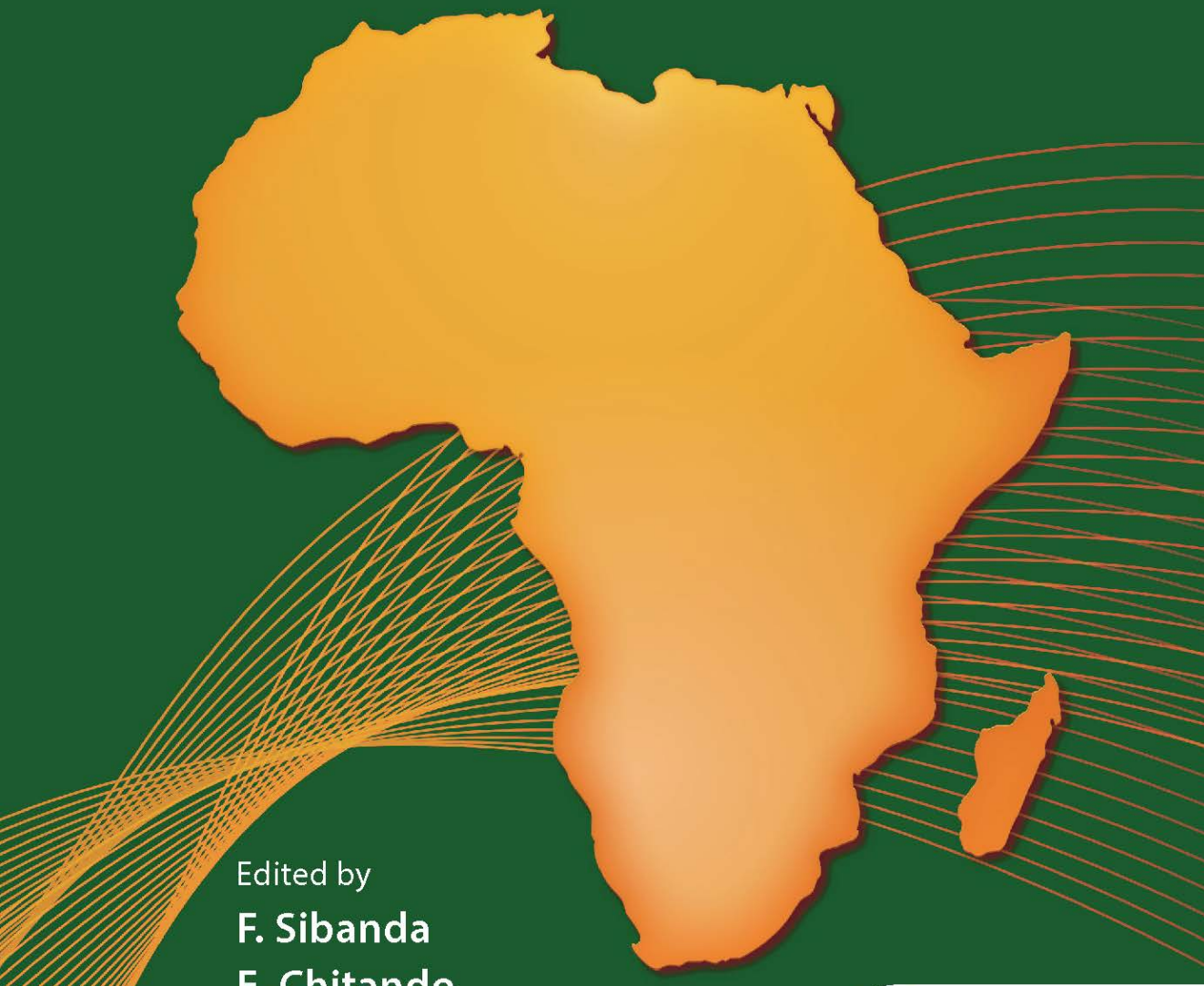
Law, Religion and Leadership in Africa
Published by AFRICAN SUN MeDIA

Law, Religion and Leadership in Africa



Edited by
F. Sibanda
E. Chitando
E.G. Konyana
B.P. Humbe

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

ACLARS
AFRICAN CONSORTIUM FOR LAW AND RELIGION STUDIES

23 Faith-based organisations and the training of religious leaders to combat violence against women: A South African Faith and Family Institute case study

Fungai Chirongoma[1]

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is a social reality in South Africa. In 2014, the country was named the world rape capital because of the intensity of violence against women. Several legal reforms have been put in place to address such violence, which include the Domestic Violence Act and the establishment of Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences investigations units across all South African Police Service stations.[2] Even so, despite the policies in place, cases of violence against women continue to increase. It appears these laws and policies have not been successful in addressing the problem. As representatives of religion in the public sphere, several faith-based organisations (FBOs) have also responded to the problem of violence against women. These organisations provide shelters, refugee and psycho-social support to survivors of gender-based violence, while some also train or sensitise religious leaders and religious communities to fight and challenge violence against women within their communities. In a society such as South Africa, where religion determines gender dynamics, laws and policies alone are not effective strategies to mitigate violence against women.

