Unmasking Christian women survivor voices against gender-based violence – A pursuit for a feminist liberative pastoral care praxis for married women in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

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Candidate Declaration

I, **NOKULUNGA ZAMANTSHALI PORTIA DLAMINI** declare that:

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NOKULUNGA ZAMANTSHALI PORTIA DLAMINI

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12 August 2022

"I raise up my voice—not so I can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard. We cannot succeed when half of us are held back."

(Malala Yousafzai)

Dedication

To my family: you are my circle of strength and support.

Your words of encouragement have inspired me to focus on the goal and to soar, thus enabling my voice to be known in the academic space.

My heart is filled with only gratitude!

To the many other scholars who have fought hard in pursuit of academic excellence and women wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

You all are stars…

I am deeply moved by the courageous women survivors who participated in this study, generously sharing their stories in abusive marriages. My deepest respect goes to your strength and courage. I hope I have done your stories justice. The systemic challenge with our churches flouts the silent cries of women survivors. However, this study has uncovered the 'dirt' under the carpets. I respect the strong warriors who continue to challenge patriarchy in various spaces for women to flourish. Many of you have experienced and survived domestic violence and gender-based violence in your Christian homes! Your pain is my pain, our pain! You have resisted toxic and damaging theologies being 'Godly wives.' I pray that your lived experiences leverage intervention resources that advocate for gender justice and equality as a way of life. Your sanity and your healing should be the ultimate victory.

Marriage must be enjoyed and never endured.

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who are alive"

(Howard Thurman).

This project has felt like a homecoming!

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Philosophy who supported me throughout this journey. This bears testament to the fact that there is hope for African women whose identities have been shattered through toxic ideologies of a patriarchal society. To the many women voices who remain overlooked and silenced—we shall overcome!

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Abstract and Key Words

Gender-based violence is a global pandemic and Christian women face the unthinkable suffering and psycho-emotional trauma in their Christian homes. Traditional culture and practices are key agents of gender-based violence. Religion is another collaborator that perpetuates gender oppression and violence. Toxic theologies are implicated as sexist and patriarchal institutes that fuel injustices that harm more than cure as its women congregants suffer in shame and silence. The skewed biblical translations, and the language of submission and male dominance among many theologies have caused much harm. These toxic narratives are further bolstered in families at the wider society, where sociocultural practices such as *ilobolo* have created a climate of abuse as women are treated as chattel. Accordingly, patriarchy remains a contentious issue. The study employs Mercy Amba Oduyoye's, African Women Theology as a theoretical lens since it intersects gender, where culture and religion surface as gender inequality and oppression which manifests as violent abuse, suffering, and psycho-emotional trauma in the home.

This research study presents data collection from eleven (11) narratives of women survivors, who weave their embodied lived experiences of domestic and gender-based violence. These narratives explicate how and why African Christian women suffer from pathologies of culture and religion within marriage and how it distorts women's identities and personhood. The latter part of data collection is embodied on focus group discussions and visual maps that shape pastoral care guidelines inspiring the Anglican Church of Southern Church in the Diocese of Natal to theologize differently. As part of incarnating faith communities such that women heal and flourish, the study explores a pastoral theological reflection tool/resource synonymous with pastoral guidelines aiding African women to participate in their own journey of healing within the Anglican communion. The pastoral praxis explored in here envisions non-patriarchal safe spaces beyond the Anglican Church norm and beyond the traditional theological resources for the affected to vent their feelings and frustrations about their experiences of exploitation and oppression outside of hierarchical borders. Their narratives created a space for vulnerability, recognition, and healing as, mechanisms that lead to restorative justice and emancipation, enabling women to flourish.

Key Words: *African feminist theology; Anglican Church of South Africa; Christian; Christianity; Domestic-based violence; Feminist theology of praxis; Gender-based oppression; Gender-based violence; Human flourishing; Liberation; Pastoral care; Patriarchy; Psycho-emotional trauma; Womanist theology.*

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACSA	Anglican Church of Southern Africa
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
Circle	Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
DGBV	Domestic, Gender-Based Violence
DV	Domestic Violence
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (or Questioning), Intersex, Ally (or Asexual), and other extensions
MU	Mothers Union
NSP	National Strategic Plan
SA	South Africa
SAPS	South African Police Service
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN	United Nations
VAW	Violence Against Women

Chapter 1: Introduction and General Overview of the Study

Senzeni Na? (What have we done?)
Sono sethu, ubumyama? (Our sin is that we are black?)
Sono sethu, yinyaniso? (Our sin is the truth?)
Sibulawayo! (We are being killed!)
Mayibuye iAfrica! (Let Africa return!)[1]

1.1. Introduction

The isiXhosa and isiZulu folk song *Senzeni Na?* has been sung at protest marches and rallies throughout the era of the anti-apartheid struggle for human rights in South Africa. The song bears poignant significance to the country's journey towards liberation. The "haunting sounds of this lament have been heard in South Africa, at funerals, mostly, but also in political marches and in church" (West, 2017: 260). According to Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) (2008: 1), the song primarily speaks to "the torture and atrocities which were being perpetrated on them on account of their black skin colour: *isono sethu ubumnyama* (lit: *their sin is their blackness*)." Simply put, the song raised an alarm to the racial oppression that Black people faced at that pivotal time in history. The lyrics and the rhetoric of this lamentation remain applicable when attempting to understand the systematic and structural reinforcers that keep women pinned down in sacred spaces. In the contours of religion and culture, these surface complex gender inequalities, patriarchal oppression manifesting as gender-based violence (GBV): *isono sethu ubulili bethu besifazane* – our only sin is our female sex (Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2008). I also choose to argue that "our sin is our femaleness," meaning women are constructed as weaker vessels 'boxed in' by society to be powerless, dominated, and submissive. Currently, violent attacks perpetrated against women, girl children and members of the LGBTQIA+ community are common. Accordingly, *Senzeni Na?* "…manages to evoke anger and communicates a sense of frustration at the injustices of the time" (Nkoala, 2013: 57). *Senzeni Na?* is thus a rhetorical question that married Christian woman continue to pose silently, both inside and outside the church, and whereby they disclose their degrading and demeaning experiences.

I propose to invite you to the embodied lived experiences of married Christian women whose homes resemble warzones. These are women survivors who have had first-hand GBV experience in the privacy of their homes. This study underscores the pervasiveness and the androcentric nature of religion and culture that is embedded in the institution of marriage. These two are viewed as carriers of

[1] *Senzeni Na?* also spelled *Senzenina*, literally means in English, "What have we done?" See: https://www.riseupandsing.org/songs/senzenina [Accessed: 20 May 2021].

patriarchal ideologies which create fertile ground for GBV. The conversation in this study uncovers the scholarship of theologians and scholars who in different fields of study and various settings have committed time and resources in seeking appropriate interventions to curb this pandemic. In this present study, I tease out the toxic institutional cultures, patriarchal systems, and languages of oppression particularly of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA).[2] The legacy of the ACSA is rooted in the colonial, patriarchal and hierarchical missionary originality of the Church of England. It continues to navigate the effects of apartheid and post-democracy politics and its related social injustices of the post-liberation era.

In this study, I argue that women are faced with inequalities and myriad layers of oppressive experiences. Within the sacred spaces, I maintain that the language of oppression commonly shared through biblical teachings and sacred sermons in pulpits every Sunday silences women, aggravating violence against women. I further argue that the narrative on women oppression and gender inequality is deeply entrenched in our social fibre as Africans and during socialisation and this narrative reinforced by family values, culture and religion intersects. What one finds is that "women's behaviour is normally under severe scrutiny and surveillance" (Mpungose, 2010: 26).

Women in the church are only silenced and to be silent as a heritage passed on from generation to generation (Oduyoye, 1995a: 481). In her book, *Wounds of the spirit*: *Black women, violence, and resistance ethics*, Traci West (1999: 5) defines patriarchy as the systemic devaluation of the worth and value of women. West further argues that patriarchy involves the political process of gender supremacy from biological difference. Theology and religion are pervasive as it constitutes of restrictive language and metaphors that encourages GBV. This is evident in the use of doctrinal language that needs to be condemned as it promotes male authority. Violent masculinities[3] are a reality. According to Gqola (2007) the 1996 South African Constitution foregrounds equality and human rights. However, according to the United Nations (UN), women are violated and that threatens human rights and inhibits the possibilities of women flourishing. As John 10:10 states: *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full"* (New International Version). Hitherto, women have no peace and certainly have no life in abundance.

[2] The Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) is the province of the Anglican Communion in the southern part of Africa. The province comprises dioceses located in South Africa, Mozambique, Angola, Lesotho, Namibia, Swaziland, and Saint Helena. Prior to 2006, the province was known as the Church of the Province of Southern Africa (CPSA), with an even earlier rendering of the name being the Church of the Province of South Africa.

[3] Toxic masculinity refers to norms of masculinity as violent, unemotional, and sexually aggressive has a harmful impact on society and the individual.

According to Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, issues of social injustice must be challenged. However, the realities are saddening since violence remains prevalent in society. Historically, gender injustice, and the marginalisation of women has been treated as a normal way of living, and men's authority continues to be legitimised and unquestioned. Women face traumatic and harmful experiences at the hands of men they know whereby they are treated as sex objects. Men value women as mere sex givers. If sex is not given voluntarily, the men force the women to do so (Baloyi, 2010). In contemporary times, married women are demonised, raped, shamed, and silenced, losing their lives and their sense of self at the hands of their husbands or partners. If efforts are to be thought out in liberating women, it is vital that women's rights are considered as human rights and theologies be conceptualised as phenomenon that ought to be life affirming, inspiring women's vitality and wholeness. Clearly, violence is a public health concern as it impacts a person's physical, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and emotional health. Women continue to be vulnerable to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), post-traumatic stress disorders, enduring emotional and physical scaring, which impacts how they understand themselves as created in the image of God. What is more disturbing is to see women being further subjected to unkind ambiance in church spaces as it depicts unequal gender dynamics. This is where they grapple to find safe spaces within faith organisations to enable them to vent and give meaning to their struggles in their search for healing. Women challenge the narratives of patriarchy initially embodied theologically.

This study will seek to contribute to the ongoing discussion between academics, clergy, and lay people on how to address the psycho-emotional healing of the marginalised women's sector in the ACSA as a way of outlining a pastoral care intervention relating to GBV. In this regard, chapter two of this work will review the ACSA's response to GBV through various interventions in combating DGBV. The review will trace how the ACSA has in the past dealt with the issue of pastoral care interventions through a gendered approach. The main objective of this present study is to envisage a process whereby spaces within the church and outside can be non-patriarchal as women 'story their stories for healing' as a liberatory praxis.

Faith organisations present sexist and patriarchal institutional cultures that perpetuate injustices and women insubordination. Such religious and socio-cultural constructs are extended in policies, systemic structures, congregational leadership, and governance, embodying stereotypical values that are a cause for concern in the era of GBV in the history of Christian faith. I will thus focus on the institutional culture and patriarchal systems of the ACSA, ravaged as it is with domestic violence and gender-based violence. Ntuli (2013) coined the acronym DGBV,[4] thereby describing domestic violence as a gender-

[4] DGBV refers to domestic and gender-based violence. This acronym is adapted by G. T. Ntuli in her Master's dissertation, provocatively entitled, "Poking thorns in a bed of roses": A feminist critique of the premarital and

based predicament. In putting the engagement into proper perspective, I mainly refer to the acronym DGBV in this study, as I try to understand the manifestation of violence in the domestic context between intimate partners.

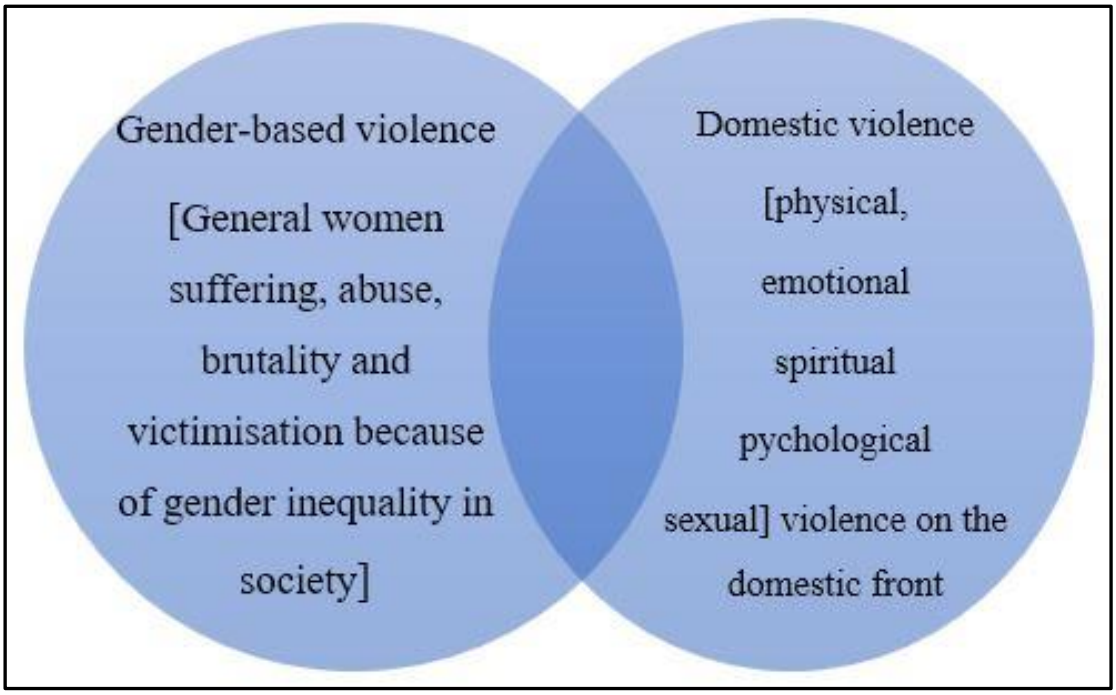

Figure 1.1. The intersectionality of gender-based violence and domestic violence

Source: Author

Figure 1.1 illustrates the intersection of gender-based violence and domestic violence erupting in heterosexual marriages, which manifests as spousal abuse or wife abuse as it remains unabated in society. These types of abuse will be engaged and expanded upon in chapter two of this work. A popular catchphrase asserts, "the personal is political" (Angela Davis cited in Oloka-Onyango & Tamale, 1995). Many women are held in hostage in their own homes, the pain inflicted by their spouses translating into trauma, hardships, physical and psychological suffering in their marriages. Some women are not abused physically but are at the receiving end of vulgar and demeaning language, psychological abuse, constantly controlled in terms of their movement, restrictions on how to spend their money, and are constantly put down by their husbands. Such trauma defines how they experience marriage. Activist movements have held summits, protests marches, conferences, and community dialogues, yet GBV remains unabated.

marriage coaching programme (PMCP of the Diocese of Grahamstown). In this present study, I use DGBV and GBV interchangeably to denote intimate partner violence and abuse.

According to Rule and Mncwango (2010: 186), more than 80% of South Africans are said to be Christians. Among the Christian majority, the Bible is fundamental to their Christian faith. Hence, as Nicola Slee posits, the "Bible provides Christianity with narratives, symbols and images which have informed and continue to inform prayer, preaching, worship, doctrine, and ethics" (2003: 13). It is viewed as a tool that is inspirational, empowering and healing. And yet in different contexts, theologians and feminists appreciate and wrestle with its content. The Bible's authoritative and normative witness to divine revelation in the Christian tradition has been problematic in the sense that it has been used to oppress and perpetuate women subservience. In fact, the Bible is known to use "anthropomorphic terms" that makes it difficult to understand (Howell, 2014: 1). The faith sector engagement is viewed as a double-edged sword (Le Roux et al., 2016). It influences and addresses GBV by "perpetuating and condoning beliefs and practices that facilitate GBV" (2016: 23). In this study, I argue that the Bible has situated women in abusive contexts and relations. Its literal and ideological misinterpretations have only silenced and shamed the oppressed.

This study intends to uncover GBV as a pastoral challenge and examines how the ACSA can provide a contextual response, steering away from the traditional theological approach of solely relying on the Bible, prayer, and worship as sources of theology. This study creates a space for GBV survivor stories within the church to be heard. Furthermore, it allows the survivors to define the pastoral care praxis where guidelines are aimed at honouring the narratives that are survivor centred. As an output, the study presents visual maps that shape the pastoral guidelines on how the ACSA can respond to DGBV. Women's stories are the source from which the study uncovers agency for shaping a pastoral care praxis as it advocates for the liberation and the flourishing of women in faith spaces.

Gender inequality is not new. It dates to ancient times. The Book of Esther re-counts a narrative of Queen Vashti, who is defined as an unsung hero (Kebaneilwe, 2011). Queen Vashti was summoned by the King at the banquet to parade herself like a beauty pageant contestant before a roomful of drunken dignitaries as a fitting delicious feast for male eyes, *"in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at"* (Esther 1:11 New International Version). According to Butting (2012), the sight of the beautiful woman was to be used in this important assembly as a demonstration of the King's power, while at the same time reminding the men present of their own dominant power as males in the hierarchy of the empire.

Vashti's response to this king's command was unexpected: she took a stand and refused. She challenged patriarchy and the notions of bondage. Vashti was not intimidated by wealth, power, authority, or control. Her response meant self-liberation and perhaps that of many other women. By her action, she changes the narrative of power, control, and patriarchy. It was a demonstration of her activism, boldly doing away with being commoditised and sexualised as an object. The lessons to be drawn from the

Book of Esther include the resilience and bravery of a woman, thereby indicating that all women can take their own initiative against abuse, and they can fight all forms of injustices. Attacks, violent acts that diminishes a women's worth, including the violation of her integrity as a woman requires a fight. Queen Vashti was able to change the course of history and fought male dominance. In seeking to curb GBV, Christian women can break the silence, protest injustice, and develop resources that inform healing. Women can play a significant role in re-imagining processes and systems that defy all forms of abuse and control, thereby liberating themselves from the shackles of patriarchal domination. This present study draws its inspiration from Queen Vashti, emulating her as a model of liberation. It is laying a table where one can regard the church as a safe space where Christian women liberate themselves and become agencies of change, participating in an ongoing activism that resists male hegemony.

Data presented, engaged, and interpreted in this research study was conducted in the historically ACSA Black parishes in the Diocese of Natal[5] in the year 2021. My hunch was that because of Zulu cultural practices and religious patriarchal views, women face oppression. Hence, GBV is rife. Religion informs this patriarchy, resulting in women being abused, treated as punching bags, battered, humiliated, but still putting on their Sunday best to attend Holy Eucharist. After observing GBV in the church, and the art of masking pain and trauma, women fearing 'to hang their dirty linen in public,' the study sought non-religious ways that would empower survivors in responding to GBV.

1.2. Positionality

Although I intend to begin by situating myself, I will expand on this in chapter four. I am approaching this project as an African intersectional feminist. I understand the world to be enmeshed by layers of class, sexism, and patriarchy. I understand the world as a modern, urban, African woman, a Zulu woman, born and bred in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. In my own situatedness, particularly growing up in a South African township, I embody the lived experience where women's bodies are vulnerable to abuse and oppression. I declare this position to avoid any biases that may arise.

