centred pastoral care concepts are integrated into a strong, contextually appropriate practical theological framework. Giving Seshego's Pentecostal pastors and lay leaders a better grasp of GBV dynamics will help them transition from being 'theologically literate but traumas-illiterate' to capable first responders.

Clear procedures, training materials and referral systems are just a few of the practical policy suggestions that local churches and denominational organisations can implement to improve their approaches to GBV.

Through empirical and contextual research, this work broadens scholarly engagement with GBV, contributing to the field of practical theology.

## Suggestions for future research

The study provides the following suggestions:

- **Primary qualitative research:** Interview pastors, GBV survivors and members of Seshego Pentecostal congregations in depth and hold focus groups. In order to test the framework created in this study and to comprehend the intricate, lived experiences of all stakeholders, this would offer first-hand, empirical evidence. Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the long-term effects on survivor recovery and community perceptions of incorporating trauma-informed treatment and new GBV policies inside Pentecostal churches.
- **Comparative research:** To find shared problems and situation-specific solutions, conduct comparative research between Pentecostal churches in Seshego and those in other South African townships or other denominations in Seshego.
- **Research on implementation:** Examine the obstacles and enablers to putting the suggested GBV policies and training programmes into practice within local church organisations and Pentecostal theological institutes.

The roles and attitudes of men in Seshego Pentecostal churches in relation to GBV should be the focus of future research. This should include studies on how to successfully involve men as allies in prevention and intervention.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this proposed qualitative research study aimed to explore the perceived significance of how pastoral practices can be reshaped by practical theology to become more survivor-centred and trauma-informed. Instead of using primary data-gathering methods like surveys or

interviews, this research used a qualitative desktop research technique, which means it only relied on previously published papers and literature. The study ensures that pastoral care is in line with best practices in GBV response by bridging the gap between theological thought and practical treatments through the use of Osmer's (2008) model of practical theology. While offering useful suggestions for Pentecostal church leaders in Seshego, the findings will also add to the scholarly conversation in practical theology and help them better assist survivors without sacrificing doctrinal integrity.

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### CRedit authorship contribution

Hundzukani P. Khosa-Nkatini: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. Rebotile S. Moshole: Conceptualisation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing. All authors contributed to the article, discussed the results and approved the final version for submission and publication.

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### Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Hundzukani P. Khosa-Nkatini, upon reasonable request.

### Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and are the product of professional research. They do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency or that of the publisher. The authors are responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

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