For this reason, the role of religious actors should not be overlooked. Religious organisations play a crucial role in addressing violence against women by offering interventions that aligns with community values. FBOs are equipping religious leaders with skills and tools to deal with violence against women making religious leaders' key partners in combating violence against women. Be that as it may, it is important to note that the role of religious leaders in dealing with violence against women is deeply complex and contradictory. While some religious leaders may challenge androcentric and patriarchal systems that perpetuate abuse, other religious leaders can perpetuate gendered social norms that reinforce gender inequalities and may also take advantage of their patriarchal and religious authority to abuse women. Some religious leaders reinforce patriarchal attitudes and misinterpret religious scriptures and traditions in ways that promote violence against women. Thus, it is worth to note that the place of religious leaders in dealing with violence against women is dual and contradictory, religious leaders have the

1 Postdoctoral Fellow, Department of Practical Theology and Gender Unit, Faculty of Theology, Stellenbosch University.

2 Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

potential to be both perpetrators and key partners in challenging violence against women.

In this paper, I examine how a multifaith organisation, South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI), attempts to reconcile the contradictory nature of the role of religious leaders by providing training that equip religious leaders with the theological and practical tools to combat violence against women. I employ a qualitative approach, drawing on ethnographic data gathered at SAFFI training programs and conversations with religious leaders, to explore how the religious leaders training equip them to deal with violence against women. This paper begins by providing the context of the nature of violence against women in South Africa. It also highlights both non-religious and religious interventions in place to curb violence against women.

The paper also presents a case study of the training model for religious leaders offered by SAFFI. I employ anthropologist Arnold van Gennep's rite of passage framework to conceptualise the training of religious leaders as a rite of passage, signifying a process of transformation. I will analyse the training phases, as well as the impact of the training model offered to religious leaders by SAFFI. The paper will conclude by assessing the effectiveness of these trainings in shifting the attitudes and perceptions of religious leaders. I argue that although the role of religious leaders in dealing with violence against women is complex and contradictory given how they can be both promoters and perpetrators of violence as well as resources in combating violence against women. If equipped with proper training and held accountable, religious leaders have the potential to challenge violence against women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN OVERVIEW

Violence against women is rife in South Africa. In a 2018 study, Kammila Naidoo a professor of sociology, also confirms that cases of gender-based violence within South African families, communities and societies are increasing at an alarming rate.[3] The intensity and extent of the violence against women has resulted in the country being dubbed the "world's rape capital" by media and humanitarian organisations.[4] In elucidating the levels of violence against women, the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, reiterated that "South Africa is one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman."[5] Reem Wael, a scholar of gender studies, indicates that although gender issues have received much attention in contemporary

3 Naidoo K. 2018. "Confronting the Scourge of Violence Against South Africa's Women", *NewAgenda: South African Journal of Social and Economic Policy* 2018(71):40-44.

4 Le Roux E. 2012. "Why sexual violence? The social reality of an absent church. In Men in the Pulpit, Women in the Pew?: Addressing Gender Inequality in Africa", in Hendriks HJ, Mouton E, Hansen LD and Le Roux E (eds) *Men in the pulpit, women in the pews? Addressing gender inequality in Africa* Cape Town: African Sun Media.

5 Ramaphosa C. Address of President Cyril Ramaphosa at the Joint Sitting of Parliament on the Crisis of Violence in South Africa, National Assembly, Cape Town, 18 September 2019.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

South Africa, cases of violence continue to prevail. Women's organisations in South Africa estimate that one in every three women is a victim of rape,[6] while one in every six women is in an abusive domestic relationship. Other statistics reports that two in five women are beaten by their partners and one in fifteen women is murdered by her partner. Naidoo also highlights that some statistics say that women one in every two women reported to have experiences some form of violence in their lifetime.[7] Despite the differences and inconsistences in the statistics, the statistics reflect the intensity of violence against women in South Africa. The actual number of violence against women cases is likely higher than reported in the statistics due to under-reporting.[8]

Responding to the scourge of gender-based violence, the government and non-governmental sector have put in place several interventions. Legal specialists Binaifer Nowrojee and Bronwen Manby note that by 1993, the South African government had already made several interventions to address violence against women.[9] Prior to 1993, a peace order was the principal mechanism used to warn an abusive partner to stop abuse. In 1993, a new law, the Prevention of Violence Act, was promulgated.[10] However, Nowrojee and Manby have criticised both the Act and the peace order as ineffective strategies for protecting women from violence. In their view, a peace order was a mere warning that had no provision for arrest if the order were breached.[11] In 1995, likewise, the South African Police Service (SAPS) established Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences units. These units were established to prevent and investigate violence against women related crimes and to offer services to victims of violence against women.[12] By 2003 to 2004, South Africa had thirteen Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences units in its major cities, and, by 2006, the number had risen to forty-nine.[13] Despite these various legislative interventions that were put in place to curb violence, cases of violence against women continued to prevail in South Africa.

The South African government also passed the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.[14] The act was promulgated after it was realised that the existing interventions for

6 Wael R. 2019. *Negotiating the Power of NGOs: Women's Legal Rights in South Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

7 Naidoo, "Confronting the Scourge of Violence Against South Africa's Women".

8 Bowman CG. 2003. "Domestic violence: Does the African context demand a different approach?", *International Journal of Law and Psychiatry* 26(5):473-491.