[5] The diocese is in the region of Natal, South Africa. The area marking the diocese excludes the area known as Zululand, which is its own diocese. The diocese of Natal is situated in the geographic location where mainly Zulu people reside. Hence, there is inculturation since Zulu culture permeating the church. Zulu people still practice their culture. They are steeped into beliefs that males are above females, and that a woman's place is found in the kitchen. The Zulu tradition is still steeped in traditions that promote inequality and those who subscribe to patriarchal ideologies practice Zulu culture as a way of life.

In the year 2019, I read a poem entitled, *While I am oppressed.*[6] This poem made an attempt at painting a picture of the dehumanising and painful lives of women who are abused.

While I am oppressed?

Tell me, who am I?[7]

Who am I when I have been shamed and chained in my father's land?

Who am I when my body has been tortured and violated?

Tell me who I am supposed to be, when my soul has been crushed with layers of brokenness?

Who do I turn to when I have suffered at the hands that were meant to cushion me?

Who am I when love hurts?

Who am I when my marriage vows are tormenting me?

Who am I when marriage has turned into a covenant of death and suffering?

Who am I when my lover raises his fist, reminding me of submission?

Who am I when my sacred space has been violated?

Who am I when my world has been shattered into pieces?

Who am I when I can't hear my own heartbeat?

When my voice is silently buried... buried in contours of pain and indignity.

Who am I when my own culture violates me?

Where do I turn to when the book of life makes me vulnerable to pathologies of power?

Where do I turn to when I feel violated in the sacredness of the church?

Why are you quiet my sister?

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[6] *While I am oppressed* is a poem that was written and read by myself as the author on Day 1 of the Silent Protest and Praxis Reflection on GBV and faith staged at the School of Religion, Pietermaritzburg campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. The 2019 theme was titled #Unsilencing the Silence. The University of KwaZulu-Natal's Pietermaritzburg campus holds this event as an annual conference inviting stakeholders, scholars, and practitioners in the specialized area of Violence Against Women. The event runs a series of advocacy programmes on GBV and host silent protest campaigns demonstrating the fight against GBV and standing in solidarity with the survivors.

[7] The use of 'I' in this study will be used to signify the authors' agency in challenging patriarchal power. The 'I' in this instance defines the author writes from her own position as a Black African woman born and bred in a South African township, which thus shapes my understanding of theo-social and cultural dogmas of women oppression, domination and gender violence that prevails in African communities. In this poem, I narrate lived experiences of indigenous women who continue to be subjugated in the matrimony of their own households due to patriarchal teachings and toxic theologies that manifest into GBV.

Why are you quiet as you watch me suffer in silence?

My sister, why are you not pleading for my peace and wholeness?

All of them don't grasp my brokenness

All of them don't perceive how my spirit is crushed

All of them think I lament at the experience of the Holy Ghost serenaded by the beauty of drowning in His presence.

All of them think I am spiritual, powered, and empowered, yet my spirit yearns for freedom.

Come closer, you and you. Walk with me. Hear my story,

Hold my hand. Understand my path. Feel my pain.

Wipe my tears.

Journey with me as we both heal.

Do not silence me,

Do not shame me.

Do not stigmatise me.

Beneath my wound are traces of potential yet to be discovered. Vibrations of pain reverberating a deep desire for change.

I long for my sanity.

Now I remember... I am a daughter of the Most High, created in the image of God

I want to break free. Break the cycle. Break the legacy...break the chains...

Who I am and who I am becoming roars to endless possibilities...ushering a new dawn of women who shall be free and never a subject of violation?

Women who shall triumph and have their justice well served!

I may be weak in spirit, but I am strength personified!

I shall overcome. We shall overcome!!

Zama Dlamini

This poem creates an alertness on how in the African context women experience marriage. As such, the poem reflects on the lamentations of women survivors of violence who continue to experience all

kinds of trauma in their abusive marriages due to culture and harmful androcentric Bible interpretations that continue to relegate and denigrate women.

1.3. Background to the study

African married women face dehumanising experiences in marriage, and these diminish opportunities of dignity and hope for a flourishing life. African society is governed by strong values, most of which lie at the intersection of culture and religion. These strong pillars have been pivotal in structuring and shaping groupings in society. Over the years, religion and culture has shared a rich heritage of values and belief system, which on marriage has seriously hampered women's experiences of marriage life since it mostly possessed sexist and patriarchal connotations. These are unpacked and engaged in chapter two of this work. Being privileged to have access to mental health resources, I am particularly concerned about many women who cannot offload; these are women survivors who are affected emotionally and mentally. In this instance, I argue that the church has silenced and shamed their experiences.

This study provides evidence that the plight of DGBV is a threat not only to women, but to society at large. I also argue that the plight of women is still inadequately and carelessly handled and hence the church needs to create a space for transformation, changing the social conditions "creating a humane and egalitarian, and just society in which human beings can find their true selves" (Hinga, 2017). For centuries, the church has failed to appreciate the importance of hearing women's plight other than offering prayer as a solution. Christianity conscientizes believers into a life of prayer, and all answers are said to emanate from a deep chain of prayers. One such admired virtue is the exhibition of what I call the 'the good girl façade.' This is based on the so-called 'virtuous woman' of Proverbs 31:10-31 who handles her marriage matters confidentially with astute peculiarity without hanging out her dirty linen for all the world to see *(Anganekeli izwe amanyala)*. Regrettably, these sexist Bible understandings have been normalised in various patriarchal communities and have not served the emancipation and the liberation of African women. Women find themselves caged and bottled-in within unique and often dehumanising marriage unions. The society has socialised women to suppress their anger and aggression. Biblical texts continue to be the author of the divine truth and it conscientizes women to become numb to the suffering. These repercussions are well detailed in chapter two of this work as I tackle the consequences of abuse and biblical misinterpretations as they manifest themselves as mental health care struggles.

Traditional societal teachings have silenced women, treating them in a manner that is invisible. Traditional teachings have dwelt on teachings and a consciousness that makes women choose silence

even on matters that explicate body violence. Even when they receive pre-marital counselling, there is a marked absence in promoting gender equality in marriage (Ntuli, 2013).

Churches have often dwelt on similar notions that result in making women wellness matters insignificant and trivial. Indeed, the church continues to ignore, trivialise, and vilify women's issues. For its predominantly male hierarchy, women's issues are not a priority. Hence, emotional healing needs are unsupported, often overlooked, unnoticed and somehow taken for granted in most churches. The church continues to call out occasions of social injustice such as racism, xenophobic attacks, and poverty, as sin, yet GBV is not included. And yet, prior to partaking in Holy Eucharist, congregants chant the prayer, "We who are many are one body" *(Thina sithi sibaningi sibemzimba munye…ngoba sonke samukela sinkwa sinye).* As Siwila (2015: 83) has observed, "the Lord's table is seen as the sacred space that is meant to unite all humanity." In post-colonial times, the Lord's table should be seen in the light of church structures defining a contextual theology. However, Siwila's argument presents gendered contestations. I also point to similar parallels where women who endure the pain of GBV have *a* space at the table' but the table is silent about their experiences of GBV. and yet the church community finds no reason to pause and reflect how the Eucharistic table can be expanded to explore pastoral care resources to answer such cries.

Women play a pivotal role in society, where they are often the pillars of the family unit. It is therefore critical that the church holds courageous conversations around GBV so that there is capacity and protocols in place responding to this plight. These conversations are to be open to every single congregant.

According to the South African Government, the 2020 National strategic plan on gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF NSP) provides:

> …a multi-sectoral, coherent strategic policy and programming framework to ensure a coordinated national response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide by the government of South Africa and the country as a whole (Department of Justice, 2020: 18).

I am not a practical theologian or an expert in pastoral care. It is what I intend exploring in future publications. However, this present study recognises the moral obligation of faith organisations in responding to GBV. As such, this study, leverages on Pillar #2 of the NSP that underpins, Prevention and Rebuilding Social Cohesion response stimulating a conversation on unmasking harmful social and structural norms that feed GBV (Department of Justice, 2020: 19). In this way, social frameworks will be created, building and bolstering capacity that enables GBV prevention.

In her book, *Toxic couples: The psychology of domestic violence*, Motz (2014: 1) defines domestic violence[8] by referring to intimate partner violence (IPV). Both GBV and domestic violence affects women and children. This research study acknowledges that males also on the receiving end of abuse. However, in this study I intend uncovering that married women are more vulnerable to violence in their Christian home since they are embroiled in a power matrix that is promoted by culture and religious norms. Hence, the acronyms DGBV and GBV are used interchangeably throughout this study to survey the landscape.

Media coverage depicts a rise in incidents and crimes reported. State statistics may not however be reflective of the current situation, since many cases remain unreported as they take place in the privacy of the home, where the perpetrators of such acts avoid police intervention due to intimidation and further threats of violence upon the victims. In this, I recall the Presidential #GBV Summit.[9] Some GBV cases in South Africa have attracted media attention. Examples include the case of 19-year-old Uyininene Mrwetyana,[10] a university student, who was raped and killed, the case of Precious Ramabulana, who was raped and murdered, being stabbed some 90 times,[11] and Dr Thandi Ndlovu, a medical doctor and businesswoman who was denied help by South African Police Services (SAPS) staff in Kya Sands, Randburg, when she sought to report DGBV which she had endured from her husband throughout their 10-year-old marriage.[12] Likewise, the testimony shared by Cheryl Zondi,[13] which vividly described her lived experiences of being sexually violated by Nigerian Televangelist Pastor Timothy Omotoso left

[8] Domestic violence is a part of gender-violence, which includes physical and sexual violence in different forms. It also involves psychological, verbal, financial abuse, and economic control.

[9] A GBV Summit was held in Pretoria 01-02 November 2018. This platform created a conversation with survivors that shared gruesome and traumatic testimonies of their survival. However, what became clear in their stories were the many layers of pain buried under their physical scars.

[10] Uyinene Mrwetyana was a 19-year-old University of Cape Town student who was tortured, raped, and murdered on 24 August 2019 in Claremont, Cape Town. Her body was dumped in the township of Lingelethu West, Khayelitsha. Mrwetyana's murder highlighted the broader national problem of GBV and murder in South Africa. See the News24.com documentary: #IamNene: How Uyinene Mrwetyana's murder ignited a movement. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sTPRoCLHyU [Accessed: 10 December 2021].

[11] See: Russel Molefe, "Precious Ramabulana was stabbed 90 times, court hears," News24.com. https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/precious-ramabulana-was-stabbed-90-times-court-hears-20210610 [Accessed: 10 December 2021].

[12] See: Siwaphiwe Myataza, "I am hurt, our SAPS failed businesswoman Dr Thandi Ndlovu," *Independent Newspapers*, 31 August 2019. https://www.iol.co.za/news/opinion/i-am-hurt-our-saps-failed-businesswoman-dr-thandi-ndlovu-31573722 [Accessed: 10 December 2021].

[13] Cheryl Zondi is a woman who testified about being sexually groomed and violated by Nigerian televangelist Timothy Omotoso while she was a member of the Jesus Dominion International church. She took to the witness stand to testify about the sexual abuse and psychological oppression she suffered at the hands of someone who was supposed to be a servant of God. Through this lived experience, Cheryl Zondi was inspired to help the victims and survivors of sexual abuse by launching the Cheryl Zondi Foundation to help those abused in 'sacred spaces.' See: Nomahlubi Jordaan, "Cheryl Zondi launches foundation to help victims of sexual abuse," *The Times (SA)*, 04 December 2018. https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2018-12-04-cheryl-zondi-launches-foundation-to-help-victims-of-sexual-abuse/ [Accessed: 10 December 2021].

many people bewildered. To bring the matter closer to home, are recent GBV cases within the ACSA that went viral on various social media platforms. A case in point is the story that traces an Anglican priest, Rev Dolley-Major,[14] a GBV-raped victim deserted by Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. Lastly, this study recognises the untimely tragic death of an Anglican Church clergy spouse, Mrs Nomthandazo Sithole.[15] According to press reports, allegations levelled suggested GBV as a manifestation of marriage misunderstandings. Side-line conversations erupted confirming that there were difficulties. This major GBV incident became a public spectacle and revealed that the ACSA struggles with GBV like other faith organisations that have been studied. I argue here that intervention initiatives have not trickled down to the parish level. The church still acts the role of being 'fire extinguishers' and only reactive when there is a mishap. Currently, there are no tangible steps towards pastoral care for survivors that filter down to the parish level. In the event, they are often contained by the hierarchies of the diocese or the gender ministry desk. This does not reflect well on the church. More concerning is the ecclesiastical hierarchical nature of the ACSA and its prevailing culture of silence. These realities are explored in-depth in chapter two of this work.

1.4. Motivation for the study

I am a licenced lay minister within the ACSA. In my experience as an itinerant preacher and lay counsellor, I meet married women, many of whom are experiencing marriage difficulties and end up leaving the church. Traditional support is rendered as the "application of exegetical material produced by Old and New Testament" (Louw, 2019: 92). Women are told to mask their pain, resist and pray, as well as display a "maturity in faith" as enduring qualities that can sustain them during times of tribulation (Louw, 1999b).

For many, social media forms a large part of today's living. Consequently, I follow several Facebook pages specially set up for Christian married women who are constantly seeking advice anonymously in

[14] Rev Dolley-Major is an Anglican priest from the Cape Town Diocese. She is alleged to have been a victim of abuse, rape, and institutional abuse. In fighting for justice, Dolley-Major went on a hunger strike, fighting for herself and other victims of rape and GBV. See: Karabo Mafolo, "Almost 20 years later, an Anglican priest is still determined to hold her alleged rapist accountable," *Daily Maverick*, 29 July 2021. https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-07-29-almost-20-years-later-an-anglican-priest-is-still-determined-to-hold-her-alleged-rapist-accountable/ [Accessed: 10 December 2021].

[15] Mrs Nomthandazo Sithole was an Anglican clergy spouse in the Diocese of Natal. It is alleged she committed suicide, leaving a suicide note assumed to break the silence of her alleged spousal violence in her Christian household being married to an Anglican priest. Shockingly, a couple of weeks later her husband Rev Sandiso Sithole was murdered, gunned down in his mission house by an unknown suspect. See: Zanele Mthethwa, "Isidumbu sikamka mfundisi sitholwe esigangeni" (The body of a Pastor's wife was found in a field), *Isolezwe*, 12 June 2020. https://www.isolezwe.co.za/izindaba/isidumbu-sikamka-mfundisi-sitholwe-esigangeni-49295399 [Accessed: 02 June 2021].

fear of shame. Top on the list of issues, is the suffering they endure in their marriages in the name of culture and religion. Gender-based Violence (GBV) or other forms of victimisation has turned the institution of marriage into a toxic space. Culture has treated women as properties, silencing and marginalising them. As a Christian woman I am aware of religious ideologies that endanger women. Christian married women are confronted with serious marital difficulties and the popular piece of advice often given is endure and survive *'bekezela.'* Linking to my discussion on positionality, a *makoti*[16] is 'othered' in her own home, where she is treated as someone's property, being constantly silenced, marginalised, ostracised, and subtly reminded of 'her place' by her in-laws. This is evidence that patriarchy is not entrenched by male bodies only. Through silence, deeds and words women on women violence exists. This is purposely orchestrated to demean, degrade, and humiliate, rendering her seemingly worthless and insignificant. I consider this passive aggressive activity on the part of the perpetrator as one which predisposes that person to power and domination and hence adds to GBV in the lives of married women. In my own experience, under the guise of religion and culture I have faced exclusion and rejection and my body being policed in terms of what I can wear by other women. In my own understanding, this typically reveals that women can often become enablers of patriarchy.

As a licensed lay counsellor with the ACSA, I consider myself a wounded healer.[17] I am a survivor due to secondary trauma. I observed and experienced GBV in my formative years. My recollection of growing up in a township, includes being exposed to the toxic and often violent masculinities of the *Amagintsa*[18] living large. I have personally witnessed in my family, generations of women, as well as family friends coerced and entrapped in acts of violence. These are stories of women deeply and severely scarred emotionally, abused by husbands, uncles, and sons. Any hurt, pain, or suffering creates emotional wounds and at the time of suffering, it is my belief that everyone wants to offload, heal and be well. This is a ministry that continues to be conservative where all answers are sought through faith, fasting, and prayer.

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[16] *Makoti* is an IsiZulu word and refers to a daughter-in-law.

[17] A 'wounded healer' is a term created by the Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Carl Gustav Jung [1875–1961]. Jung was the first to write about the dynamic of the wounded practitioner healing the wounded. The wounded healer idea states that an analyst is compelled to treat patients because the analyst him or herself is 'wounded.' The idea may have Greek mythology origins. In this instance, I acknowledge my personal embodied experience of mental and emotional aches and pain, which are a part of my journey. Hence, I use the term of the 'wounded healer' in this context to heal and empower others who are navigating diverse forms of suffering within patriarchal settings.

[18] *Amagintsa* is township slang referring to gangsters. These are predominantly Black African man who because of socio-economic depravity in the 1990s, resorted to making fast money by selling drugs, committing cash transit robberies, stealing cars, and living promiscuous lives. The *Amagintsa* were known for merciless killings. They abused women and their definition of 'manhood' included disturbing images of toxicity. These shaped and role modelled to growing boys the images of violent toxic masculinity.

Born and raised in a liberated family, I have a different stance on the language of submission and gender inequality. I hear the prayer requests of women praying that God's mercy prevail in their marital difficulties. These are lamentations and narratives of women deeply and severely scarred emotionally. But, I also observe the church struggling with its own politics and the nature of institutionalisation which leaves no room to attend to such cries, thereby perpetuating silence on this matter. There is an impression that abuse happens only in the secular world and not in the church. My take is that when a problem is not called out and named as such, it persists, leaving far devastating effects emotionally, socially, and psychologically.[19]

I have always been baffled why there is silence in the church about women abuse, oppression and violence particularly in Christian families. Identifying the topicality of GBV as a pervasive pandemic locally, the trajectory of the project was clear, to unmask domestic violence and gender-based violence and honour the survivor narratives to outline guidelines of African pastoral care for sacred spaces. Accordingly, this study topic has enabled a space where one envisions gender justice and transformation through the voices of survivors of violence being aided by the creative use of visual maps. The visual maps in this study have created a space for women survivors to envision the fundamentals and practicalities of survivor care.

Women continue to be ostracised, harmed through church sermons, including interpretations of biblical texts that are inconsistent with Christian values as they are told to persevere, forgive, and forget. Following God's calling upon my life as a lay minister, I began taking interest in how sermons and biblical/sacred texts are interpreted, which the church has used to perpetuate and justify acts that amount to GBV in modern times. As an itinerant preacher, in most of my engagements I meet women in pain, who bear the emotional and psychological scars from GBV, seeking safe spaces for healing (Mwaura, 2010).