9 Nowrojee B and Manby B. 1995. "Violence against women in South Africa: The state response to domestic violence and rape". New York: Human Rights Watch.

10 Nowrojee and Manby, "Violence against women in South Africa".

11 Nowrojee and Manby, "Violence against women in South Africa".

12 Manby B. 2001. "Unequal Protection: the state response to violent crime on South African Farms". New York: Human Rights Watch.

13 Manby, "Unequal Protection".

14 Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

victims of domestic violence had proved to be ineffective.[15] The act clearly states that its purpose is to offer victims of domestic violence protection from domestic abuse.[16] Later, another law, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act 32 of 2007, was published, criminalising any attempt, conspiracy and incitement to commit a sexual offence.[17] In a 1999 study, Shahana Rasool, a scholar of social work, argued that "the act will be of great benefit to women confronting abuse but still more needs to be done".[18] In the same vein, Wael considers the law "a powerful tool that can be used to put society on the right track for the implementation ofhuman rights values".[19] However, it appears that both of these laws have not been effective strategies given the continued increase of violence against women in South Africa. Ramadimetja Mogale, a women's health expert and Afrofeminist, and colleagues emphasises that despite the government's efforts to implement these laws, cases of violence are still rampant.[20] These scholars criticise both the Domestic Violence Act and the equally applicable Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act for not providing strategies that take into consideration cultural, social and economic factors within which violence against women is embedded.[21] I agree with Mogale and others that laws alone are not an effective strategy in a society where religion determines gender power relations.

In addition, in 2012, the South African government responded to the challenge of gender-based violence by establishing a National Council on Gender-Based Violence. The National Council a advises, monitors, reports and coordinates national and international partnerships and it is responsible for implementing "a 365 Day National Action plan against Gender Based Violence".[22] South Africa implemented the "365 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children" campaign, which is influenced by an international campaign of Sixteen Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children, which runs from 25 November to 10 December annually.[23] These government initiatives have not

15 Domestic Violence Act.

16 Domestic Violence Act.

17 Amendment Act 32 of 2007

18 Rasool S. 1999. "Is the Domestic Violence Act enough? Assessing women's needs", *Indicator South Africa* 1999(18):29-32.

19 Wael R. 2019. *Negotiating the Power of NGOs: Women's Legal Rights in South Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

20 Mogale RS, Burns KK and Ritcher S. 2012. "Violence against women in South Africa: Policy position and recommendations", *Violence against women* 18(5):580-594.

21 Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act, 2007 (Act No. 32 of 2007).

22 Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). 2014. "Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries: Fostering Diversity for Inclusive Growth". Paris: OECD Publications Centre.

23 "365 Days of Activism Campaign Moves to Mshadza", *Mmpumalanga News/The Citizen*, 10 October 2018.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

yielded many positive results in curbing violence against women. Although the South African government has made it a priority to take part in these campaigns, the situation of violence against women in South Africa remains unchanged.

Several non-governmental organisations in South Africa have also responded to the problem of gender-based violence. Nonhlonhla Sibanda-Moyo, a women's rights and development professional, and her research colleagues highlight the role played by NGOs in responding to violence against women in South Africa.[24] According to these authors, the work of these non-state service providers centres on advocacy, training, awareness creation and research.[25] Examples of such NGOs include the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust, which operates in the Cape Town suburbs of Observatory, Athlone and Khayelitsha. Established in 1976, this organisation provides counselling and support for survivors of rape.[26] Another organisation, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), is based in Johannesburg. The organisation was established in 1979 and offers counselling, shelter and legal advice to abused women.[27] The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), which was established in 1989, is another example of an NGO that has responded to violence against women in South Africa. CSVR has branches in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The organisation seeks to understand and prevent violence through research and advocacy.[28] The Women's Legal Centre is another NGO that addresses violence against women. Founded in 1999, it focuses exclusively on women's rights, and it has a department that deals with violence against women. This department ensures that there are legislative frameworks to protect women in general and ensures that the state has implementation plans in place to action these legal frameworks and policies.[29] Another NGO that addresses violence against women is the Saartjie Baartman Centre for Women and Children (SBCWC) in Athlone, Cape Town. This organisation was likewise established in 1999 and provides shelter and counselling for abused women.[30] Sonke Gender Justice is yet another organisation, established in 2006.[31] It seeks to promote gender equality, prevent violence against women and reduce the impact of HIV and AIDS. Sonke Gender Justice is involved

24 Sibanda-Moyo N, Khonje E and Brobbey M. 2017. *Violence Against Women in South Africa: A Country in Crisis*. Cape Town: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR).

25 Sibanda-Moyo et al, *Violence Against Women in South Africa.*

26 Rape Crisis Trust, Cape Town. "Who We Are". Online at: https://rapecrisis.org.za History of Rape Crisis Trust is an organisation that offers support to survivors of sexual violence.

27 People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA). Online at: https://www.powa.co.za POWA is an NGO that addresses violence against women in Johannesburg.

28 Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. Online at: https://www.csvr.org.za

29 Women's Legal Centre. Online at: https://wlce.co.za Women's Legal Centre is an African Feminist Legal Centre that advances women's rights and equality.

30 Saartjie Bartman Centre for Women and Children. Online at: http://www.saartjiebaartmancentre.org.za. This centre is a shelter for abused women named in honour of Saartijie Sarah Bartman, a Khoi Khoi woman who was taken to England and exhibited for her body structure.

31 Sonke Gender Justice. "Our Work". Online at: https://genderjustice.org.za/our-work

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

in advocacy campaigns, community education and policy development. Sibanda-Moyo and colleagues acknowledge some of these non-governmental organisations for complementing state interventions on violence against women.[32]

INTERVENTIONS OF FAITH-BASED ORGANISATIONS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Despite the secularisation assumptions that relegated religion to the private sphere, the involvement of FBOs in addressing or responding to social issues reflects that religions have refused to accept a marginal role. Faith-based organisations are among the many non-state actors well known for providing of social services in Africa.[33] Barbara Bompani, a leading scholar in religion and development, stresses that FBOs remain a critical source of welfare in Africa and are regarded as the most significant non-governmental providers of basic social services to disadvantaged groups.[34] Although these organisations are well known for providing health care services, education and humanitarian aid, FBOs are also responding to the challenge of violence against women in South Africa. Despite their efforts to respond to and address the problem of violence against women, these organisations have not yet received much attention in scholarship.

Although I do not suggest that faith-based interventions are the panacea to the problem of violence against women, I argue that they hold the potential to influence change. Despite the patriarchal teachings and systems in religious traditions, I argue that harnessing faith-based interventions holds the the potential to influence change. The high level of religious affiliation in South Africa offers a unique position to make use of faith-based interventions to addressing violence against women. The General Household Survey conducted in 2013 showed that over 90% of the South African population is affiliated to religion,[35] suggesting that faith-based interventions could be more immediate, relatable, and culturally resonant. In a 2001 study, Isabel Phiri, an African feminist theologian, highlighted the potential of religion to address gender-based violence in the context of South Africa.[36] It is therefore vitally important to assess the impact of faith-based interventions in addressing gender-based violence in a society where religion determines gender dynamics.

---

32 Sibanda-Moyo et al, *Violence Against Women in South Africa.*

33 Bompani B and Frahm-Arp M (eds). 2010. *Development and politics from below*. Basingstoke/ New York: Palgrave Macmillan; Bompani B. 2011. "Religion and Faith Based Organizations in Africa: the forgotten actors", *E-International Relations*, 27 September; Olarinmoye OO. 2012. "Faith-based organizations and development: Prospects and Constraints", *Transformation* 29(1):1-14.

34 Bompani, "Religion and Faith Based Organizations in Africa".

35 Schoeman WJ. 2017. "South African religious demography: The 2013 general household survey", *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 73(2):a3837.

36 Phiri IA. 2001. "Domestic violence in Christian homes: A Durban case study", *Journal for the Study of Religion* 14(2):85-101.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

While research on FBOs and violence against women is still emerging, several FBOs are already active in addressing violence against women in South Africa. Many FBOs are involved in advocacy and campaigns against gender-based violence, some are offering trainings on violence against women prevention to religious leaders and communities and other organisations offer counselling and support to survivors through shelters for abused women programs. This paper focuses on the South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) as a case study. This organisation is a multifaith organisation that provides training to religious leaders from different religious traditions to challenge violence against women from a faith perspective. In the section to follow, I will provide a brief description of SAFFI and its training model that equips religious leaders to deal with violence against women.

SOUTH AFRICAN FAITH AND FAMILY INSTITUTE INTERVENTION ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A CASE STUDY

As noted above, South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) is a multi-faith organisation concerned with addressing issues of gender-based violence and family.[37] This organisation notes that it intends to bring people from different faiths together to address gender-based violence and emphasises that its primary goal is to mobilise faith leaders and faith communities to address violence against women. According to Elizabeth Petersen, the organisation's founder and executive director, SAFFI was established in 2008 because there were few organisation in South Africa that particularly worked with religious leaders and religious communities in addressing violence against women from a religious perspective.[38] SAFFI notes that its main aim is to end gender-based violence in South Africa through engaging religious leaders. The organisation asserts that religious scriptures and traditions contain positive elements with the potential to curb violence against women. Its mission is to challenge patriarchal traditions and other root causes of violence against women from a religious conviction. SAFFI notes that it promotes positive scriptural and religious teachings that challenge the abuse of women. This organisation also emphasises that one of its main goals is to be a resource for religious leaders and religious communities from various religious traditions by offering training and advocacy programmes on violence against women. This is especially relevant for the present study's main focus on SAFFI's training for religious leaders.

SAFFI offers religious leaders a training programme which is designed to equip and empower them to address and challenge violence against women. SAFFI highlights that religious leaders do not have enough capacity to deal with violence against women, SAFFI's trainings therefore aim to build and strengthen the capacity of faith leaders. SAFFI'S religious leader trainings promote scriptural and theological teachings that challenge violence against women and equip religious leaders with necessary skills to challenge patriarchal norms within their religious communities.