My proposition is that the church should allow women survivors to speak out and never shame nor silence them. To enable healing, women survivors must be freely disclosing the abuse, teachings done to decentre toxic teachings, aiding Christian women to unlearn and detach from the colonial episteme. While one may applaud efforts by the ACSA where time, energy and resources are invested in expanding GBV advocacy and forms of activism, currently these do not mitigate the gendered violence. My overarching argument is that the church events embody a contradictory rhetoric. Women themselves, as the audience, activists, and planners with their intent to mobilise for change and to express solidarity in the fighting against heteronormative norms, instead reinforce a public gaze through enactment, fashion display and eloquent speeches (a miniature performance play). This staging is

[19] The consequences of GBV will be discussed in detail in chapter two of this work.

merely a box ticking exercise and the experience of DGBV remains unaddressed. The traditional theology still centres around prayer, scripture reading and worship. I therefore maintain that these activities disregard transparent engagements and disclosure of abuse in Christian homes. They reflect the characteristics of a 'gendered spectacle,' inconsiderate of the complex mental and emotional wounding women bear as survivors of DGBV. This present study thus envisions the importance of the ACSA being an agent of transformation and an advocate for justice.

Continuous trauma has the potential of being passed on from generation to generation, haemorrhaging the flourishing of humankind. Failure to respond to the scourge is catastrophic and could translate into churches losing their legitimacy and diminishing their prophetic obligation of promoting justice and social transformation. Considering this background, this study is primarily premised on fashioning a feminist praxis theology that is both redemptive and transformative to GBV women survivors. It is vital that the church maintains its prophetic voice by standing with the afflicted and the wounded, appropriating its theology against the plight of GBV. Therefore, this study adopts a liberative approach to pastoral care mediation that honours the lived experiences of ACSA women across all social, economic, and racial lines, and their vulnerability to GBV. It is envisaged that women's narratives will determine pastoral care practices and strategies that cultivate a life-giving spirituality. Kang (2005: 286) maintains that the mission of the church should be to demand justice in all its forms as the church stands on the side of the oppressed, the marginalised, and the deprived.

In trying to navigate the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, this GBV conversation must urgently come up with solutions since women have been suffering during the lockdowns. Considering my background in psychology and counselling, and involvement in pastoral care ministry, these realities have shifted the trajectory of this project. It has triggered a profound passion for a theology of pastoral care as a way of honouring women's voices.

1.5. Outline of the research problem

In the Christian context, unjust systems continue to exist that drive women into oppression and victimisation. The church is silent. The subject of domestic violence and gender-based violence is poorly attended to. The pastoral care is supposedly a clergyperson's vocation. Since the church is dominated by male clergy, there are challenges in terms of male clergy struggling to extend some pastoral care functions to communities and congregants as they tend to regard women issues as petty and feminine. A study by Petersen (2006) investigated the challenges of the clergy in dealing with domestic violence. In her dissertation, she outlines how violence occurs as both emotional/psychological damage and sexual violence, which is a result of power control. It emerged that women were reluctant to report cases of violence because domestic violence was treated with

silence. Interestingly, what is worth noting is that the research participants alluded to a lack of training in dealing with real life issues as pastors, and secondly the lack of theological guidelines to address problematic teachings and misinterpretations of biblical texts (Petersen, 2006). Hence, the church has in the past played no role in intervening in situations where there was spousal violence and violation of women. The church still struggles to respond and there is dead silence which, Haddad (2004) describes as the discourse that embraces poor and marginalised women's struggle to survive each day. Speaking about those suffering is considered taboo *'ihlazo.'* Hence, while women sweep such matters under the carpet, they are nevertheless the ones that continue to suffer.

This study unmutes the abuse married women endure. It distinguishes between the ailing patriarchal systems and traditional processes within the ACSA. However, it honours the liberation and flourishing of women body, mind, and soul. Scholars postulate that most congregants are women. These are women who are in the pews, while yearning for justice and their dignity to be restored, as the church strives to make formidable actions where there is a safe space to exhale and flourish.

This study hopes to amplify the voices of women whose emotional healing needs are often overlooked, unnoticed, and somehow taken for granted in black church communities, more specifically in the ACSA. Following attempts and efforts that have focused on GBV interventions, either as workshops, seminars, consultations, and GBV marches, these have magnified advocacy and awareness on GBV. Hence, the current study shifts the gear and seeks to approach the healing and flourishing through indigenous resources that honours their lived experiences. Doing theology is thus central to the previously marginalised sectors of the church, focusing on survivor narratives while encouraging communal gatherings that seek resolutions that can shape pastoral care. Women who live on the economic margins struggle to access proper therapeutic and counselling services. The lived experiences of such women survivors are pivotal for interrogation in this study, as they shape structures and avenues of faith communities where GBV survivors can heal.

1.6. Theoretical framework

Drawing insights from African woman's theology (AWT), a theology proposed by its founder, Mercy Amba Oduyoye. This is in conversation with Denise Ackermann's feminist theory of praxis where flourishing as a phenomenon becomes the experience of every woman. This research study aims at privileging women survivor voices in the exercise of theologising. This is innovative within the ACSA where a space is created for the healing of its women members. The AWT framework as a postcolonial theology, offers a theo-philosophical perspective that reconstructs women's theology in the face of patriarchy. By so doing, it focuses on women raising their theological voices as they seek liberation, as they speak about their experiences, citing their direct contact with a context. Significant work has

been done by Oduyoye, the founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women theologians (*hereafter*, 'The Circle'). According to Musa Dube, "as African women of The Circle we, therefore, do circle theology and interpret life-giving traditions found and used in the African continent from this perspective" (2005: 78). Dube goes on to assert that The Circle distinguishes its work, "being a transformative Circle" against tradition, oppressive roles, and patriarchal spaces (Dube, 2005: 78).[20] This study consciously and intentionally prioritises 'Her Story, Her Healing' as a way of restoring justice, and in the process, reaffirms the feminist agenda which believes the survivors story as a point of departure. This study also recognises the possibility of integrating theology, visual media and psychology as the study enables women to self-empty their pain in a safe environment where both faith related activities are synchronised with non-religious activities which the church could reconsider being progressive in healing.

According to Oduyoye (1995a: 485), the African church needs to empower women not only to speak for themselves and manage their "women's affairs," but to be fully present in decisions and operations that affect the whole church, including the forming of its theology. African women theology explicates how women neither accept nor subscribe to the violation and abuse of women, and instead are keen on ensuring women's liberation and social transformation. The theoretical chapter will unpack and engage the African women theology and its feminist theology of praxis as a form of intervention that is used in the study to privilege women's narratives, reflections, and emotions, particularly in the age of mental illness. This framework engages a radical critique of Christian life and enabling the liberation of women by foregrounding the experiences, needs and voices of women in a context that is patriarchal. It also gives the woman a space to tell her stories and write her healing and liberating identities, as she is an expert in telling her stories.

1.7. Methodology

This research study is premised on the qualitative approach design as it seeks meaning, nuances on the lived experiences of women against DGBV. Furthermore, such lived experienced are considered vital in shaping a theology that honours the dignity and justice of women who have survived violence and victimisation. The participants of this research study were purposively sampled and recruited in the ACSA parishes within the Diocese of Natal. These were participants who have primarily experienced DGBV at some point in their abusive marriages, and who were willing to share their narrative on DGBV. Focus group discussions were also conducted. The final layer of data emerged from visual maps where survivors creatively shared guidelines that could shape a pastoral care praxis within the ACSA. Considering the real fear of stigma and intimidation, I committed to recruiting an ethnically

[20] Chapter three of this study will discuss this framework at length.

diverse sample to be interviewed in their preferred safe setting or via virtual spaces. This was a consideration I made since the sensitive subject of gender violence may invite denial, or a desire to avoid distressing emotional responses related to distress. Prior to embarking on the fieldwork, the collation of data was informed by precepts of practical theology.

In his book, *Practical theology: An introduction*, Osmer (2008), describes practical theology in terms of four major tasks (processes) which need to be reviewed when tackling a contextual/theological challenge. These questions open a robust conversation seeking a solution in restorative justice. This structure will be followed towards collating data. By utilising Osmer's adapted *see-judge-act-evaluate* methodological approach, promoting a method of movement from observation to evaluation, four key questions will guide this investigation:

i. See: "What is going on?" This question will help to identify and discern the patterns of behaviour and specific dynamics related to the situation at hand, which in this case is DBGV (Osmer, 2008: 4). This task will involve a review of relevant literature to explore the context of the problem at hand, i.e., gender-based violence/domestic violence. Here, aspects such as context and the constellation of factors relating to it (e.g., the individual, family, community), and how each are affected will be of special importance. It has been previously argued that although practical theology deals with phenomenology, the approach followed here will glean more than merely empirical information.
ii. Judge: "Why is this going on?" This question defines the interpretive task. As with the first question, the dynamics of what is going on will be explored, and issues such as cultural context, family systems, and psychological considerations will be considered in detail (Osmer, 2008).
iii. Act: "What should go on?" This question defines the normative task (Osmer, 2008). Here, the theological dynamics relevant to the context of GBV and pastoral ministering will be explored. It is at this stage that our theological reflection will deepen, as we deal with theological concepts to derive our ethical norms that in turn will inform our praxis. As a faith sector, I am challenged to evaluate the sometimes-dominant perceptions of anthropology, health/wellbeing, and ecclesial identity, among others.
iv. Evaluate: "What paradigmatic shifts need to happen, and how can they reconstruct and inform liberative resources as part of a pastoral ministry? This question defines the pragmatic task. Osmer's final task thus deals with praxis and will seek to address the development of a theological-theoretical framework for pastoral care as community care, which in turn will serve as the basis for an integrated approach to health, wellbeing, and meaning-generation within the present GBV epidemic. This links well with the understanding that practical theology seeks to explore the theological and practical dynamics of a situation to enable development and

transformation. Hence, it will be informed and guided by a process of sound reflection and dialogue (Swinton & Mowat, 2016).

Theology is a primarily a process of human reflection and as such entails a process of interpretation. This interpretation takes place in the context of a meaningful encounter between God and humankind; an encounter that affects our understanding of what it is to be human, to be church, and our understanding of the pastoral calling of the church. As such, it is the hermeneutic of encountering God in the contexts of the congregation and the world (Louw, 1999a: 129). This theological reflection encompasses the central path undertaken throughout this study.

1.8. Key research question

The key research question for this study was as follows:

How should the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal respond to the life-denying reality of GBV drawing on the insights of African women's theology and praxis of narrative theology assist Christian married women?

1.8.1. Research sub-questions

The research sub-questions that guided this study were as follows:

i. How are black Christian married women suffering at the helm of GBV because of tradition, culture, and religion?
ii. How does the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handle this pastoral challenge?
iii. What insights are drawn from African women's theology and praxis of narrative theology that could assist married Christian women in the context of pervasive GBV?
iv. What pastoral care guidelines need to be developed to assist the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal to engage the issue of GBV?

1.9. Research objectives

The research objectives of this study were as follows:

i. **Research Objective #1:** To understand Christian married women's knowledge and perceptions of GBV, including patriarchy, toxic masculinity, church, and marriage, within the ACSA.
ii. **Research Objective #2:** To explore how the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handles GBV as a pastoral challenge.

iii. **Research Objective #3:** To critique current theological practices and pastoral care interventions which the ACSA uses for the advocacy and healing of its women members, to establish how they engage the afflicted and wounded.

iv. **Research Objective #4:** To propose pastoral care guidelines, drawing insights from African women's theology and the praxis of narrative theology that could assist Christian married women in the context of pervasive GBV.

1.10. Structure of the study

This study comprises of nine chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction and General Overview of the Study. This opening chapter introduces the study and provides a road map to direct and inform the reader about what to expect in the final conclusion and recommendations. It includes the background to the study and summarises the main constructs to be researched, including patriarchy, gender, religion, culture, and theology as they link to the language of oppression and women submission. The objectives of the study, research questions, and a brief description of the theoretical framework adopted in the study, the methodology and the structure of the study are presented in this chapter. Lastly, the chapter presents an outline of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review. This chapter comprises a review of the relevant literature and how cultural practices and religion intersect as catalysts for GBV. The chapter is presented in two parts. First, the chapter surveys the generic GBV landscape and later concentrates on how faith nurtures GBV. The chapter deconstructs the anatomy of GBV, its complex constellation factors, consequences in society, as well as tracing toxic theologies in the context of the church. Second, the chapter provides a brief review of the ACSA's response to DGBV. The literature review comprises the various elements of pastoral care, liberation theology, black theology, and the theology of healing, highlighting what has been studied by womanist and liberation theologians.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework. This chapter discusses the theoretical framework of the study, providing the guiding lens of African women theology as developed by Mercy Amba Oduyoye discussed in conversation with that of Denise Ackermann's feminist theory of praxis. Both postcolonial feminist theology and the theology of praxis underpin this study.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Design. This chapter consists of a discussion of the methodology utilised in the study. It begins with the research approach, design, paradigm,

study setting and context, and highlights the researcher's positionality. Also engaged is the selection of research participants, data collection method, instruments, procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations observed in this data collection.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation – Phase I: An Account of the Participant's Narratives. This chapter comprises a presentation of the findings, being the narratives of Christian married women within the ACSA who have experienced DGBV in the context of a Christian marriage.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings. The themes that emerge from the narratives of lived experiences are presented and discussed in this chapter, providing a rich analysis of data based on the narratives of women survivors. Pertinent issues that emerged in the findings are also discussed.

Chapter 7: Data Presentation: Phase II – Focus Group Discussions and the Exploration of Visual Maps – ACSA Responding to DGBV. The scope of this chapter in two-fold: findings are drawn from the focus group discussions and data from visual maps is presented. From this platform, survivors volunteered to take part in a participatory methodology designed to yield response guidelines inspiring the ACSA to respond to the plight of DGBV. Initially, this was meant to be run as a healing retreat, run in a workshop format. However, due to Government-imposed COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing, the participants performed this task from their homes. The visual maps are survivor-centred, and in this chapter are presented as data, unpacked, and engaged, articulating how Christian women and other leadership structures within the ACSA can envision a holistic healing (pastoral care praxis).

Chapter 8: Data Analysis and Interpretation of Empirical Evidence Based on Focus Group Discussions and the Visual Maps. This chapter critically engages and discusses data from focus group conversations and offers the interpretations of the visual maps. The analysis, which is done thematically, engages the data from focus groups and the visual maps.

Chapter 9: Conclusion. This final chapter provides a discussion of the data collected from all methodologies of data collection, responding to the key research questions. Lastly, recommendations for future research are provided.

1.11. Chapter summary

This chapter introduces the study and provides the background to the study. The chapter briefly outlines the culture and institutional systems of the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA) that serves as a catalyst for GBV. The research questions were tabulated, and the objectives of the study were stated. The concept of a pastoral care praxis that is envisaged by the study was highlighted.

The next chapter provides a comprehensive literature review to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10 New International Version).

2.1. Introduction

This chapter reviews the work of scholars in DGBV and therefore documents discussions which surveys DGBV as a social ill and a human rights violation. However, in this context it is unpacked as a theological nightmare. This review is done thematically, providing a comprehensive discussion circumscribing the identified themes and sub-themes. In this, the following two research study sub-questions raised in chapter one will be covered:

i. How are black Christian married women suffering at the helm of GBV because of tradition, culture, and religion?
ii. How does the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handle this pastoral challenge?

To answer these two sub-questions through the literature review, I will engage three landscapes in the discourse:

i. Survey the landscape of DGBV. I will show how a culture of violence is socially, culturally, economically, and theologically formed.
ii. Dissect the toxic theologies that perpetuate violence can be dissected, engaging the ailing patriarchal systems, practices, and theologies in the church and in society. Moreover, the discussion will expose the harmful interpretations of biblical texts and religion, which have been deemed influential in making Christian marriages unsafe.
iii. Explore the ACSA's participation in activism and pastoral care as a way of standing in solidarity with women against the 'pandemic' of GBV. Here, I provide a discussion on pastoral interventions that have been explored which tackles the ACSA's position and experience on GBV activism.

2.2. COVID-19 and the GBV pandemic

COVID-19 has impacted different spheres revealing systemic challenges which resulted "unemployment, job displacement, and income loss" (Mooi-Reci & Risman, 2021: 161). One of the greater challenges GBV became a reality as women experienced cruelty and brutality within their own homes. Due to the restrictions imposed by national COVID-19 lockdown rules, homes became worship sites; however, they also switched to become sites of abuse, violence, and oppression due to the

"abuser's control over the abused" (Rezwana & Pain, 2021: 744). Even more concerning was inaccessibility of resources for GBV survivors. COVID-19 put religion and theology into shame. Failure by church to arrest GBV proved that "gender theology is weak to promote healthy and gender relationships" (Musembi et al., 2022: 111). Instead, this made it critical for the church to examine the state of gender relations in marriage (Musembi et al., 2022).

COVID-19 has affected communities resulting into "the risk of losing jobs, economic vulnerabilities, and psychological health issues resulting from isolation, loneliness, and uncertainty" (Mittal & Singh, 2020: 2). This has revealed gender inequalities that continue to ravage society. Since the national COVID-19 lockdown and quarantines, GBV cases have escalated significantly, indicating massive struggles of power inequality. Women are trapped in relationships with abusive partners, unable to leave, escape or reach out for help. Somehow, this has magnified the *status quo* of marginalisation, a situation that requires redress. Scholars state that quarantines increase the risk of violence against women, and children's exposure to potential perpetrators (Peterman et al., 2020: 10). The plight of GBV forces the church to settle for the new normal. The church needs to "progress towards a 'new normal' around entrenched patterns of violence between men and women." (Palm, 2021: 171).

The church has a responsibility and an obligation of bringing hope, where women can afford to see beyond COVID-19. There is a need to provide "interventions with men to reduce use of violence through behaviour-change interventions: promote gender equitable values, encourage alternative conflict resolutions and better communication skills" (Nduna & Tshona, 2021: 351-352). Moreover, there needs to be "support systems for women who plan to escape from an abusive situation; these include women in the process of separation and divorce" (Nduna & Tshona, 2021: 352). When it comes to faith-based organisations, Dlamini (2021) advises that faith-based leaders must challenge gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity. This research study envisions both reactive and proactive interventions creating an opportune *kairos* moment, as the church becomes comfortable in engaging about gender equality, gender justice, healing, human rights, and issues relating to patriarchy and sexuality. At the core of Christian faith is the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The old that is no longer serving women and men in the church must go, paving the way forward to newer ways of theologising hope. Hope is a fundamental component of the Christian faith. There is no justification for women suffering and in holding the space in prayer, hoping that this too shall pass is not enough. It is only through active participation that the church can reconfigure the experience of church where women can trust, hope, and believe that they are made in the image of Christ and hence their lives matter too. It is the peculiarity of giving voice and meaning to their experience where they can relate their embodied pain, suffering and pain. It is about envisioning the church unmasking its pathologies, changing its traditional theology and being open to a new way of doing theology, as a witness to the death and resurrection of Christ.

2.3. The definition of GBV

To mobilise for change, it is important to understand what GBV is and how it manifests itself particularly in private spheres. Gender-based violence is a prevalent pervasive social ill often perpetrated by patriarchy and gender inequality. According to Nayak and Suchland (2006: 469), it is a systematic, institutionalised and/or programmatic violence (i.e., sexual, physical, psychological) that operates through the constructs of gender and often at the intersection of race, gender, sexuality, race, and class. The GBV struggle "ranges from sexual harassment, domestic violence, assault and rape to intimate femicide" (Gouws, 2016: 401). Gouws further alludes to the GBV struggle as it reflects "a deep structural and systematic problems in a society" (2016: 401). Kirk-Duggan (2020) concurs with Gouws (2016), describing gender-based violence as systemic, embodying a language of suffering. Heise et al. (2002) argues that GBV is expressed "using verbal force, physical force, or other coercive actions that result in physical or psychological harm, humiliation, or deprivation of autonomy." These definitions give clarity in terms of how female gender inequality is a global and a local challenge. It respects no class, race, ethnicity, or educational background.

According to the United Nations (UN), violence against women is an act of GBV that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public, or in private life (World Health Organisation, 2014). According to Klaasen (2018b), GBV is an assertion of physical dominance between a man and woman, which is characterised by physical, oppressive power that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm. Both definitions define violence that exists where there is violent relationship between a husband and wife. Scholars and feminists have always argued that women's rights are human rights, so anything disrupting the humanity of women falls within the purview of human rights (Reichert, 1998; Grewal, 1999).

Women and girls are "systematically disadvantaged and often suppressed by poverty, violence, inequality, and marginalization" (Luna, 2020: 2). The UN has shone a spotlight on GBV as a public health and a human rights challenge. The United Nations 2030 Agenda puts women and girls under the spotlight, developing programmes that promote gender equality and social transformation. Among the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals are Goal #3, Goal #5, and Goal #16, which together seek to ensure healthy lives, gender equality and the promotion of an inclusive society. Goal 5#[1] aims to empower women and girls. As a result, GBV has grown as a researchable area to mobilise for change.

[1] Sustainable Development Goal #5 aims at achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls by year 2030. It also seeks to eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres. See: https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/envision2030-goal5.html [Accessed: 01 July 2021].

The UN's focus and emphasis on gender equality, seeks the elimination of gender-based violence and all forms of exploitation in a society subjected to the harsh realities of male oppression and sexual violence by advancing the gender justice agenda and the global fight for gender equality.

Since 2018, GBV and femicide have been placed squarely on the national agenda as a crisis with which the country is grappling. Statistics suggest that the prevalence of GBV is unacceptably high. Also, this has galvanised world-wide gender justice movements against it. Gender-based Violence cases have prompted an increase in activism. Particularly noticeable are emerging online and offline social media trending campaigns with #hash tags. Movements such as #MenAreTrash, #Metoo, #NotInMyName, and #TheTotalShutDown, have mobilised and strengthened advocacy in response to the spike in GBV. Gender-based violence is no longer a scourge, but a pandemic. This has altered the narrative of women as they often grapple with feelings of being unsafe.

2.3.1. The common causes of GBV

Plaatjies van Huffel (2011) perceives patriarchy as a phenomenon beyond the subordination of females to males, highlighting those structures and ideologies which generate the domination and exploitation of the weak and powerless. Women are oppressed and dominated in certain communities and power is at the centre as a driving force behind abuse.

Patriarchy remains deeply entrenched within the social fabric of society. This system is oppression "reflected in gender role differentiation" (Ademiluka, 2018: 350). For centuries even in Israel patriarchy defines and confined women movement. The Genesis 2 account continues to be understood as "a divinely ordained dominance of social relationships where men are to be in dominance and authority over women and children" (Kroeger & Beck, 2019: 16). Patriarchy presents itself in early marriages and in certain context in polygamy. In Nigeria, for (Ezejiofor, 2011: 144), it is experienced deeply as widows "can don't accentuate their personhood or humanity". South African women are no exception, their lived experiences being displayed by control and powerlessness, often played out as violence in intimate relations. Hierarchical systems in various settings disempower women due to patriarchy. Marriage has turned out to be toxic, as it is perforated with control, power, and oppression. The interaction between married couples defines aggression and intimacy as interwoven elements. These scenarios are common in a society where women are beaten and coerced into sex by their husbands. This pervades the lives of most women: the economically dependent, the rich, the bold and the weaker in spirit. What connects them all are stories and experiences of abuse by their intimate partners. Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) argues that women in church settings find "biblical interpretations more 'wounding' than healing" (2005: 187). What remains a cause for concern is that churches have women forming the largest number of its congregant members. Marriage thus culminates

into what (Maluleke & Nadar, 2002: 7) view it as "a covenant of violence cultivated in attitudes, practices and rituals." Marriage is the incubator for heteronormativity and patriarchy, largely owing to skewed biblical interpretations of patriarchy in African communities where male headship is privileged. A lot is shoved under the carpet, silencing women, and indirectly clipping women's wings that would otherwise enable them to soar.

Studies highlight that the subjugation of women and associated violence dates to colonial times, emanating from the concept of ownership, which placed women in the vulnerable hands of men. Gqola (2007) maintains that slavery and colonialism were rooted in violence and violation. Both patriarchy and a culture of violence constitute the two main ideological drivers of the subjugation of women. Studies have shown that apartheid reinforced forms of masculinity and femininity that are central to the perpetuation of GBV (Casey & Smith, 2010). Helen Moffett (2006) has thus argued that the legacy of apartheid, coupled with a patriarchal system, has inordinately contributed to the high levels of sexual violence in South Africa.

2.3.2. The causality of GBV

Links exist between gender equality, gender-based violence, gender norms and gender conflict. While this is the case, at the core of GBV are complex systematic realities associated with gender stereotypes and patriarchy, as women suffer for being women. According to Birchall (2019), the beliefs and values behind unequal gendered roles and power relations are instrumental in building support for and perpetuating conflict. Consequently, the notions of masculinity based on domination and violence can motivate men to participate in acts of gender-based violence. The literature refers to such men as "thwarted masculinities" (Myrttinen et al., 2017). These are men who have serious struggles in conforming to standards of manhood imposed by their societies, for example, being unable to find work, getting married, or supporting a family (Wright, 2014: 11). Norms and social expectations around femininity implicate women as weak and defenceless, whereas those around masculinities perpetuate men as protectors, capable of using violence if necessary (Cohn, 2013; Jackson et al., 2011; Wright, 2014). In unpacking the causation of intimate partner violence in South Africa, Jewkes et al., highlights "a constellation or web of associated and mediating factors and processes" (2002: 1615). These are "centrally influenced by ideas about masculinity and the position of women in a society and ideas about the use of violence" (2002: 1615). The model captured in Figure 2.1 sheds light upon this understanding.

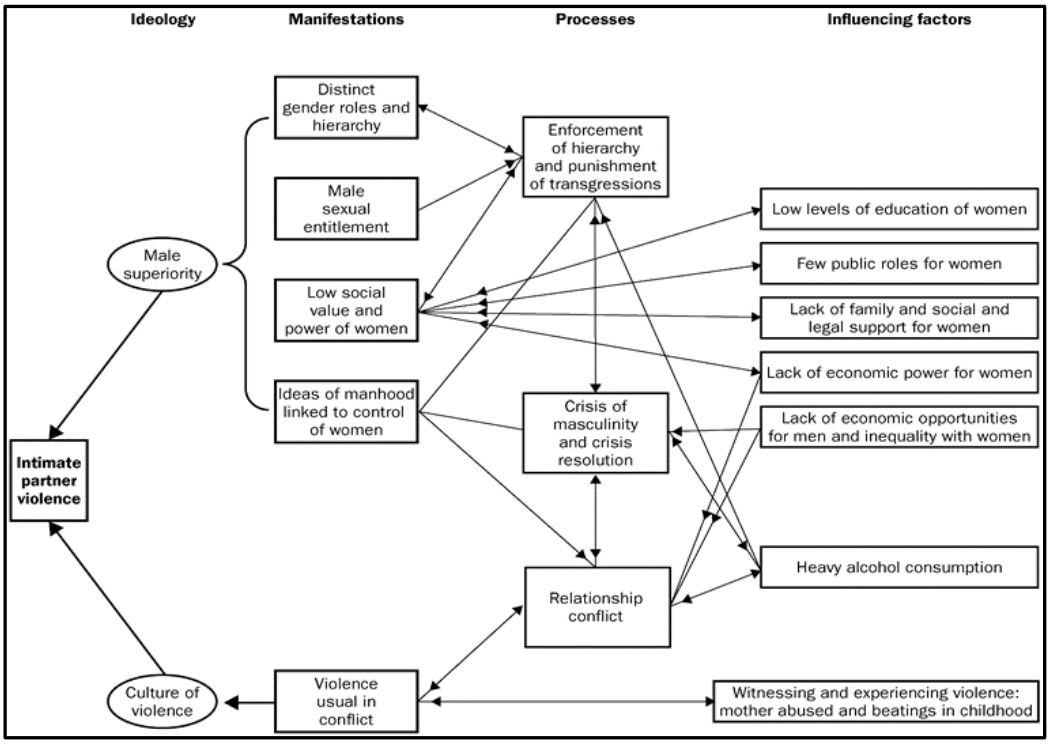

Figure 2.1. Causation of intimate partner violence

Image source: (Jewkes, 2002)

In Figure 2.1., Rachel Jewkes identifies the complex interrelated factors that increases the risk for women to be abused. The abuse becomes the vehicle that shapes a woman's self-esteem and self-worth such that it becomes impossible to escape abuse. Jewkes (2002) further identifies other markers of vulnerability such as poverty, physical disability, mental vulnerability, substance abuse and dysfunctional homes. Moreover, Jewkes (2002) also identifies economic vulnerability as a promoter of male violence, which extends to poverty, the widespread misuse of alcohol and drugs, the discharge of illegal guns, parental separation, and out of home placements and jealousy, amongst other causes.

Harmful traditional and cultural practices maintain the subordination of women in society, thereby legitimising and perpetuating GBV (Wadesango et al., 2011). One cannot discount how socialisation influences men as they are groomed by negative role models on what manhood entails. Childhood trauma is likely to negatively affect one's idea of masculinity (Jewkes et al., 2011). Economic dependence has been revealed as a frontier in how it advances vulnerability especially when there is a high unemployment rate. This has been worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic, thus exposing women to violation. While there could be multiple realities that aggravates the marginalisation of women survivors who are prone to abuse, the intersectional analysis provides insight. This analysis establishes how gender intersects social categories of significance like race, class, ethnicity, culture, economic status, and education to oppress men and women alike (Crenshaw, 1990; Boonzaier, 2008). As Gouws (2017:20-21) can state, "intersectionality highlights how lived identities, structural systems,

sites of marginalisation, forms of power, and modes of resistance 'intersect' in dynamic, shifting ways." When viewing the complex notions that render women vulnerable to abuse, this elucidates how interventions should target the structural components where these women are situated.

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' in the 1980s. She used it as a descriptive tool "to describe the problems that black women experience with the law" (Gouws, 2017: 20). The concept has been used across disciplines to examine complex dynamics situated in society which makes women susceptible to abuse. In probing more about women and violence, this becomes pivotal as it explicates multiple axis of domination women encounter in their everyday lives. Scholars argue that DGBV comprises acts and practices that systematically target a person, a group, or a community to dictate what women and men are supposed to be, and to discipline marginalised communities or any other perceived threats to dominant political structures and practices (Nayak & Suchland, 2006: 469). Given these circumstances, women are victimised as they constitute the marginal sections of the community.

2.3.3. The prevalence of DGBV towards women

According to the 2020 Stats SA report,[2] some 22% of assaults that occurred in South Africa were committed by a friend or an acquaintance, while 15% were committed by as a spouse or intimate partner and 13% by a relative or household member. The South African Police Service (SAPS) crime status report[3] tabled 1 482 (6.9%) murder cases for 2019/2020 that were domestic related. While the cited statistics refer to recent occurrences, I maintain that there are many incidents which remain undocumented and unreported due to numerous reasons that prevent women survivors reporting incidents at their local police stations.

Despite the country's progressive constitution and policies that promote the protection of women's rights, in South Africa, violence against women and girls is endemic (Peacock, 2003). Twenty-seven years into democracy, engagements of gender injustice are still heated debates as stakeholders prioritise collective approaches and multi-sectoral interventions to curb the violence perpetrated against women. Women are coerced into sex, beaten up, and violated. Scholars agree that GBV is most likely the driver of many STIs, including the HIV & AIDS pandemic, since men who are physically violent are also more likely to be HIV+ (Dunkle & Decker, 2013: 21). It can be assumed that such violent acts are perpetrated by men who are not afraid of engaging in risky sexual behaviour. In the context of

[2] See: https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/1_Stock/Events_Institutional/2020/womens_charter_2020/docs/30-07-2020/A [Accessed: 09 September 2020].

[3] See: https://www.saps.gov.za/about/stratframework/annual_report/2019_2020/annual_crime_report_2019_2020.pdf [Accessed: 09 September 2021].

domesticated violence, women bear scars of being raped and beaten by their husbands. Trauma has been on South Africa's political platter since colonial times. Now, trauma is induced because of GBV. Trauma has been defined by Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela as "the undoing of self, and as loss, loss of control, loss of one's identity, loss of the ability to remember and loss of the ability to remember horrific events." The authors go on to state that if the "traumatic events in one's life do not get acknowledged, they continue to disempower victims and intensify feelings of shame and humiliation that are part of legacy of trauma and its internalisation" (2009: vii).

The customary practice of *lobola* has been linked to GBV. While it is still significant and observed in African/patriarchal settings, due to the wrong practice of this cultural belief about women's position in marriage, women are subordinated under male tutelage and left in a position where they cannot assert their voice when it comes to sexual matters. According to Pillay (2015), this violence exposes women to HIV & AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Peacock and Levack (2004) concur with this view, citing how women's greater vulnerability to HIV & AIDS is in part explained by the very high levels of sexual and domestic violence reported in South Africa. In most instances, the pervasiveness of DGBV has created adverse challenges to women's health and sexual health. Many African ethnic groups have beliefs, norms, attitudes, and social institutions that legitimise and therefore perpetuate violence against women. These go unchallenged as men direct them against women, especially within the family, regardless of the harmful repercussions.

Conversations undertaken around the subject of gender inequality often depicts the reality of domestic abuse and gender-based violence as a cause for concern. Accordingly, Maluleke and Nadar (2002: 6) suggest that:

> Alongside Coca Cola, Levi Jeans and hamburgers, nothing is more common, resilient and widespread in the cultures of the world today than violence against women, and against children.

In South Africa, GBV has been declared a national crisis, and globally the continent ranks high on the list when it comes to interpersonal violence. In this way, GBV has increased health-related concerns, further exposing women to health risks such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. According to Dunkle et al. (2004: 231), women report to clinics seeking voluntary HIV & AIDS counselling services instead of sexual violence, while cases of physical abuse increase. Hence, as Dalu and Manyani (2020: 2) have shown, women still struggle to report such cases in fear of being shamed and stigmatised.

2.4. Manifestations of GBV

Violence against women and girls can manifest itself as intimate partner violence (IPV), gender-based violence (GBV), sexual gender-based violence (SGBV), and domestic abuse (DA). However, when such violent acts are defined within a contextual reality, it is comprehended in terms of the unequal power relationships existing between genders within a society. To give the study focus, I have chosen to use the meaning of DGBV as described in chapter one; hence the following discussion outlines how human rights are violated. While men also experience violence, in this study, I want to amplify how women suffer in their marriages – mainly women in Christian marriages – at the hands of their spouses. Therefore, the study unpacks the culture of violence and patriarchy, and then proceeds to discuss masculinity as a resultant problem. The objective of the study is to trace how IPV takes place and how powerlessness renders women oppressed and abused. Also, I will track how culture and religion are contributory factors, leaving many married women, psychologically, financially, emotionally, and sexually wounded in the sanctity of their own marriages.

2.4.1. Masculinity and patriarchy

Figure 2.2. Intersecting violence in the family

Source: Author

2.4.2. Masculinities as a causal factor

Figure 2.2 details how in patriarchal settings masculinity is constructed and how this speaks to gendered abuse. Connell (2012) states that masculinities are constructed and shaped by context and social practices. The concept of masculinity is fluid and unnatural, this means it is socially constructed, hence

at any given stage masculinity may change over time. However, the reality of hegemonic masculinity as a dominant form of masculinity has been cultivated and nurtured in society as it defines the ideal male. Acknowledging the toxic and internalised negative acts that surfaces with men, this has marked "a crisis in/of masculinity" (Dube, 2016: 73). Some studies have presented black masculinity negatively, where black men are revealed as destructive and prime agents of social ills which perpetuate violence (Dube, 2016). The overindulgence alcohol, misuse of drugs and substance abuse continues to frame black men negatively, thus becoming perpetuators of violence. Adding to this equation is the reality of unemployment and identity conflicts that emerge when there are no job opportunities, these are men who struggle with manhood. Gender-based Violence (GBV) is linked to toxic masculinity. Terms like *indoda emadodeni* (lit: "a man amongst men") define male dominance and power. This is a construct that defines what it means to be a man. Hence, in society one can observe that this construction is born out of early exposures to violence, reinforced by religio-socio-cultural ideation which in turn promotes male authority. It is these I maintain, that are catalysts for GBV. Toxic masculinity on the other hand refers to negative connotations of being a man which results to violence and women oppression. Masculinity is both a primary contributor and catalyst to the violation of women in intimate relationships. According to Mazibuko (2016: 7), hegemonic masculine men are expected to be in control of women and violence may be used to establish this control. Instead of resisting, the women's dominant ideal of femininity embraces compliance and tolerance of violent and hurtful behaviour as well as infidelity. Women in the African context are found to be self-alienated, experiencing their bodies not as their own. Ideologically and conceptually, GBV is supported by patriarchal thinking, which presupposes that women's bodies belong to them (Sultana, 2010). Patriarchy has endorsed an institutionalisation of power to men, promoting hierarchies in all spheres. Accordingly, patriarchy is essentially androcentric and hierarchical in nature (Plaatjies van Huffel, 2011: 2). The term 'patriarchy' originates from the Greek *patriarkhēs* (Jayasundara et al., 2017) and refers to male domination both in the public and private sphere. This is evident in the power relationships between men and women (Sultana, 2010: 2) and exists in everyday life, where it culminates in gender inequality and unequal gender roles.

The distribution of power has been misunderstood and further "fortified by preaching that accepts all kinds of cultural assumptions about what headship means" (Alsdurf & Alsdurf, 1998: 17). Headship and maleness are deeply entrenched in the African culture, where a man is the head of the household *inhloko yomuzi*. Owino (2010: 146) claims that the masculine language of God in the Bible has constructed God as being "superior while femaleness is associated with inferiority." Notably, this ideology has proven to be a risk factor to GBV. Male headship is a defining notion of masculinity. Observable in South African society is the power imbalance manifesting as hegemonic masculinity, a dominant form of masculinity that privileges a hegemonic ideal (Mouton et al., 2015). Hegemonic

masculinity, colloquially referred to as toxic masculinity, is a structure where men are supported by societal values which place them above women. It remains a challenge to deal with people and structures that are patriarchal. However, when interventions are not engaged, women's rights are violated, and women are exposed to the harsh realities of injustice and indignity.