37 South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI). Online at: https://saffi.org.za

38 Elizabeth Peterson, Executive Director and Founder of SAFFI featured shared her life trajectory on. "I am Woman, Leap of Faith", s 2, ep 1, aired on SABC 3, on 1 September 2013.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

The trainings emphasise scriptural and biblical reinterpretation, along with knowledge of legal frameworks. The program also empowers religious leaders to offer support and counselling to survivors of violence. SAFFI maintains, "If religious leaders are transformed in their thinking and knowledge about hierarchical gender power relations, their teaching, preaching and pastoral care intervention will transform the way women and men relate to each other in society."[39]

SAFFI's work therefore resonates with the view of scholars such as violence against women research consultant Elisabet Le Roux and her colleagues, recognise the potential of religious leaders in addressing violence against women.[40] Christopher Boyer, a public health scholar, and colleagues also argue that religious leaders are prime agents for social change in addressing intimate partner violence.[41] Utilising, the rite of passage framework developed by anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, who is well known for his work on rituals of transition in life stages, I will analyse the religious leaders' trainings offered by SAFFI to assess its effectiveness in challenging gender-based violence. I adopt the rite of passage approach to understand the way in which SAFFI engaged with religious leaders. Van Gennep understands a rite of passage as a system of transformation which consists of three stages: separation, transition and reincorporation.[42] According to Van Gennep, rites of passage "accompany every change in place, state, social position and age".[43] Guided by Van Gennep's lens, I conceptualise the religious leaders' trainings on violence against women as an educative rite of passage with a potential to transform religious leaders from one state, perception or understanding of violence against women to another. This study utilised ethnographic data gathered from SAFFI religious leaders' trainings and SAFFI events, along with reports and semi-structured interviews with Christian religious leaders who participated in SAFFI trainings. I assigned pseudonyms to all participants to ensure their confidentiality and protect their identities.

In the sections to follow, I discuss each stage of the religious leaders trainings as a rite of passage. I begin by discussing the perceptions of religious leaders before undergoing the SAFFI trainings as the separation phase. Secondly, I examine the actual trainings of religious leaders as the period of liminality during which religious leaders received education that equips them to challenge and address violence against women. Lastly, I analyze the perceptions of religious leaders following SAFFI trainings, focusing on the reintegration phase. This phase occurs

39 South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI). 2017. "SAFFI responding to gender-based violence in South Africa: Documenting the history, theory and methods and training model 2008-2017", SAFFI Research Report, Issue 1, July.

40 Le Roux E et al. 2016. "Getting dirty: Working with Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14(3):22-35.

41 Boyer C et al. 2022. "Religious leaders can motivate men to cede power and reduce intimate partner violence: Experimental evidence from Uganda", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119(31):e2200262119

42 Van Gennep A. 1960. *The rites of passage.* New York: Routledge.

43 Van Gennep, *The rites of passage.*

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

when trained leaders return to their religious communities equipped with skills to challenge violence against women and possessing a renewed mindset with new beliefs and attitudes toward these issues.

Separation: Perceptions of religious leaders before SAFFI's trainings on violence against women

Religious leaders who attend SAFFI trainings hold different perceptions on violence against women. As an entry point, religious leaders go through a mandatory recruitment workshop. In this first workshop, religious leaders begin by sharing their held beliefs and perceptions about gender relations and violence against women. In one of these workshops, one pastor expressed his understanding of violence against women as only physical and sexual abuse by stating: "What I understand as abuse is beating and raping a woman."[44] Another pastor said that the only solution to deal with abuse was prayer and maintained: "A violent husband is demonic; as pastors we have to pray for territorial spirit that possess some men. We must cast demons in the name of Jesus Christ."[45] Still another pastor said that his church does not talk or preach about violence against women and admitted: "We do not preach about women abuse in my church. I grew up in the church and I never heard sermons on abuse from any pastor. My church is silent about it."[46] A female pastor blamed women for causing sexual abuse by not dressing modestly and urged: "Ladies, the way we dress at times causes these men to rape us. We tempt men with wearing revealing clothes."[47]

An analysis of the initial understanding and attitudes of these religious leaders clearly reflects their non-involvement in addressing violence against women. Their patriarchal attitudes and limited knowledge of the issue underscore the lack of capacity among religious leaders to effectively address violence against women, as observed by scholars such as social work researcher Elizabeth Petersen and psychological sciences researcher Sara Kassas and her research colleagues.[48] This reflected the initial state of religious leaders which they needed to detach from. The recruitment workshop serves as an entry point and a ritual of initiation into the SAFFI training programs. It acts as a boundary marker that separates religious leaders from their initial understanding, beliefs and attitudes about violence against women, enrolling them in a focused program to address violence against women.

---

44 Interview with Pastor Tatenda by F Chirongoma at the Sensitiser Workshop, Atlantis, South Africa, 20 June 2017.

45 Interview with Pastor Simba by F Chirongoma at the Sensitiser Workshop, Atlantis, South Africa, 20 June 2017.

46 Interview with Pastor Rati by F Chirongoma, Sensitiser Workshop, Atlantis, South Africa, 20 June 2017.

47 Interview with Pastor Dadi by F Chirongoma, Sensitiser Workshop, Atlantis, South Africa, 2017.

48 See Petersen E. 2016. "Working with religious leaders and faith communities to advance culturally informed strategies to address violence against women", *Agenda* 30(3):50-59; Kassas S, Abdelnour N and Makhoul J. "'Hitting as light as feathers': Religious leaders' voices on domestic violence", *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37(3-4):1270-1291.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