Toxic masculinity refers to a condition in which men exert their power over women, with most civil institutions engrained in such a culture, endorsing similar attitudes and doctrines that subject women to inequality. These values and attitudes prejudice the rights of women who are treated as sex objects. In this case, men value women as mere sex givers. If sex is not given voluntarily, the men force the women to do so (Baloyi, 2010: 4). This culture is nurtured through socialisation as men are groomed with a conscience that violence is the language of love and discipline. These notions of being are instilled from childhood as young boys are exposed to domestic violence at home or in the community, and later in life as they live by these acts as if they are normal. In response to such anomalies, toxic masculinity manifests itself in adulthood as women and young girls are battered, raped, and killed, losing their lives and their sense of self. Since time immemorial, patriarchy has been seen as "the way life is,' they have been considered to be ahistorical, eternal and (for religious believers), sanctioned and ordained by God" (Rakoczy, 2004: 30).

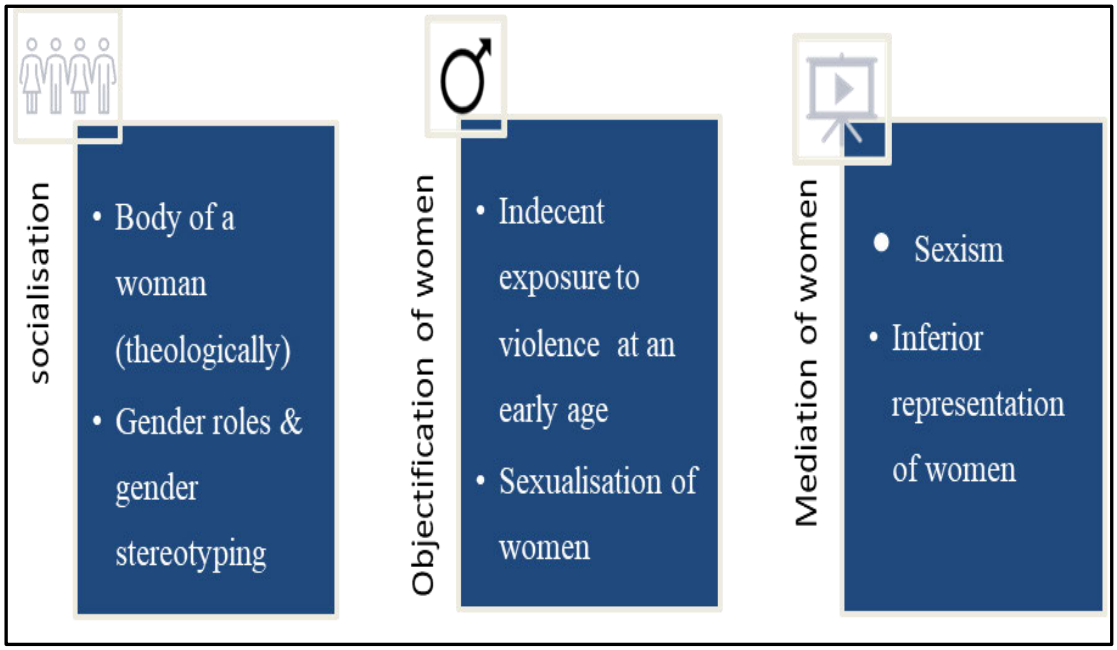

Figure 2.3. Depiction of patriarchal culture and the patriarchal mindset that leads to GBV

Source: Author

2.4.3. Gender socialisation: Gender stereotyping

African women continue to be boxed into traditional roles which I argue perpetuates subservience, making them vulnerable to violence and oppression. Figure 2.3 introduces the impact of gender roles through gender socialisation. Different agencies reinforce gender roles and gender stereotypes. Stereotypical gender portrayals in the media endorses a sexist arena and reinforces the traditional patriarchal notions of gender (Kumari & Joshi, 2015). Gender roles reveal a hierarchical nature, and this has been evident, for many years, in social institutions, structures and practices. Children are assigned gender at birth and socialised accordingly, learning culturally defined gender roles (Raselekoane et al., 2017: 10516). From a young age, girls are nurtured to fit into a patriarchal world, made for men. They are prepared, through cultural beliefs and practices, to be subservient to their male counterparts. African social structures are tangled up with the concept of patriarchy, so that cycles of male-oriented structures are replicated generation after generation, endorsing conformity which in turn causes women to be subject to violence and victimisation. Patriarchal power has negatively impacted on women, rendering them vulnerable. Girls are socialised to be good women so that they are privileged to be chosen as wives by men (Buthelezi, 2004: 390).

2.4.4. Gender roles

In the African culture, men and women must meet certain expectations set by society. These expectations stipulate gender roles expected of men and women, where "gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments" (Blackstone, 2003: 335). The simple act of choosing clothes and toys remains riddled with politics. Blue is socially accepted as the dominant colour for boys, while pink is for a girl. These colours continue to have adverse connotations in society as boys are expected to be strong and bold. Girls on the other hand are expected to be feminine and soft. Dolls are meant to be for the girl child, whereas guns and big cars are designed with the boy child in mind, to play this script of being aggressive, bold, and a go-getter. These notions have had an adverse effect in shaping the scripts for males and females. In adulthood, this makes individuals embody the same mindset that social roles differ between males and females, as they subscribe to societal norms and values. In a study conducted by Boonzaier and de la Rey (2004), men drew upon "hegemonic gendered discourses scripting standards of male authority and female submission." In this study, men's account of traditional marriage, family and gender roles of the husband and wife were deliberated. For example, women blamed themselves for their partners violence and held themselves responsible for changing their own victimisation experiences (Irwin & Pasko, 2018). These constructions are ingrained in men's minds, scripted as an absolute way of living life appropriately. In the African context, women believe that men are the head of the household and women are expected to be passive and submissive. Men and women are socialised to perform social roles in a specific manner and therefore they exhibit

certain characteristics in their demeanour. Certain gender roles are specifically constructed to fit a woman. For example, men are the heads of the household, while women assume subordinate positions (Buthelezi, 2004). This comes with role stereotyping what women must do to demonstrate submissive traits.

Women's roles in South Africa have always depicted a conventional patriarchal orientation. In discussing the causes of violence, (Abrahams et al., 2006: 249) assert that people see it as a normative part of gaining and asserting ascendancy, whether occurring in relationships, in the community, or in the workplace. Women have always been traditionally subordinate to men; hence, their roles have always showed the domestic side of women, as they confine a woman's place to the kitchen. Scholars argue that "gender roles are severely enforced" (Meyiwa et al., 2017: 8615). Mental health issues are said to aggravate GBV, where the real struggle is found in processing emotional wounds. Studies confirm that when men cannot cope with problems in life such as unemployment, marital conflict, and other psychosocial issues, they tend to overindulge alcohol or use drugs (Schafer & Koyiet, 2018). In this way, they find themselves asserting their dominance and becoming violent.

Also, masculinity constructions entail "the punishment of women and children is accepted, and cultural norms conveniently picked and used to silence deviant voices" (Meyiwa et al., 2017: 8615). It is obvious that enculturation plays a significant role in determining power relations and gender inequities in society.

2.5. The effects of DGBV on women

Christian women can find themselves in abusive marriages which have serious consequences in life. According to Westenberg (2017: 2) these women remain in or return to unsafe relationships, citing religious beliefs to support such decisions. Looking at how DGBV continues to be a public health concern, it has immense impact on women, children, and the community at large. One observes the repercussions of GBV transpiring in negative terms, affecting the physical, psychological, spiritual, sexual, and emotional well-being of women. Studies have revealed that the health of women is compromised when they are in relationships with men who control or dominate them through constant surveillance of their whereabouts, or through restriction of their financial resources (Martin & Curtis, 2004: 1410). Mwaura (2010) states that women in Christian families and in the church are also wounded and they bear emotional and psychological scars from DGBV. Women are affected socially, psychologically, emotionally, and physically. They struggle with depression, self-esteem, panic attacks and anxiety. According to Davies and Dreyer (2014: 1), domestic violence breeds self-hatred, guilt, despair, and self-annihilation.

In his book, *Healing the wounds that binds us*, (Bradshaw, 2005) writes about shame, pointing out that those who have a history of violence may have to struggle with shame. He further argues that:

> To have shame as an identity is to believe that one is flawed, that one is defective as a human being. Once shame is transformed into an identity, it becomes toxic and dehumanising (Bradshaw, 2005: xvii).

As much as there are visible scars that violent episodes leave behind, many women carry pain and shame in their hearts, resulting in a toxic and flawed sense of identity where violence have interrupted their perception of reality. In covering up these visible scars, survivors of domestic violence often struggle with self-doubt and self-confidence, stealing from them a life of authenticity. In spiritual terms this becomes a bondage and when not interrupted and resolved, it can be damaging to live a life that is consumed by depression and woundedness. Living in shame, such secrecy becomes draining and disempowering. There are realities of physical wounds publicly revealed to everyone. So often, DGBV has ended the lives of women. There have been far too many fatalities showing up as homicide, suicide, maternal mortality, and AIDS-related deaths (Sabri & Granger, 2018: 1040). Women exposed to DGBV are most likely to be susceptible to ill-health. Those exposed to physical and sexual violence are at risk of STIs and unwanted pregnancies (Heise et al., 2002: 8).

Domestic gender-based violence (DGBV) is pervasive and impacts on the mental health of women and children. There are women who are afraid of using birth control or condoms, because of the potentially violent reaction of their partner (Heise et al., 2002: 8). Women are affected by high stress levels and this manifests in how they nurture families. Toxic stress is a reality as it creates suicidal thoughts as women become susceptible to extreme negativity. Others, to mitigate against violent attacks have found themselves taking chronic medication. At the family level, children exposed to GBV become ensnared in a toxic cycle of violence that is most likely to be replicated generation after generation.

Communities and societies in general are at risk of breeding a nation that is broken and wounded. Exposure to violence diminishes hope for a safe society as women grow up to discover that the world is not friendly, but is all about pain, shame, and humiliation. It is unsurprising that this plight against women is atrocious and affects women's wellbeing. Gender-based violence erodes a woman's self-esteem, inhibiting her ability to defend herself or act against her abuser (Izumi, 2007: 11). Poor mental health in the form of depression, low self-esteem, panic disorders and post-traumatic stress disorders are real repercussions that victims of domestic violence must contend with. Also, women feel trapped in their marriages that could endanger their wellbeing. These conditions, when not arrested, restrict the flourishing of women, and further affect the wellness and welfare of children and the wider family unit. There appears to be little research on pastoral care interventions by the church, where women are

empowered to be their own agencies of healing and transformation, through a de-colonial approach departing from the routine liturgy of sermons and prayers.

While I understand culture to be a toxic feature in the mix of women victimisation and oppression, in the conversations below I will elucidate how Zulu culture contributes to GBV.

2.6. The intersection of culture on GBV

2.6.1. Zulu culture and GBV

Marriage as an ideology holds specific meanings in society. In Africa, wifehood symbolizes relations of subordination between any two people (Oyewumi, 2000: 1096). In the context of Zulu culture, marriage has often treated female bodies as "sites of female oppression" (Isherwood & Stuart, 1998: 15). These patriarchal values continue to harm and endanger women, where abuse manifest as violence. Scholars agree that these formidable acts of violence are rooted in cultural, religious, and historical systems that have continued to dehumanise women (Nyangweso & Olupona, 2019). In the context of certain Zulu traditional practices, it is common also in the customary practice known as *ukuthwala*[4] which is said to "contribute to the perennial problem of domestic violence" (Monyane, 2013: 65).

2.6.2. The Zulus, the warrior culture, and GBV

Socialisation often instils within children traditional societal norms that perpetuate gender oppression, exposing women and girls to scenarios of unequal power violations disguised as cultural values. Culture is therefore a critical factor in society. According to Hadebe (2010), culture is a way of life. In KwaZulu-Natal, the Zulu tribe is dominant and belongs to the Nguni-speaking peoples of Southern Africa. Other scholars allude to the warrior culture as the engine for GBV (Carton & Morrell, 2012). In reference to the myth of Shaka Zulu and his heroic iconic history, to the times of stick fighting and the longstanding culture and the spirit of *amabutho* (lit: 'the regents'), scholars like Carton and Morrell (2012) argue that Zulu masculinities could be associated with male violence. Indeed, one may deduce that there could be a link where Zulus embody the spirit of fearlessness, fighting and brutality *'ubuqhwaga'*. Over the years, one has observed that faction fighting appearing as political violence, so-called black-on-black violence, and taxi violence results in endless bloodbaths. One has observed aggressions where fighting erupts, shrouded with inequalities in power relations, resulting in DGBV as men fight with their spouses.

[4] *Ukuthwala* is regarded as a form of GBV against a girl child or woman where human rights are violated. This is evident when maidens are forced into marriage through bridal abduction. Women in certain rural villages are forcefully taken without their consent to marry mostly older men. *Ukuthwala* is another typical example of GBV.

2.6.3. Zulu culture: Zulu Proverbs, *Ilobolo* and GBV

According to Zulu culture and history, Zulu proverbs, idioms, and sayings show that marriage is not to be considered lightly. For example, as Zungu (2016: 226) has shown, the proverbs, *Umendo ngumkhumulansika* (lit: 'Marriage is not for the faint-hearted'); *Ukwenda wukuzilahla* (lit: 'Getting married is throwing one's life away'); *Akuqhalaqhala lahlula isidwaba* (lit: 'Even the most assertive woman surrenders in marriage'), indicate clearly that in marriage, submission is the order for the day, and failure to do so subjects women to abusive episodes, including fighting, arguments, and suffering.

Where marriage has been argued to be a cause for suffering and oppression, the custom of *ilobolo* (lit: 'bride price') is often viewed as a constraint to a happy healthy marriage since the interpretations of this culture explicate women being viewed as the property of their husbands (Rudwick & Posel, 2014). Other interpretations speak of *ilobolo* as it translates to the "commodification of women's bodies" (Chiweshe, 2016: 229). Against the plight of gendered violence, *ilobolo* impose restrictions for married women to escape their abusive marriages, their families must repay the lobola if these women leave their husbands (Reddi, 2007: 513). Within the African context, it speaks to the "commodification of women's bodies" where women are situated as a "site of complex interactions of patriarchy, power and politics" (Chiweshe, 2016: 229). The practice of *ilobolo* (lit: 'bride price') has been commercialised in many contexts, thus influencing the commoditisation of women, and deeply reinforcing the thinking that wives are the property of their husbands. Women are restricted from leaving abusive marriages, as traditionally, their families must repay the *lobola* if these women leave their husbands (Reddi, 2007: 513).

According to Thabede (2017), for many women, Zulu marriage implies victimisation and objectification. In such a case, socialisation is seen as a key driver, contributing to how societal norms perpetuate gender oppression, exposing women to unequal power violations under the guise of culture. Thabede further alludes to marriage within the context of the Zulu clan as a site of power contestation, aggression, and ultimate violation (2017). Furthermore, Partab (2011) argues that patriarchal cultures have justified their abuse of women, with men behaving as if women are either their servants or property. The African culture has created this institution as a transaction that exposes women to abuse, oppression, and victimisation. The Zulu people are governed by stereotypical notions that depict women as the 'other.' According to Mazibuko (2016: 7), hegemonic masculine men are expected to be in control of women and violence may be used to establish this control. Instead of resisting this, women's dominant ideal of femininity often embraces compliance and tolerance of violent, hurtful behaviour and infidelity. Black African women have been subjects of gender violence. While marriage is highly celebrated, it is viewed as a site of power, aggression, and ultimate violation.

Zulu husbands regard *ilobolo* (lit: 'bride price') as their ticket to sexual entitlement and this risky behaviour is a threat to a healthy marriage. Wives have no chance to discuss issues pertaining to their reproductive health and child spacing. Karim and Baxter (2016) thus argue that GBV is a contributory factor in the struggle against the HIV & AIDS pandemic. Accordingly, African cultures epitomise patriarchy (Zondi, 2013: 164). According to Chisale (2017), *ilobolo* puts women at risk of gender-based violence, while Maluleke and Nadar (2002a: 14) contend that the practice may have originally had good intentions, but instead it has become an oppressive and violent instrument. It encourages male dominance and control over women, as gender power imbalances contribute to male perpetration and women's vulnerability. Such violence is a display an expression of male powerfulness and dominance over women. For example, research on *ilobolo* (Lit: 'bride price') has revealed that it increases women's level of vulnerability to be treated as private property (Madiba & Ngwenya, 2017).

Having surveyed the socio-cultural landscape, illuminating how culture influences DGBV, in the following discussion I will discuss the role that religion and religious doctrines play in aggravating GBV in society.

2.6.4. Faith, faith communities and GBV

Christian faith upholds patriarchal understanding. According to (Isherwood & Stuart, 1998: 15), the role of woman in religion and theology women means to "act as 'other', the outsider, to the holy trinity of man, God, and church". Hence, women have carried great weight under patriarchal theology (Isherwood & Stuart, 1998). The lives of Christian women have centred around the "notion of the self-sacrificial love suffering" (Isherwood, 2002: 87). Christian women in their own homes have been treated inhumanely. In her article entitled, "Black women's bodies as reformers from the dungeons: The Reformation and womanism," Kobo (2018a) relates a visual scenario of Elmina Castle on Ghana's Gold Coast, where there are located slaving dungeons that date back to the sixteenth century. Upstairs in the castle, one finds the governor and the merchants' quarters, the barracks for soldiers and pastors, and the Dutch Reformed chapel on the same floor. Below this floor there are male and female dungeons. These dungeons signify structural oppression and commodification of Black humanity as slaves. The author observed broken Black African women's bodies in a dungeon described as a "dark filthy place" (Kobo, 2018a: 2). This oppression and abuse is comparable to the gender inequities faced by Christian women who are similarly trapped, violated, and scarred in toxic marriages, due to DGBV condoned by the church. Therefore, a radical modification and pastoral intervention, premised on Womanist theologies and ethics is urgently required to bring about African women's liberation and justice.

In the previous discussion, I pointed to culture as a constituent where cultural norms, customs, and traditions 'fit' into the mix of GBV. When noting this cultural narrative, it is unimaginable to think of

religion being a contributory factor when it comes to GBV. However, scholarship has shown that women have been brutalised, all in the name of the Christian faith (Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2001). Palm argues that historically, "churches can perpetuate dominating dynamics and underlying theological justifications for abusive social patterns" (2019a: 177). Against this reality of a patriarchal milieu, women abuse, oppression, and victimisation is rife. There is a gap that has been identified by scholars whereby there is "potential role of religion" with an overarching contribution to IPV (Takyi & Lamptey, 2020: 27). In their study, Takyi and Lamptey (2020) applaud the exploration of religion in IPV, and this is what this research also amplifies. Religious leaders in faith organisations offer religious teachings that conscientise the faith communities. They also "provide a source of social, moral and ethical guidance and support for their community members" (Vaughan et al., 2020: 4). However, studies have confirmed that religion promotes family violence and violence against women. According to Vaughan et al. (2020: 6) religious settings produce or reinforce the gendered drivers of violence. Factors include: religious teachings, interpretation of biblical texts, language that condones violence against women and restrictively prescribes gender roles and identities, structured gender inequality that is produced by gendered leadership hierarchies and patriarchal norms within religious traditions, faith-based barriers to divorce or separation for women who are experiencing violence, the silence that prevails within some faith-based communities, and lastly, the complex interplay of religion and culture.