Transition: The SAFFI Religious Leaders Training Model

The transition phase was a period of liminality during which religious leaders enrolled in SAFFI engaged in learning and gained new knowledge. According to SAFFI, the training model was designed to train and equip religious leaders with skills to combat and prevent violence against women. The training model was divided into five phases: (1) a religious leader recruitment workshop, (2) five-day training, (3) 10-week support series, (4) support and (5) monthly religious leaders' forums on gender-based violence.[49]

The first phase, the recruitment workshop, also called the sensitiser workshop, was an entry point into the training programme. This introductory workshop was mandatory, and it aimed to create a general awareness on gender-based violence to religious leaders. The sensitiser workshops are also a space for SAFFI to offer a general awareness on the intersection of faith and domestic violence, emphasising the critical role that religious leaders can play in challenging violence as well as offering support to survivors.

The second phase of the training builds on the recruitment workshop and covers topics on violence against women in detail. This workshop discusses the prevalence of domestic violence in communities, the root causes of domestic violence and ways to challenge violence against women. Religious leaders are also introduced to the Domestic Violence Act of South Africa and provided with information on how to interpret and apply the act. This workshop also educates religious leaders on maintaining professional pastoral boundaries when counselling and engaging with survivors and perpetrators of violence against women.

The third phase of the training programme is the implementation stage ,where religious leaders implement what they have learned about domestic violence in their religious communities. SAFFI calls this phase a ten-week support series. Religious leaders use a template that was designed by SAFFI and a previous cohort of of religious leader trainees. This template guides religious leaders to speak about domestic violence in their Sunday services and youth programmes. This template is titled "Our places of worship: True sanctuaries of hope and healing", and it has ten themes. In each week of the ten-week series, religious leaders are required to address a specific theme in their Sunday church services.[50] These themes are derived from the Bible, and they include specific Bible stories and passages that provide guidance to religious leaders when discussing about domestic violence in their faith communities. For example, in week six and seven, the religious leaders reflect on the story of Tamar, who was raped by her brother Amnon, which is recorded in 2 Samuel 13:1-22. In week six, the story is read and interpreted as a guide to deal

49 SAFFI, "SAFFI responding to gender-based violence in South Africa".

50 South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) 2017. "SAFFI's gender-based violence intervention programme: Documenting the experiences of religious leaders and faith communities in a South African context", SAFFI Reasearch Report, Issue 2, July.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

with survivors while in week seven the story is used to provide guidance when addressing perpetrators.

The fourth phase constitutes a continued training, supervision and mentoring of religious leaders, and the final fifth phase comprises monthly religious leaders' forums on gender-based violence where religious leaders meet once a month to get support from SAFFI and exchange ideas with fellow religious leaders on how to deal with violence against women. Religious leaders receive technical support and mentoring on filing gender-based violence counselling cases, reporting abuse and referring cases to stackholders such as the police and social workers. This phase is based on the work Elisabet Le Roux and others who argue that successful interventions on gender-based violence should promote collaboration between religious actors and secular stakeholders.[51]

This period of training of religious leaders, which I interpret as the liminal phase, was a critical stage of transformation of religious leaders. The period opened the opportunity for religious leaders to learn new ideas, challenge patriarchal notions that perpetuate violence and apply new perspectives that are life-affirming. It is significant to highlight that, while initially the transition stage was marked by tension and resistance, as some religious leaders found it difficult to challenge patriarchal structures, hierarchical gender power relations and deeply ingrained attitudes, this phase eventually marked a positive shift, as religious leaders eventually grappled with new ideas and renewed their consciousness abput the need to respond to violence against women. Of importance to note is how the peer support from religious leaders offered a space for religious leaders to navigate the process of change by learning from the advice and experiences of fellow religious leaders. With the knowledge gained through the SAFFI training models, religious leaders reintegrated into their communities with new perceptions and began to practically implement and challenge violence against women in their communities, reflecting the significance of training and equipping religious leaders in dealing with violence against women.

Reintegration: Experiences of religious leaders after SAFFI training

The state of religious leaders post-SAFFI training can be equated to a rite of passage through incorporation or reintegration. The reintegration of religious leaders was characterised by a change in attitudes and involvement in addressing violence against women. Religious leaders began to apply and implement what they had learned from SAFFI in their religious communities. In my conversations with some of the religious leaders after training, they shared a range of activities in which they are now involved to challenge violence against women. These include preaching about domestic violence in their churches, counselling survivors and perpetrators of violence, establishment of education programs for youths in their congregations and offering pre-marital counselling. Some of the religious leaders have established

51 Le Roux et al. "Getting dirty: Working with faith leaders to prevent and respond to gender-based violence", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 14(3):22-35.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

aftercare programs for young girls residing in areas affected by violence, while others are actively engaged in advocacy and campaigns on social media platforms. This dual approach underscores their commitment to addressing the needs of vulnerable populations and raising awareness about issues related to violence against women. Most significantly, one of the bishops who went through SAFFI training indicated that he was planning to incorporate topics on violence against women in his church's theological seminary to equip student pastors with necessary skills to deal with violence against women.[52] This reinforces the argument of Kassas and her fellow researchers that training religious leaders is important in improving their responses to violence against women.[53]