Women have been scarred with dark histories that are riddled with pain and shame, as they try to escape their abusive past, incurred from their abusive marriages. These women are in their Sunday best committed to attending church services. These are Christian women displaying ideal happy families yet confined in their personal spaces, called as they are to battle the trauma associated with abuse. A comprehensive and close study will follow on how the Christian faith embodies and promotes life-denying theologies and how such skewed interpretations of biblical texts can have dire consequences for the health and well-being of women and girls.

2.6.5. The skewed interpretation of sacred texts

Gender-based violence has theological undertones. Within the Christian faith and in church organisations, there are certain institutional norms that aggravate abuse, and make women subject to violence and powerlessness in their own Christian homes. Sacred texts are misused, misinterpreted, and poorly misrepresented. O'Sullivan (2015) opts to use feminist hermeneutic tools in interpreting the John 7:53-8:11. This is one of many oppressive stories in the Bible where a woman is singled out, having been caught in adultery. How she was caught is not mentioned in the text, but the woman alone must face disciplinary measures of being stoned. During this time, the punishment of stoning was a historical custom/tradition embodying violence against women who had so sinned.

Although I am assured that the Bible is a life-giving tool, I am apprehensive where biblical references allude to patriarchal culture and a patriarchal time, both of which inevitably engender androcentric and even misogynist perspectives. These are readings that are grounded from the perspective of a male-dominated psyche, where women are projected to occupy lesser and insignificant roles. Symbolism and metaphors have been used to elevate males performing heroic acts and women serving as nurturers. This is problematic when skewed interpretations endorse this patriarchal worldview. Hence, in such a society one laments the culture of misogyny and violence. This remains a global challenge, this being the reality that religious and political leaders are still grappling with.

According to Jayasundara et al. (2017: 40) abusers use religion as a weapon of abuse and justify their abusive behaviour by reference to religious texts or traditions. In her work, Daly (2017: 59) provides an exposition of a God as a male, where she argues that the biblical image of God as a male patriarch has dominated the popular discourse for years. Structures within the church have thus been created and sustained to befit this narrative. Daly (2017: 60) further contends that if God is in 'his' heaven, and is as a father ruling 'his people, then it is in the divine nature of things and according to a divine order and plan of the universe that the society is male dominated. Christian marriage follows a similar model where the husband is the head of the household. In such circumstances, women have been abused and subjected to unhealthy engagements which render them insignificant. These women stay on in their miserable marriages, fearing to be labelled, judged, or perceived as failures, which makes marriage an unsafe terrain. Nash (2006: 196) thus contends that the abuse within the home undermines the rhetoric of "happy Christian living" and disrupts the imagery of solid congregational families. The "fall in love and live happily ever after" tale, thus becomes an unachievable and imaginary cliché.

2.6.6. The covenant of silence and DGBV

For generations, women have been admonished not to hang their dirty linen in public, which metaphorically resonates with keeping domestic matters private. Domestic gender-based violence (DGBV) has been shrouded in silence because of the stigma attached to it, thus exacerbating the scourge in families and communities. Families have thrived on secrecy and as such, domestic matters are best dealt with by family members, if at all. Obviously, outsiders could not intervene and assist, which opens women to further abuse and oppression. The church too has been silent on these critical issues and instead advocates religious texts and prayers to pacify women. Speaking about one's suffering is considered *ihlazo* (lit: 'taboo') and thus women sweep such matters under the carpet despite their continued suffering. The perception that women are to be seen rather than heard is embodied in Zulu culture. Women suffer in silence, hence the Zulu term '*Umfazi'* connotes '*ufa azi,'* (lit: 'wife dies knowing'). Patriarchy is thus accompanied by an entitlement which aggravates the abuse and the victimisation of women. Marriage has also become what Maluleke and Nadar (2002) refer to as a

covenant of violence and a covenant of silence. It is obvious that under such circumstances, marriage is an incubator for the victimisation of women. Churches seem to do more harm than good and therefore women opt to keep quiet and suffer in silence. Chisale (2018) contends that patriarchy produces legacies of cultural oppression, restrictions, and exclusion in the context of culture and tradition, resulting in women self-silencing, a development that further complicates pastoral care interventions within the context of marriage.

2.7. The ACSA and its life-denying narrative

Christian theology confines marriage to Christian marriage, which is all done under the rubric of Christian values and principles. In this section I will interrogate the theology of marriage and how its projected sanctity becomes fertile ground for DGBV. In Pillay's (2017) research within the ACSA, her premise is that the ACSA occupies previously male-dominated ecclesial spaces. Pillay further contends that "patriarchal normativity is re-inscribed through the reproduction of knowledge, which sustains skewed gender power relations amongst the clergy" (2017: 2). For Chiresh, (2015: 380), this pervasive, unpalatable, and endemic scourge against women is attributed to male dominance (patriarchy). These harsh realities are central to the experiences of Christian married woman within the ACSA. They are the experiences of committed church-going women, who are proud members of the Mothers Union (MU), religious extremists who attend every prayer meeting, retreat, and revival to soak themselves in the Lord's presence. An observation of the present researcher is that married women attend Bible studies, healing services, whole night prayer meetings, and retreats as a concrete sign of their commitment to the church. Some come desperately seeking God to answer their prayers. They read spiritual literature and partake in other church activities in their search for deliverance and divine intervention. They display strong, often stoic faces, yet they are deeply scarred, bearing the hidden wounds of DGBV.

2.7.1. The theology of male headship and female submission

There is an infusion of culture in religion affairs, for example through socio-cultural teachings which situate the woman's place in the kitchen and the man as the *de facto* head of the household, a position which goes unquestioned. According to (Baloyi, 2008), "the headship of man in the house has been of greater importance." Oftentimes, such cultural teachings and beliefs systems are at the heart of families, when the woman is expected to always keep their homes warm and neat. And, to oppose roles these would mean to oppose culture and cultural practices (Maisiri, 2015: 20). It would seem there is a script a woman should ascribe to as they are socialised to be 'good wives,' and 'good mothers' that demonstrate endurance, tenderness, and endurance, holding on to a marriage even if it is costing them peace, joy, and happiness. They are expected to perform feminine duties, while men must 'gather food.'

During the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in job losses and retrenchments, and the general culture of unemployment, it is concerning how the incidents of abuse have increased. Indeed. one can only imagine how these job losses have disrupted the identities of men where they place their manhood on firm and tangible phenomena. It thus becomes tragic when men rule with aggression and violence since no one is allowed to question what he does in his own household, which places the women and the lives of children in severe danger.

For Rakoczy (2004), patriarchy is interwoven into the Christian tradition in various pervasive ways and argues that "the images of God in Scripture and liturgical prayers are overwhelmingly male: Lord, King, Father" (2004: 31). Rakoczy further contends that the oppression of women through patriarchal and social structures increases in the religious context, since the presumed "maleness" of God and the male identity of Jesus are used to justify women's subordination (2004: 31).

2.7.2. The ACSA and its patriarchal legacy

The ACSA has a rich heritage that is predominantly Eurocentric. Women ministries and programmes continue to be inspired by the wisdom of the liturgical worship order. This is evident in worship, prayers, and the healing ministry, where it is written large in *The Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. This highlights how the basis of prayers is still inspired and interpreted through a rich heritage of the constructed colonial institution which is androcentric. The prayers and liturgies are written down and are mainly recited or sung. Having cited this background, it is vital to indicate that discussion will revolve around the subject of violence and Christian marriages within the ACSA. There is a significant gap in terms of how the theology of courtship consists of teachings, which prepare couples particularly men, as it challenges their patriarchal notions of masculinity and family. The pre-counselling session is still gendered as it focuses on the role of women as crucial in making the marriage work. I here argue that the MU, when advising the bride, still centres their advice on what she must do to make her home hospitable, and how she must take care of her husband. No programmes are offered for the groom as he gets to be sharpened for the new role of being a God-fearing husband who advocates for gender equality and human dignity.

2.7.3. The ACSA liturgy: God as male and headship theology

The ACSA liturgy presents God as male with much precision. Jesus' maleness has been linked to his divinity in such a way that the female has become marginalised from imaging Christ. The doctrine of the Holy Trinity informs the liturgy, being deeply scripted in the minds of Christians that God and Jesus are male, a narrative which feminist theologians encounter as being particularly problematic. This has freely entered the narrative, congregants enjoying singing the hymns and reciting the Apostles Creed

without questioning its constructions. In moving forward, the traditional perspective on Christological constructions being male and exclusionary, poses some potential difficulties for feminist theology.

The basis of the traditional Christian faith is enthroned in the ancient Apostles Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth;

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son Our Lord,

Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead;

He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God, the Father almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting.

In the opening stanza, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth," one may argue that this is to put an emphasis on the relationship as an important aspect which we all need to develop and nurture. This is evident within the ACSA, and this transpires in their doctrinal expressions such as in *The Anglican Book of Common Prayer, An Anglican Prayer Book (1989),* and *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, as well as being apparent in the Bible itself. For centuries, this Christian tradition has shaped how God is perceived, imagined, and accepted. God has been bestowed with race, gender, and sex. For example:

The Nicene Creed (Isivumo sokholo sabaPhostoli).

Ngiyakholwa kuNkulunkulu, uYise, uSomandla (Line 1)

uMdali wezulu nomhlaba. (Line 2)

On page 104 of the ACSA liturgy, there is a strong emphasis on God being male and praise and worship centred on God as male. This is reflected as follows:

Makadunyiswe uNkulunkulu ophezulu

Kubekhona ukuthula kubantu bakhe abasemhlabeni.

Nkosi Nkulunkulu, Nkosi yasezulwini

Somandla Nkulunkulu onguBaba

Siyakudumisa, sikubona

Sikubabaza ngenkazimulo yakho

Nkosi Jesu Kristu, Ndodana eyodwa kaYise

Nkosi Nkulunkulu, Mvana kaNkulunkulu

And, on page 6, this is evident:

Nkulunkulu Somandla, Baba wasezulwini

The Lord's prayer on page 126, reads thus:

Baba wethu osezulwini

And lastly, I bring attention to page 141 where different lines are used as prayers prior to absolution in the sacrament of forgiveness. For example:

Unkulunkulu wawuthanda umhlaba kangangokuba wanikela ngeNdodana yakhe evele yodwa, ukuze bonke abakholwayo yiyo bangabhubhi, kodwa babenokuphila okupakade.

The patriarchal language of God as omnipotent and supreme above is also commonly evident in the hymns. It is the sovereignty of Christ who is deemed the only route for salvation. One may deduce that this becomes problematic when there are challenges of toxic masculinity, for how can men save women from abuse? There is a deliberate omission of feminine metaphors in hymns as well.

For example, hymn 136 *Ukubantu bakho Nkosi…*

Bayabheka kuwe Nkosi

Bonke abantu bakho,

Bakuthande wena Baba,

Bakwethembe njalo,

Bayabonga Wena Baba

Nendodana futhi

Nawe Moya oyiNgcwele,

Nkulunkulu munye.

The above extracts from The Nicene Creed and from the ACSA's liturgical hymns specialise in the use of words like *Nkosi* (Lord), *Baba* (Father), *Ndodana* (Son). All these masculine expressions have been an important part of the Christian faith, and upon which the Anglican liturgy has been built upon.

Maleness has been represented and presented as normative because it is chosen by God, as evidenced in Jesus' maleness. There is also the Anglican theology and doctrines that present two natures of Christ, one that is human and the other divine. However, the Nicene Creed only refers to manhood which may render the use of man as normative.

There is a tendency to be exclusive as most expressions refer to manhood as a generic and the universal term that defines Christ. However, I argue here that whether Christ holds the masculine virtues or femininity in our faith, one needs to recognise how such history may have been distorted to perpetuate the patriarchal era of the time. Also, in the context of toxic masculinity, those who had witnessed and had lived experiences of being violated and assaulted, struggle to accept God as father, since the concept of fatherhood may have negative connotations of representing violence. Against this hegemonic locus of maleness, I make the claim that we need to engage and unpack this potential historical background, one needs to be mindful that the Bible, prayer books and hymnals are constructed by humankind. They are written and refer to a particular era which may have been patriarchal and therefore contain the specificity of patriarchal roles that served the agenda of that time. In the today's world of GBV, it becomes a condescending issue that males are seen considering becoming abusers. Taking maleness as a metaphor thus poses certain challenges as to how women receive and imagine Christ as their Saviour. I argue therefore that the overarching problem is the maleness of Christ and the uniqueness of Christ.

Different feminist critiques have admonished this Christology construction. For example, Mary Daly argues that Christology is nothing short of idolatry, idolising the male sex at the expense of the female. She in fact renames Christology, "Christolatry" rejecting any claim that Jesus might offer or achieve salvation for women. One can thus argue that God being hailed as a male continues to legitimise male superiority, which is concerning. In one's journey of faith as a Black woman, pondering serious questions and seeking solid answers, if Christ and the language of the Bible, the church's prayers, songs, and hymns are all male and if policies and doctrines recognise males, what is the world of women looking like? Who shall redeem women inside and outside the church?

I concur with other feminist theologians, on how this Maleness has implications on how women relate to God the Father, even more so when men inflict pain upon women and children. It makes sense that this tradition legitimises male superiority, reinforces patriarchy and sexist thinking which is catastrophic. On the other hand, Jesus's ministry highlights the use of power in a positive manner. He had power and access to power. But he gave it up! Jesus thereby modelled in his own being the dramatic assault on male privilege. Who but a man could credibly teach and model such a revolution in relationships by giving up power? The maleness of Jesus is neither a weakness in the story, nor is it irrelevant. The maleness of Jesus is a strong point in the story of giving up power and becoming a

servant, joining the underclass of women and other servants to abolish servitude altogether. This is the position that the church ought to assume in walking with those who are in pain.

If men and women are made in the image of God, it is an expectation that the use of inclusive language is addressed. The use of inclusive language is an issue of justice, and is a central Christian principle (Stjerna, 2016: 18).

2.7.4. Women navigating ministry and leadership

According to Pillay (2017), the ACSA has ordained women to the priesthood since 1989, yet until now, few women are in senior leadership positions. Indirectly, this perpetuates male domination and feeds DGBV as women remain in submission. There are still more male clergy as opposed to female clergy, and this narrative has endorsed hierarchical structures and doctrines within the ACSA, privileging male dominance. According to Thesnaar (2010), the presence of male as opposed to female clergy is life denying, since the current congregation practices do not take women's pain seriously. Women who have assumed the ranks within the church have also chosen to assume the positions of men as they seek to fit in. The male clergy somehow regard themselves as equal to God, which makes it difficult to openly approach those private matters taking place in the home. It therefore becomes crucial to determine how urgently married women exposed to DGBV in their own homes are assisted, and how such pastoral care programmes can empower them. There is a clear discourse of powerlessness that makes women vulnerable. Through toxic theologies, women are rendered vulnerable. Women are grouped with children, and jointly considers them a vulnerable group.

2.7.5. The ACSA, its systems, and processes

Toxic theology is also evident in places of worship, sacred iconography, religious texts, religious laws, traditions, and customs. In churches there are women who have been battered, where some have experienced verbal insults which often are characterised by anger, hostility, and bullying, mainly perpetrated by men. These often go unreported and rarely spoken about, as they invoke feelings of despair and shame. It is usually during the Sacrament of Confession that such matters are discussed and due to the seal of the Confessional, the clergy exercises confidentiality and may not disclose anything they have learnt from penitents. For Maupa (2015), the institutional structure of the church, its systems and processes, liturgy, symbolism, and iconography further perpetuate violence against women. Hence, systemic structures are patriarchal, and some hymns and biblical texts have been interpreted in a manner that further places women in a difficult position.

2.7.6. The ACSA and the language of prayer

Scholars state that women are mostly vulnerable since GBV embodies an aspect of patriarchy (i.e., male control) and this indicates male control over women (Ellberg & Heise, 2005). Unemployment and economic constraints also increase the vulnerability of women who are subjected to GBV, as they depend on men who are the breadwinners. These circumstances create layers of abuse, exposing women to vulnerability and victimisation due to cultural expectations and gender stereotypes. The precarious nature of the circumstances pitted against women is most unsettling. Violence "displaces the role of holiness, and a sacrality of God and humanity, violence skews reality and is often ambiguous" (Kirk-Duggan, 2020: 149). The problem is further compounded by the inability and incapacity of the hierarchical church that dishonours the mental and psychological wellbeing of women, who may have experienced domestic violence, if not gender-based violence. Christian married women must keep such abuse private and are often expected to solve such abuse through prayer and forgiveness. Marsden (2018: 12) states that Christian married women are often asked these questions:

i. Have you prayed for your husband?
ii. Have you forgiven him?
iii. What have you done when you have contributed to the conflict?
iv. Have you been submissive?
v. Did you promise to stay in the marriage for better or worse in your wedding vows?
vi. Doesn't the Bible say we must suffer for our faith?

According to Owino (2010: 146) the church has been influenced by the masculine language of the Bible, through its theology. He goes on to argue that scholars have constructed the image of God as masculine. It is this idea of maleness whereby women are considered inferior. It is a language that privileges male over females. According to Oduyoye (1995a), this notion of maleness is apparent in the use of the Bible, as it endorses hierarchical and oppressive terms such as Omnipresent, Omniscient, Ruler, or Almighty, which are coded in terms of race relations as racist, and to gender relations as sexism. It is also important to note that male clergy continue to refer to themselves as 'Father,' while female clergy are referred to as 'Reverend.' There is certain urgency which needs to be promoted as liturgical language is encouraged. The church and marriage is in dire need of theologies, systems, and doctrines that challenge old, dysfunctional, and oppressive systems.

The ACSA remains silent and pretends not to 'see the elephant in the room.' There is a deafening silence on matters of injustice and the oppression of women. This is evident in terms of how ACSA leaders make statements and policies without tangible actions. In terms of social media, one notices a silence which is a clear indication that GBV is a challenge for the church. What is most disturbing is

the discourse of shame, as women opt to silence themselves. Patriarchy is rife in the homes of many Christian married woman, 27 years after the South African democratic state was instituted. The freedom attained in 1994 in the SA political terrain, was a freedom disabled in many Christian households.

One sees MU women wearing branded T-shirts with the word *Masithwalisane* (lit: 'let us support one another') taken from Galatians 6:2: *"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ"* (New International Version). One would think that members of the MU have a collective consciousness that abusive marriages require no prayer and in this instance the act of *ukuthwalisana*[5] in prayer is problematic does nothing to condone violence and indeed puts the responsibility on a woman. The MU is built upon clear objectives, one of which speaks to marriage and family life. This alludes to raising kingdom children and ensuring that the growth of the guild. The MU recites a prayer, usually read when women are gathered for prayer meetings. This prayer is already problematic as it appears to glorify suffering.

The Mothers Union prayer reads as follows:

Nkulunkulu Somandla, Baba waseZulwini,

(Heavenly Lord, Our Father in heaven)

Osiphe umshado waba ngumthombo wenjabulo kubantu bakho.

(You have given the gift of marriage as the source of joy.)

Siyakubonga ngezinjabulo nezinhluphekho nezinsizi zasekhaya zempilo yasekhaya.

(We thank you for the joys, suffering, and the sorrows of our marriage life.)

Thela phezu kwethu uMoya wakho Ongcwele, ukuze sikuthande sikusebenzele ngeqiniso.

(Pour upon us the Holy Spirit so that we may love and truthfully work for you)

Busisa bonke abaganeneyo Kanye nabazali nabantwana.

(Bless all the married, the parents and the children.)

Senze sibazi ubukhona nokuthula kwakho emakhaya ethu, agcwalise ngothando lwakho,

(Make your presence known and let peace prevail in our homes, fill them up with love)

Uwasebinzisele udumo lwakho.

(And use them for your glory)

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[5] *Ukuthwalisana* is a word from Zulu, the word is from the verb *ukuthwala* (to carry). the term refers to a collective act of carrying together

Busisa bonke abenhlangano yawoNina emhlabeni wonke.

(Bless all MU members in the whole world.)

Sihlanganise ngomkhuleko nangenkonzo, sikuthande, sikusebenzele sithi

(Unite us in prayer and worship, let us love and dutifully serve you)

Sesiqinisiwe ngobabalo lwakho, sishisekele ukwenza intando yakho,

(When we are strengthened with grace, inspire us to do your will)

NgoJesu Krestu inkosi yethu. Amen

(In Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen).

While prayer is considered life-giving, there tends to be a glorification of suffering, where it is viewed as equating to salvation. When in a state of trauma, every person seeks a pragmatic solution. The church tradition sustains its traditional ethos even when it impacts change and the challenge that remains is that prayer forums rarely encourage women to escape abusive marriages. Instead, these prayer meetings encourage women to endure suffering as they live under the domination of their abusive spouses. Such acts continue to subjugate women, further enabling male supremacy amidst episodic violent attacks in their homes. These prayer meetings employ a one-sided approach to building a stable marriage, and if a marriage fails, they shift the blame to one person: the wife. African women continue to remain in dysfunctional marriages that slowly erode their sense of self-esteem and confidence. The flipside of the coin is that such abusive traits when unchallenged or disrupted become "a core thread in the 'family' culture" (Steele, 2003: 355). It is chilling that such cultures take the form of catastrophic traits handed down as a family heritage, breeding abuse through the blood line.

2.7.7. The ACSA and Christian marriage

The ACSA asserts that marriage by divine institution is a lifelong and exclusive union and partnership between one man and one woman (Canon on Holy Matrimony). Similarly, the ACSA Constitution (Canon 34)[6] asserts that marriage by divine institution is a lifelong and exclusive union between one man and one woman. Thus, marriage in various religious faith communities is understood as the 'till death do us part' covenant. However, this assertion does not consider marriage difficulties, especially the unhappiness and danger that is faced by women in abusive marriages. The stereotypical expectation is that a woman needs to preserve the sanctity of her marriage at all costs, no matter what it takes. Divorce is never an option, and for those who choose to opt out of the matrimonial union, society renders them failures and not 'woman enough' to overcome such challenges. However, the dilemma

[6] See: *An Anglican Prayer Book, 1989.*

begins when there are challenges, as the married wish to consider divorce. This subject is often taboo, rendering marriage difficult to leave. Women thus opt to stay in abusive marriages due to poverty and dependence on their spousal support.

Women are entangled in this tug-of-war, to stay on or to leave, whether to preserve marriage or prioritise their mental and emotional wellbeing. Despite all cultural and religious meanings of marriage, the reality is that no matter how sanctified the marriage is, the institution is burdened with violence. Marriage is understood as a sacrament, which means that it is sanctified and indissoluble. This is in accordance with the tradition in which the priest binds the hands of the newly wedded couple with her/his stole, saying: "Those whom God has joined together, let no man put asunder" (*An Anglican Prayer Book*, 1989:457). Ntuli (2013: 43) cites the theology of indissoluble oneness: "to have and to hold, till death do us part," whereby biblical teachings about marriage are life denying. The question borders on what happens to women who are abused. This theology does not permit married women to leave their marriage, no matter what, until death do them part. Women have thus been subjected to GBV in the name of God. It is difficult to imagine the struggles of women in such scenarios and this poses a challenge in marriages that are punctuated by violence.

In the context of Zulu culture, married women find it a taboo to disclose their marital struggles. Ntuli, 2013: 46) refers to a theology of cleaving as highlighted in Mark 10:8, which subjects married women to miserable marriages. In African churches, it is not unusual to hear reminders of what 'the Bible says' about women. Ephesians 5:28-31 is continually used as a tool which subjects women to an ongoing submission that exposes them to violence in the 'comfort' of their homes. According to Baloyi (2008) Ephesians 5: 21-22 has been used to place women under an unconditional subordination. Furthermore, the theology of prayer and preaching for those in pain and suffering perpetuates GBV. The MU is the women ministry in the ACSA that has what is known as *inkonzo yemithwalo,* which is a liturgical practice where women gather to pray for their pain and suffering (Kobo, 2018b: 6).

2.7.8. Liturgical services and the ACSA

With the ACSA, Easter Week is a week packed with prayers and reflections, with Holy Thursday devoted to the Gospel of John in which Jesus speaks to his disciples before the Last Supper. The message in this tradition invites the congregants to strengthen their relationships. This is the ideal time when the sermons should reflect on equality and mutuality, in which women and men equally meet and share God's love, love as it admonishes injustice. Regrettably, despite the church calendar observing this tradition, there is a tendency of misrepresenting the gospel and its context. It is concerning that the church still holds to traditional patriarchal and masculine truths that seek to diminish women and further reinforce in men's conscience of what they consider to be their rightful place in marriage. This place

has exacerbated GBV and a positioning that has placed Christian women in harmful scenarios of abuse and victimisation.

The Bible continues to be revered as the Book of Life with divine truths. Theologians argue that in the African context, the Bible has always represented a different version of women: who they are and who they ought to be. It was used as an imperial project of colonisation and conquest (West, 2016). According to Oduyoye (1995a: 480), African churches developed a theology of 'folk talk' on what God requires of women. Precisely, the church has never attempted to renew and refresh the way women are treated and regard them in a manner that is liberating; instead, it has always used biblical texts that subject women to norms of tradition and culture. Accordingly, Proverbs 14:1 *"The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down"* (New International Version), is still poorly interpreted thereby perpetuating psychological and emotional harm. This text has negative connotations, as it entrusts everything to a woman who must build her matrimonial relationship alone and should things falter, then she is deemed wicked.

The abuse of women continues to be perpetuated because of toxic theologies where women are forced to stay in abusive marriages. The theology of sacrifice has been distorted: the cross being seen as the strongest symbol of Christ's identification as a co-sufferer with the oppressed (Gnanadason, 2012: 251). This sacrificial lifestyle is normalised as women give more of themselves in their families and communities, in their quest for the acquisition of Christ-like qualities. This is a common scenario in the ACSA, as African women are so used to give up their dreams, passion, and goals to nurture everyone else in their family. Religious values and ideals often reinforce and sanction strict adherence to stereotypical gender roles. Female submission and male domination are inscribed in "the religious construction of women or wives and men or husbands" (Boonzaier & de la Rey, 2004).

2.7.9. The theology of family values and the discourses of powerlessness

Through family social values, women have been socialised that they are inferior to men, as men are the heads of households. They have through systemic and institutional cultures been placed at a lower rank from men as they are to respect the position of men who are the heads of households. These traditional beliefs have been enforced and theologically sanctioned that the man is the head, which the woman must accept and be in submission. For example, jokingly in the Zulu tradition, women would often refer to their husbands as *'inkosi yami'* (lit: 'my husband is my king'). In unequal relations of power, this subjects women to subservience and harm. Of course, this notion exists in the church, as its teachings endorse a theology that equates husbands to the level of God. The question is therefore: "How do you defy your God, your Father, who is your husband?"

2.7.10. The theology of self-sacrifice

Christianity has taught parishioners the theology of self-sacrifice. Philippians 2:8 provides support of this notion, claiming that Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. One already detects some problems with this biblical text. The skewed interpretations have a potential of harming rather than building. In the context of Christian marriage, the church has taught wives to honour their husbands. Failure to do so is considered sinful and women are condemned for failing to keep the marriage flame alive. Women take the blame for marriages that fail, and hence they must sacrifice and keep giving, pouring out for the sake of mending, shaping, and affirming an institution that may be draining emotionally and psychologically. Christianity has taught believers that sacrifice is the way of life. The Christian teaching popularises a mindset that endorses the thinking that others matter, while it trains the mind and heart that it is acceptable to sacrifice one's life and happiness in exchange for a covenant which should be unbreakable, in terms of biblical authority. In the context of marriage, the theology of sacrifice "presents Jesus' death as God's sacrifice of his beloved child for the sake of the world, it teaches that the highest love is sacrifice" (Brock & Parker, 2001: 25). Brock and Parker further argue that "to make sacrifice or to be sacrificed is virtuous and redemptive" (2001: 25). Women survivors are haunted because of teachings where they bear suffering for the sake of love. They opt to stay in abusive marriages, choosing to act happy and joyful for the sake of being respected by external people. And yet often, sadness becomes their internal struggle as they opt to sacrifice their inner peace as Christ did to bring forth salvation for humankind.

2.7.11. Purity codes

Womanhood and the rites of passage hold ideological perceptions that are sexist. These are justified biblically. The theology shared and expressed in church still focuses on one gender and there is a lack of resources and an inclusive approach as to how both males and females can be conscientised towards the issue of gender inequality which may inflict families and communities badly if not handled well. Women are still considered unclean since they go through menstruation periods, and this is considered as impure in the context of the church. Intertwined with issues of sexuality, these are subjects that are taboo in the church, women still experience exclusion as certain congregants still hold on to notions of impurity and unholiness. These exclusions are foreseen when women are forbidden to serve at the altar. However, these are the same women who bring the gift of life into being.

There is much emphasis on the codes of purity which speak to women in terms of keeping themselves pure for marriage. Women are to save themselves for their perfect husband and in return, they will have happy marriages. On the other hand, men do not undergo any biblical teaching which prepares them to be good husbands. No induction is engaged with men as they are sharpened through teachings that

defines and refines their masculinity. Women are on numerous occasions and in various contexts prepared for marriage and how it is important that they are the ones to keep the fires burning at home. In this study, I question how the church educates boys to become men? How does the church initiate discussions where young men are exposed to biblical teachings that do not endorse toxicity, but instead speak of gender equality? What kind of role modelling are boy children exposed to? What kind of scripting is the church providing for young men so that they can be empowered to change the narrative of abuse they are prone to?

2.7.12. Discourse of protection and pity

The sacred texts and traditions in faith spaces have been used to portray women as weak and soft. This is a social construction that transcends from church to the home environment. "Women are conceptualised as weak and as the sex that needs protection" (Ojong, 2013: 79). In most instances, they are ranked on a similar scale as children, which aggravates their risk of being in situations that make them vulnerable to domestic violence and gender-based violence.

2.7.13. The theology of sin

Issues of sexuality are still creating bias and ignorance makes people regard menstruation as impure. Some are steeped in teachings that exclude women from being at the altar and from leading at the front when they are in their menstrual cycle. This is a contentious issue since women give birth to a human being, yet when they serve in church, are considered ritually unclean. The theology of sin exists and requires interrogation through the feminist pastoral approach. In this study, it should be viewed in the context of spousal abuse evident in Christian marriages and prevalent in Christian households.

Sin is described in *An Anglican Prayer Book* (1989:426) as "the seeking of our own will instead of the will of God, thus distorting our relationship with God, with other people, and all of creation." Married women suffer in silence in fear of being labelled and stigmatised, considering that divorce is frowned upon. Moreover, for those who may wish to remarry, the Canon Law of the ACSA stipulates that a person should acknowledge a share in the sin that led to the breakdown of the former marriage and be repentant of the failure to keep the vows made in the marriage. This researcher argues that these church canons, which classify remarriage as a sin, place women in a risky situation that makes them opt to stay with their abusive husbands, allowing them to be passive victims of IPV within marriage. This identifies the position of the ACSA as a partner in causing and perpetuating DGBV, and calls upon the institution to review its theology and church canons, to curb DGBV in South African society.

Liberation is at the heart of practising feminist pastoral care and escaping abuse is what the church needs to present and represent as a mandate, to relieve those who are enduring abusive marriages.

However, if the church continues to propagate its oppressive and draconian decrees, it will perpetuate gender abuse. By so doing, this researcher argues that, as an institution, it must also confess its sin and repent. Moreover, it must seek ways and means of theologising in a manner that affirms rather than oppresses women. It is vital that the ACSA should review its theology and be bold in revising the vows that eulogise power in patriarchal society. Divorce should not be universally perceived as sin, but as liberation in the context of abuse, allowing women to reclaim their lives. The use of the language of sin and guilt in relation to abused women highlights the issue of structural sin rooted in social factors. To consider the liberation of the oppressed woman as sin, in relation to the binding patriarchal power arrangements of society, seems questionable. Divorce ought to be viewed as liberation from a destructive abuse of physical power and the resultant suffering. Therefore, the ACSA needs to review its ideology from a feminist pastoral perspective for the creation of safe and non-judgemental platforms that allow space for healing to those who have been shattered through divorce, creating programmes for healing without judging them.

2.7.14. Theology of shame

Issues of sexuality constitute the theology of shame. The church struggles to hold conversations around sexuality. The development of women from being a girl into a fully-fledged woman is still a taboo subject and even when a girl menstruates, the church fails to use the opportunity to empower by exposing the treasures of life-creating potential with possible aspects sexual violence and anything that comes with dating and marriage. How these remain unpacked leaves woman feeling shamed and sinful. Women understand their sexuality as a sin (Moyo, 2004: 74). Traditionally, women have had no say in issues of sexual engagement (Haddad, 2002: 95). Phiri and Nadar (2009) postulate that young married women are advised to turn a blind eye to their husband's infidelity, which means they are powerless to protect themselves from HIV & AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Hence, the spread of HIV & AIDS is a reality since married women cannot negotiate for safer sex in cases of unfaithfulness, because of cultural constraints (Phiri & Nadar, 2009: 13). This is important for this study as it highlights how shame and the secrecy of DGBV, may result in women undergoing severe trauma, stress, and depression. It therefore rests upon the church community to reshape the worshipping community's thoughts, beliefs, and actions which in turn may shape relationships with others and with God.

The ideation of Christian piety is a legacy that shapes peoples morals and behaviour. The narrative of the story of Eve being blamed for the fall of the entire human race continues to be perpetuated negatively. For example, "male violence and predatory male sexuality continue to be excused or tolerated, while women and girls are blamed (and encouraged to blame themselves)" (Schoeffel et al., 2018: 12). These skewed biblical passages are taken literally and somehow equated to African value

systems and thus perceived as biblical tools that further oppress and silence women. Hence, the OT proverb: *"The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down"* (Proverbs, 14:1 New International Version), is a case in point. This scripture text is very popular at African weddings and those who offer advice use it to 'empower' a woman in assuming the duties of a good wife and place the rise and fall of the marriage in her hands. Accordingly, the text has always been interpreted and translated in a manner that endorses the oppression of women. I therefore contend that violence against women requires urgent attention in this region, and that the church must take on a more active role in tackling this crisis of social injustice.

In the Christian context, pastoral care is supposedly a clergy's vocation. Because the church is dominated by male clergy, there are challenges in terms of male clergy struggling to extend some pastoral care functions to communities and congregants, as they tend to regard women's issues as petty and feminine. A study by Petersen (2006) investigated the challenges confronting the clergy in dealing with domestic violence. In her dissertation, Petersen outlines how violence causes emotional or psychological damage and sexual violence, which are the result of power control. She went to argue that women see no point in reporting such cases because domestic violence is treated with silence. What is worth noting is that the participants in her study alluded to a lack of training in dealing with real life issues as pastors, and secondly, there was a demonstrable lack of theological guidelines to address problematic teachings and misinterpretation of biblical texts (Petersen, 2006: 126). The church has in the past played no role in intervening in situations where there is spousal violence and violation of women and still struggles to respond. The silence and inaction which Haddad (2004: 10) alludes to, is an important part of the reality that embraces poor and marginalised women's struggle to survive each day.

2.7.15. Theology of fear

Families that raise their children according to Christian precepts have leaned towards fundamentalist principles, believing that God desired that they, as God's children, fear God. It is this fear that is instilled in children from a tender age. This is a theology that emphasises the importance of fearing God as a mission and a calling. What however is disturbing is that such socialisation defeats the love for Christ. One questions, how do Christian women who live under the shackles of abuse trust God to deliver them from such injustice? Living under such a dark cloud of fear has shaped the discourse of resilience. Fear prevents women from leaving their abusive spouses and this perpetuates DGBV.

2.7.16. Theology of the cross and doctrines of atonement

According to Brock and Parker:

> Atonement theology takes an act of state violence and redefines it as intimate violence, a private spiritual transaction between God the Father and God the Son. Atonement theology then says this intimate violence saves life. This redefinition replaces state violence with intimate violence and thus makes intimate violence holy and salvific (2001: 49).

Christians have always believed in the satisfaction of their faith. According to Adams and Fortune (1995: 37), Christianity has always been a primary feature in the lives of women. Central to their core belief is that the image of Christ on the cross as Saviour of the world epitomises redemptive suffering. Many believe that in suffering and obedience there is true salvation and a faithful identity. There is a dominant narrative that is perpetuated as real, believing that if Christ died for us, then we too should be willing to suffer to save the world. Women are therefore prepared to endure pain and humiliation as they suffer in silence, being prepared to offer themselves as a sacrifice For Adams and Fortune (1995), women are inferior and assume a servant-suffering role. This theology has been shaped within the church and in society. Women are perceived as sinful and the ones who ought to change, who must seek correction and forgiveness. This goes against the grain of liberation. Against this reality, women have a fundamental role to play in reclaiming their living space, their identity, and above all their wholeness.

Suffering as narrated in the Old and New Testaments, holds a dominant view in the church whereby suffering is seen because of sin. The narrative of Jesus Christ is understood by scholars in unique dispositions, as it postulates different motifs which attempt to explain what Jesus' death meant and what it was meant to achieve for humankind. Some theologians attribute Jesus' sacrificial death as a necessity for salvation; while for others, Jesus' suffering is equated to the will of the Father. In times of suffering, Christians hold on to these entrenched ideologies that Christ died to appease God. Various biblical texts, such as Psalm 44 and the Book of Job, demonstrate that suffering engages a dialogue on integrity, as the blameless and the pure become tested but never lose their integrity. Gender-based violence as a theological challenge exists even in Christian households. It is alive, but private. Christians hold on to the belief that to remain firm in one's suffering is a theological motif that grounds one's faith and stance.

2.7.17. Theology of forgiveness

Since women are expected to maintain their marriage, they are supposed to forgive and forget their ill feelings. Marsden (2013: 32) argues that certain biblical texts are misunderstood and thus misapplied

pastorally to women living with violence. Some biblical texts have undergirding messages of hope and as forgiveness. These include the following:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also" (Matthew 5:38–39 New International Version).

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12 New International Version).

"But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them" (Luke 6:27–39 New International Version).

"Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Matthew 18:22 New International Version).