One of the pastors indicated that the training helped him see the need to address violence against women in his church. This pastor noted that he now includes issues of gender-based violence in his preaching. He also organises counselling programs for both victims and perpetrators of violence against women in his church. As he describes it, "SAFFI helped me to gain more knowledge to assist and counsel people. I now know how to file all my counselling sessions. I have referred some of my church members to social workers. I continue coming to SAFFI's events like these to gain more knowledge on addressing violence against women."[54]

Pastor Kuda is another SAFFI inductee who is now involved in addressing violence against women. Before he had attended SAFFI's trainings, Pastor Kuda believed prayer to be the only answer for dealing with violence against women. He intimated that SAFFI's trainings helped him realise the need for action in dealing with violence against women. In my conversation with him ten months after the training, he noted that he was now implementing what he learnt about violence against women in his church and in his community. He encourages church members to join campaigns such as the "16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children" to raise awareness. As he put it, "I was able to learn a lot from SAFFI, which I implemented in my church and community. SAFFI made me realise the need to take action in addressing violence against women. As a Man of God, I need to act. I now know that prayer only does not change things, action changes things; even Jesus took the rod to correct others.[55]

Another pastor indicated that he realised that it is the responsibility of the pastors to speak about violence against women in the church. He now preaches about violence against women in his church which he did not do before SAFFI's training. He added that he also teaches his church leaders about violence against women and emphasised, "Pastors have the responsibility to know the burden of their church

52 Interview with Bishop Kudzi by F Chirongoma. SAFFI Annual General Meeting, Zonnebloem, 19 September 2017.

53 Kassas et al. "'Hitting as light as feathers"'.

54 Interview with Pastor Tawanda by F Chirongoma. SAFFI 10th Anniversary Conference, University of Western Cape, 29 November 2018.

55 Interview with Pastor Kuda by F Chirongoma. Atlantis Monthly Religious Leaders Forums, Atlantis Community Library, 14 April 2018.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

members. Our purpose on earth as pastors is to fix the earthly problems. As pastors we cannot be much concerned about receiving tithes when there are other problems such as violence against women."[56]

In addition, this pastor also established a programme in his church to teach youths about gender-based violence. He said that SAFFI's trainings influenced him to hold talks and discussions on healthy relationships with the youths in his church. The purpose of the youth program is to help children to grow up knowing that violence against women is bad. He believes that if the youth are taught about violence against women, and if they groom young boys to be nonviolent, they will be able to raise a generation free from gender-based violence.[57]

Another bishop attributes his decision to address the abuse of girls to the influence of SAFFI's training. He indicated that he has been in ministry for many years. Through the years he heard several stories of young girls being sexually abused in the informal settlements of Khayelitsha, but he did not do anything other than praying. He added that in his community, several teenage girls are raped by their male relatives, who take advantage of the children when their parents are at work. He highlighted how his church took the initiative to take care of young girls after school, providing them with food and supervision until their parents return from work.

In addition to conducting interviews with religious leaders, I also followed some of them on social media to gain further insights. From the social media discussions, SAFFI seems to have been successful in incorporating some religious leaders into activists against gender-based violence in South Africa. In August 2019, South Africa experienced one of the highest rates of brutal rapes and murders of women and children. A religious leader who had received training from SAFFI responded to the brutal killings by raising awareness on Facebook with the injunction: "STOP violence, RAPING and KILLING of WOMEN. Surely when men in our nation come together with one voice to fight abuse towards women there will be a solution to preserve the lives of women and not provide more opportunities for women to die.[58]

An analysis of these experiences of religious leaders who went through SAFFI training on violence against women clearly reflects that some religious leaders were transformed from a state of non-involvement to a state of positive engagement in challenging violence against women. Findings of the study showed that some of the religious leaders clothed their involvement or interventions on violence against women with life affirming theological interpretations and they introduced new practices to prevent and reduce violence against women in their communities. This involvement of the religious leaders reflects some level of individual

56 Interview with Pastor Dudzai by F Chirongoma. Khayelitsha Monthly Religious Leaders Forum, The Great Commission Site C, 27 February 2018.

57 Interview with Pastor Dudzai.

58 Pastor Jabali, Facebook Post, 3 September 2019.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

transformation. Even so, while individual transformation of the religious leader is critically important, there is need for structural change and transformation. Thus, religious leaders have the mandate to work constantly in promoting new gender attitudes and perceptions and develop teachings that denounce the abuse of women. Although there are possibilities of religious leaders facing resistance and criticisms from religious communities that are socialised and deeply ingrained in patriarchal structures, religious leaders also have the potential to influence change in attitudes and behaviours, given the respect and authority that they command in their communities.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that while some religious leaders demostrate transformation by preaching about gender-based violence from the pulpit, a significant challenge remains. Some religious leaders, while openly preaching and speaking about violence against women, continue to support traditional gender roles that promote violence, particularly in private marriage counselling sessions, where advice may perpetuate further abuse of women. This is consistent with the work of Nina Hoel, a scholar of religious feminism, who problematises patriarchal legal norms exhibited by Muslim religious leaders who engage with women going through divorce.[59] Hoel highlights how some of the religious leaders are not empathetic to the experiences of women in marriages and proposes reconciliation that forces women to endure abusive marriages.[60] Hoel further notes that some religious leaders addressing divorce issues prioritise the preservation of the reputations of men whom they consider respectable within the Muslim community despite their abuse of women ty.[61] This shows the need for religious leaders who go through training on violence against women to translate their theoretical knowledge into praxis by dismantling patriarchal and androcentric norms and attitudes.

Another challenge lies in how some of the religious leaders are also perpetrators of gender-based violence. There is evidence to suggest that some religious leaders also abuse their intimate partners. Numerous reports document cases of religious leaders who abuse their own spouses. In her 2009 research, theologian Felicidade Chirinda examines stories of intimate partner abuse experienced by the wives of religious leaders in the Presbyterian church in Mozambique. In Chirinda's analysis, the wives of the clergy endure abusive relationships and remain silent.[62] Similarly, Hundzukhani Khosa-Nkatini, a practical theologian and Jacob Mofokeng, a criminalist, cite an example of a Cape Town pastor who claimed to be against gender-based violence yet he assaulted his wife. These examples of religious leaders who are also perpetrators of intimate partner violence highlight

59 Hoel N. 2012. "Engaging religious leaders: South African Muslim women's experiences in matters pertaining to divorce initiatives", *Social Dynamics* 38(2):184-200.

60 Hoel, "Engaging religious leaders".

61 Hoel, "Engaging religious leaders".

62 Chirinda NF. 2008. "Male clergy violence against their spouses in the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique–A new theory of praxis", Master's Thesis, University of Pretoria.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

the necessity of holding them accountable for their abusive behaviour. In addition, male religious leaders take advantage of religious authority to abuse women in their religious communities acknowledge that some religious leaders who are perpetrators of sexual abuse use spirituality to manipulate women to have sex with them. These scholars describe how women are raped by religious leaders claiming to free them from evil spirits.[63] The respect and trust accorded to religious leaders in their communities disempower survivors abused by religious leaders to speak out. Mthokozizi Ndlovu, a journalism and media scholar, also highlights that victims of rape abused by religious leaders find it hard to question the authority of leaders who claim to be the mouthpiece of God.[64] This potentially makes religious communities spaces of oppression than places of refuge. Thus, the dual nature of religious leaders as both resources and perpetrators of violence against women reflects the dire need to ensure that religious leaders are also hold accountable for abuse of power. However, despite the challenges discussed above, religious leaders occupy a prime position of authority and moral guidance in many communities. For this reason, they remain key resources in challenging violence against women in their communities given the respect and authority that they command. This authority and influence can be harnessed for positive change if religious leaders are equipped to challenge patriarchal traditions and are hold accountable for their actions.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the pervasiveness of violence against women in South Africa. It has also highlighted responses to the challenge through diverse means, including strengthening of laws and policies by the state, national campaigns by the government and establishment of shelters and advocacy programs by non-governmental organisations. Although research on faith-based organisations and violence against women is still in its infancy, it is apparent that FBOs are actively involved in responding to violence against women.

This chapter has demonstrated the significant role of faith-based interventions in addressing violence against women in South Africa. The case study of South African Faith and Family Institute (SAFFI) illustrates how faith-based interventions can transform the patriarchal perspectives and attitudes of religious leaders that perpetuate violence against women and turn religious leaders into key partners in challenging violence against women. By conceptualising the religious leaders training on violence against women as a rite of passage, the study has highlighted how the trainings helped some religious leaders to dismantle patriarchal social norms, transforming them from a state of non-involvement in dealing with violence

63 Khosa-Nkatini HP and Mofokeng JT. 2022. "The paradox of safety between pastors and female congregants", *Khazanah Theologia* 4(3):159-172.

64 Ndhlovu MP. 2020. "Examining media discourses on religious rape in Zimbabwe", *Feminist Media Studies* 20(6):801-812.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888

against women to a state of positive engagement in challenging violence against women.

Findings of this study illustrate that the religious leaders were more equipped and motivated to speak about violence against women after the SAFFI training. Some indicated that they established programs to educate the youth and provide counselling, while other established after care programs. This suggests the potential of religious leaders who are equipped in dealing with violence against women. While acknowledging that religious leaders can also perpetuate violence against women and can also be perpetrators of abuse, religious leaders can also be key resources in dealing with violence against women given their authority and respect in their communities.

It is critically important to recognise the interventions of FBOs in responding to violence against women in a society that is highly religious and where religion determines gender dynamics. Although laws and policies on violence against women are important in curbing violence, I agree with Ramadimetja Mogale and her fellow researchers that they are not sufficient.[65] Laws and policies have proven to be more theoretical than practical, as shown by the continued prevalence of violence against women in a country that has several legal frameworks designed to protect women from violence against women. It is against this background that the study proposes faith-based interventions to violence against women. Although the misinterpretation of religion can promote violence against women, religion is an important part of South African public life, and it has the potential to offer culturally relevant solutions to violence against women that are immediate and relatable and can be easily embraced and accepted.

65 Mogale RS, Burns KK and Richter S. 2012. "Violence against women in South Africa: Policy position and recommendations", *Violence Against Women* 18(5):580-594.

https://doi.org/10.52779/9781991260888