The above cited biblical passages include Mathew 18:22 in which Jesus answers Peter when he asks how many times he must forgive. In his response, Jesus says *"I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."* Accordingly, married women have been socialised and schooled about forgiveness. In biblical interpretation, the number seven is said to signify completion. In this instance of a sad scenario of abuse, women have often given in, forgiving their husbands, demonstrating the teaching of loving one's neighbour.

Having alluded to this dire situation, as women reside in spaces where there is a lack of psycho-emotional support, GBV will always have a negative impact on women and their families, often with ripple effects pervading the community. Although scholars such as Hendricks et al. (2012) acknowledge the importance of men involved in curbing GBV, my argument as a researcher is different. I argue that the church needs to revitalise its pastoral vision for women survivors. The church must raise its prophetic voice, by creating safe places of healing, where women can lament and exchange their stories of pain. The plight of married women abused, battered, and victimised in their marriages is an indication that silence will not solve anything. Instead, it is important to explore the efforts done by the church in providing support.

The discussion which follows will explore the current pastoral responses and practices that have been directed towards change, namely: healing, empowering, and liberating.

2.8. The response of the ACSA against the plight of GBV

This study has focused on the ACSA in terms of how the church can create space for healing. This is even more urgent against the challenge imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. While this remains the goal of this research study, it is vital to assess what has been done in responding to GBV. There are Scholars such as (Nason-Clark, 1997; Petersen, 2009; Poling, 2012; Muzenda, 2020) have researched the issue of women and domestic abuse, paying attention to the subject of pastoral care and how women can receive coping strategies.

In a recent study, Klaasen argues that it is important "to investigate the pastoral response of the church, but also how victims experience this response" (2018b: 39). While Klassen's work does not include the voices of women, much emphasis is placed on methodology and literature review. In the past, the ACSA has simply used the rubrics of prayer and faith. For many years, clerics have made this the mantra of spiritual support. Women who endure suffering find themselves having one option: prayer, and that is meant to solve the struggle and pain caused by GBV. In her dissertation, Klaasen, speaks of marriage, divorce, forgiveness, and headship, together with virtuous suffering, as contentious issues.

The ACSA has taken a stance in standing in solidarity with survivors of GBV and femicide. Evident in the Diocese of Natal, has been the creation of a Provincial Gender Desk working on gender issues, being tasked to consolidate material for "gender-sensitive guidelines in teachings and practices." Task teams are presently engaged in training the clergy and laity. They are spending time developing resources that will empower the church on gender sensitive needs pertaining to violence against women.

Pillay (2011:1) critiques the term "gender desk" in that it creates another hierarchy of power:

> The power of knowledge (and officialdom) of those behind the desk. Also 'desk' is very static and does not reflect the relationality and mutuality (of communion) which ought to underscore the church's response to gender equality.

Pillay offers the possibility that the Provincial Gender Desk would have "a co-ordinating function, identify regional, national and transnational resources, disseminate information and give general direction for gender ministry in the Province" (2011:3) The Provincial Gender Desk working in the Diocesan offices plays a central role in cascading liturgical reflection prayers which are circulated down to the parishes. These are often done to show solidarity with survivors. I argue that this shows how the church hierarchy still disempowers women's agency if it is not inspired from the bottom-up. There is no recognition of the survivor's plight which could enable married women who have endured abuse. Parishes are still trapped in the top-down hierarchy, a legacy which the ACSA churches are struggling to detach themselves from. This is defined by Shragge (2013) as the loss of the movement's critical

edge, where the GBV response within the ACSA is more concerned with rhetoric, than with concrete actions.

Prayers and expressions are re-appropriated to speak to GBV as a real challenge. These are used and engaged in collaboration with the liturgy. Over the years, there has been a development of the church's Pastoral Standards[7] which are incorporated in Canon Law. In February 2019, the Bishops of the ACSA signed a Charter for Safe and Inclusive Church,[8] in which they committed themselves to a Programme of Action to promote a culture of safety and inclusion among all congregant members, organisations, institutions, and places of worship, and through ongoing education and training to equip all who minister to prevent the occurrence of abuse and create spaces where justice and restoration can take place. One acknowledges that these are forward moving initiatives, pointing the church towards the correct direction of justice. Yet, the pace is slow. Amid the realities of pain and suffering, there is still confidence in prayer. According to Gina (2016a), women in the ACSA pray away gendered poverty and violence. She further argues that the spirit of *Ubuntu* has not shifted the narrative of women's abuse. Certainly, prayers and the songs sung have not addressed DGBV; instead, it simply calms the raging sea, comforting women, ensuring that they only cope for a while, but remain chained and burdened in their own homes by GBV.

It is noteworthy that the church has responded through 'pilgrim-like marches.' Where congregants stand in solidarity with the survivors of DGBV. In recent times, such marches have become popular in the big cities, where clergy and ordinary women take to the streets, holding posters with 'hash-tag' messages. Scholars state that such interventions have been geared towards prevention focusing on attitude and behaviour change. These efforts remain marginally effective in curbing the DGBV pandemic. However, what stands out the most are church-based activities, which are held signalling activism against GBV, and the silence in the ACSA communities. This is against the background of the ACSA having a long history of clergy participating in the struggle for justice against the apartheid system, as well as more recent social justice programmes (Cavendish, 2000). Anglican leaders continue to make public statements raising awareness about the injustices of sexism maintained by culture and the church. This has attracted much activism expressed in programmes such as: "16 Days of Activism," "Black Thursday," and "Black Sunday" as faith organisations stand in solidarity against gender injustice.

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[7] See: Anglican Church of Southern Africa, *Safe Church Guide*. https://anglicanchurchsa.org/safe-church-guide/ [Accessed: 13 December 2021].

[8] See: Anglican Church of Southern Africa, *Charter for Safe and Inclusive Church* https://anglicanchurchsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A_CHARTER_FOR_SAFE_AND_INCLUSIVE_CHURCH.pdf [Accessed: 13 December 2021]

The subsection which follows will discuss the activism against GBV in the ACSA. The discussion will begin by surveying the general landscape of activism, demonstrating how it is a tool for raising awareness, for voicing injustice against women and girls, and for encouraging the participation and action of ACSA parishes.

2.8.1. Activism in South Africa

Pro-feminist movements have proliferated in South Africa, as women and men come up with initiatives that work towards achieving equality, fighting injustice, and creating awareness about GBV inside and outside the church. The churches are challenged to be agents of transformation, with activism being used to counter socio-political challenges, creating a platform to raise these issues of concern. Dumitraşcu (2015: 84) describes "social activism as an instrument for social movements." Accordingly, social activism enables organisations to participate in protests and to effect decisions and directions in social life. Activism has been found to contribute to social change (Franklin, 2003). In South Africa, civil society has always been influenced and moulded by political transition. Dumitraşcu thus argues:

> Activism is about doing, acting, making an action that brings change in society. It provides mobilisation, supporting leadership and bringing direction of the social action (2015:85).

The State has for years marginalised the poor, struggling to bring socio-economic interventions to its citizenry and this has enabled civil society movements to gain traction (Habib, 2005). Contemporary civil society in South Africa replicates the demographic realities which transcend the racialised inequalities. Hence, the 1976 Soweto Uprising and upsurge of protest actions of that past era have moulded the reality of the present.

Protest actions are thus central to South Africa's political landscape. They manifest as marches, strikes, and occupations, induced by service delivery protests (Duncan, 2016). The university students' campaigns known as *#Rhodesmustfall* and *#Feesmustfall* emerged between 2016 and 2017, and were oriented towards addressing the transformation of the institutional cultures of universities perceived to be white-normative and to facilitate access to higher education for black students (Settler, 2019). More activism was demonstrated on social media platforms as students fought for social transformation. The *#FMF* campaign stirred up controversy. From the beginning, activism continues to create ongoing dialogue and protests. Gender activists view this as a new disruption convoyed by the nude protest during the #FMF campaign (Ndlovu, 2017). The prevailing consensus among scholars is that the prospect for movement emergence is facilitated by the convergence of three factors: (i) the expansion

of political opportunities, (ii) the availability of mobilising structures, and (iii) cognitive and affective mobilisation through framing processes (McAdam et al., 2003).

South Africa has had an acutely fractured past, shaped by the evils of colonialism and apartheid. (Moffett (2006b) posits that the legacy of apartheid, found in the patriarchal system, has contributed to the high levels of sexual violence in South Africa. The normalisation of the violent practices prevalent in slavery, colonialism and apartheid has not only left a legacy of human rights violations, but has significantly contributed to the legitimisation of violence in South Africa (Moffett, 2006; Gqola, 2007). According to Johnson (2016), the extensive lack of human rights during the apartheid era played a role in normalising sexual violence. However, in response to this assertion, Slessarev-Jamir (2011) suggests that religion has been used to frame politics, which prophetically called for justice, peace, and healing in the world. However, the execution of such actions is crippled by the complexities embroiled in protocols of religious institutions later to be unpacked. As suggested earlier, Christians were active in the anti-apartheid struggle (Rasool, 2004). While Chitando and Chirongoma (2013) speak of an eloquent silence of the church, that while the ACSA does not condone DGBV, it nevertheless collaborates with other organisations in challenging the culture of silence on violence against women.

2.8.2. The ACSA and gender activism

Haddad (2004) points out that African woman have always been part of activism without recognising themselves as feminists. Religion and activism have for years worked together on issues of justice. In Haddad's case, indigenous women referred to as *Manyano* (lit: 'to unite') set aside each Thursday as *Manyano* day and together, without men present, prescribe their own agenda of faith and practical daily living (Haddad, 2004). These women engage in their own kind of protesting, thus the *Manyano* movement calls for a safe site of struggle for survival against death and patriarchal oppression and resistance to dominant ecclesial forces (Haddad, 2004: 11). The ACSA church leadership made public assertions, raising concern over GBV. In one of the "We will speak out" seminars held in the Diakonia Centre, Durban, South Africa, Bishop Dino Gabriel stated that:

> We need to challenge the theology of submission and frame it accordingly…also finding a way of tackling sexuality issues theologically.

Gender activism is evident within the ACSA, as the local church uses diverse forms of engagement with a clear purpose of creating a safe and authentic conversation around the scourge, seeking to restore women's rights. The ACSA women organise themselves as women ministries; Mothers Union (MU), Anglican Women's Fellowship (AWF), St Agnes Guild, and the ACSA Youth. This integration underpins a bond defined by interpersonal ties: the philosophy of *Ubuntu*, demonstrating the essence of the Zulu proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (lit: 'a person is a person because of others.'). This is a

vision articulated by social movement scholars as they credit the sharing of a common solid vision, resources, and a common approach in organising oneself as a community (Nussbaum, 2003). For Shahrokh and Wheeler (2014), such a a sense of community inspires agency and personal power as people work at building strong relationships. Ackermann (2005) also observes that theological reflection and praxis arise within the everyday messiness of Christian lives.

2.8.3. The GBV campaigns

Committed to ending the culture of violence, the ACSA participates in such movements as "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" and *#SundayinBlack*. These campaigns are among the numerous efforts by the ACSA to show solidarity with GBV survivors. Formed in 1991, the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" campaign, is an international campaign organising events to raise awareness on the problem of GBV and to promote gender equitable behaviour and influence policy. The campaign is held from 25 November (The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day) each year.[9] Its objectives are to raise awareness, assess the level to which GBV is addressed in local communities, and increase participation with local community-based organisations, as well as create activities at a local level to end GBV. The campaign engages the churches in developing pastoral and practical responses and actions to overcome violence against women, recognising the potential of world religions to unmask the many forms of violence against women and children prevalent in the family, the church, and society at large (Gnanadason, 2012). In this regard, the ACSA actively responds to GBV, organising such campaigns as: nights of prayer, revivals, retreats, and conferences, where women assemble to lament against the scourge of violence. This is a commendable act which makes the church break the "conspiracy of silence" (Chisale, 2018).

2.8.4. The *#ThursdaysinBlack* and *#SundayinBlack* campaigns

The *#ThursdaysinBlack* campaign has its roots in the protests of the 1970s in Argentina. Women began wearing black sashes in honour of their friends and family members who were being raped, abused, and disappearing. They would gather every Thursday in silence, to protest the loss of loved ones under the military dictatorship, with the aim of raising the government's awareness that these acts of violence were happening in their homeland. Since then, other groups have developed, including women who wanted to express outrage at the rape-death camps in war-torn Bosnia.

[9] See: United Nations, *International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women*. https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day [Accessed: 13 December 2021].

The *#ThursdaysinBlack* campaign[10] was launched in South Africa by the Diakonia Council of Churches in the 1980s, as a peaceful way of saying "I support the human right of women to live in a world without violence, rape and fear." Both the *#ThursdaysinBlack* and *#SundayinBlack* campaigns depict resistance and resilience. Women in some countries observe the *#ThursdaysinBlack* resistance movement to highlight the many forms of violence women and children experience in their own contexts (Gnanadason, 2012). The ACSA shows support as women wear black on Thursdays and on specified Sundays. The significance of the *#SundayinBlack* campaign still relies on women wearing all black on specified days as a sign of resistance. What has recently become fashionable is the draping of doeks (head scarfs) with ethnic fabrics. Head wraps have featured a lot in various political contexts in South Africa to appropriate power. These two campaigns are accompanied by lots of singing, marches, and demonstrations, with written messages on posters and candle lighting ceremonies. Parishes use the space in the most creative manner that raises a voice for the marginalised, and hence there is participation in poetry, music, and drama. Women who participate during these campaigns are easily identified by the wearing of the branded pins inscribed "towards a world without rape and violence." Both campaigns can be appreciated for breaking the abuse on women abuse.

One concern in terms of how these activities are approached is however problematic. The obvious public approach to these events means occupying spaces and being visible in the manner of approach. But, in the context of the church, the church hosts its 'protest' within the constraints of a liturgical order, fitting proceedings in the order of a service, which sets the tone of a diluted and weakened strategy that possibly counts against its overall efficacy.

This study appreciates the use of social media by ACSA clerics as they hold smaller group engagements online to reach out to women with different emotional difficulties. Many women are marginalised because they have no access to electronic facilities such as data and technological devices. According, this study maintains that the ACSA's participation against GBV moves at a snail's pace, insinuating that such campaigns are excluding the voices that must give direction, namely, women survivor experiences. For example, the month of August has been set aside by the National Government as "Women's month," and is usually inundated with women's themed celebrations. I suggest however that the August women's events are nothing but mere 'spectacle' as they affirm and appease women only in the month of August when they are made to feel special. There are still no creative pragmatic protocols and processes that can facilitate women's healing in a long-term approach that are intensive and rigorous. Furthermore, the "16 Days of Activism against Gender Violence" campaign and *#SundayinBlack* are the two campaigns that have struggled to disrupt the culture of the church. Both

[10] See: *Thursdays in black: Towards a world without rape and violence.* https://www.thursdaysinblack.co.za/ [Accessed: 13 December 2021].

campaigns are still in their infancy and embody in protests (of disruption and occupation) only made to be palatable to the church community, without exerting any extreme approaches as previously seen in the student protests. Accordingly, the campaigns are engaged only at a superficial level. Moreover, the representation of both campaigns is predominantly female, with men pushing themselves to the margins as if GBV is merely a feminine challenge.

These campaigns are also too weak to challenge the selective reading of biblical texts that perpetuate GBV and in fact these texts are not even part of the church lectionary. However, the activist plea should promote the reading of such sacred texts in a manner that is life affirming to women and restoring women's dignity. Women seem sceptical of sending strong messages such as "tired of being victims" as in the case of *#FMF*. Both campaigns are administered as projects and therefore parishes participate in them just to tick them off their annual operational project schedule. It is the researcher's conviction that this is a weakening reality surrounding activism on GBV within the ACSA. Such attitudes undermine the activist position of instilling public interest on the seriousness of challenges to structural violence against women and on developing a mind-set prepared to challenge injustice. McAdam and Paulsen (1993) state that activism can be inspired by psychological or attitudinal factors. However, if these efforts are limited, organisations recruit participation based on a micro-structural model. Hence, without structural factors that expose the individual to participation opportunities or pulling them into activity, the individual will remain inactive (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Coordinated with this perspective, within the ACSA is the membership in which women ministries drive individual participation. It is never linked to intimate connections with the plight faced by survivors, which compromises the efficacy of the activity.

Speeches take prime space, and one questions how this redeems the survivors and the abused. In her article, Nadar (2014) cites what bell hooks (1989) refers to as "commodity" and "spectacle." Both campaigns are embroiled with frills and high-flown themes and mesmerised by a fraction of theological context and content, shaping a narrative which many may tend to think women are celebrated. Certain subjects are still considered too personal or taboo, reinforcing further abuse. Of course, one cannot discount the progress that has been made by church organisations, since women have been ordained into ministry. However, while women have undertaken leadership roles, one still notices oppressive tendencies whereby they are excluded as decision makers. Moreover, the Bible continues to be used "to entrench patriarchy and perpetuate the subordination of women" (Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele), 2003: 2). It is evident that such a message of salvation fails to impact people, for an authentic Christian theology requires participation and creative and engaging ways of responding to the violation of human dignity.

Many scholars have researched the issue of women and domestic abuse and in some instances have explored the subject of pastoral care, and how women can receive support amidst violence perpetrated against them. Pillay (2015: 558) suggests that living in an HIV & AIDS era requires more than just "speaking out" when the rape of women has been committed. It is becoming vital that churches take stock of their tools, resources, and strategies of pastoral care, as they intentionally take centre stage in the chambers of compassion. If justice is one of the core values of church organisations, one must question why the ACSA fails after 27 years of democracy, to present a gender sensitive approach when it comes to the flourishing and intentional healing programmes in grounding the ministries of the African women.

The rise of African women's liberation theology is an encouragement as one appreciates the rise of the healing narrative as indicative of African women yearning for freedom and a healing space within the church so that they may flourish, unhindered by cultural and religious norms that diminish their vitality and wellbeing (Nyengele, 2004). A healing narrative is important to any community as it increases "well-being that incorporates both bodily and psychological states" (Westoby, 2009: 47).

Christianity has a bearing on people's psychological make-up and way of life (Berman, 2015). Having assumed that the position taken by the church has rendered itself mute in terms of providing solutions that mitigate this GBV pandemic as a social ill, Chisale (2018) highlights the socialisation of self-silencing by religion which has proven to challenge efforts of pastoral care in the context of marriage. The church seems to be inadequate as a space of aiding the victimised to access healing and flourishing, since biblical texts are often interpreted to justify the abuse of women. Therefore, women still prefer to self-silence, due to the fear of being stigmatised (Mbambo, 2006; Chisale, 2018). This suggests that church and para-church organisations need to practise theology differently, stretching its pastoral care arms to the abused and violated, as a space for emotional and spiritual healing. Mugala (2017: 48) argues that churches need to "step out and do a mobile community counselling," reaching the hurting masses in non-conventional contexts. In this regard, it is important to understand what interventions the ACSA has employed, to support women who have been exposed to domestic and gender-based violence.

2.9. ACSAs response to GBV

Church women devote themselves in prayer, soaking themselves in the sacred scriptures, praying away their sins, and yet the suffering continues. Accordingly, Hooke and Kittredge (2016: 9) cite Gina (2016) that:

> Anglican women praying for deliverance from a god who sanctions their degradation, rape, and suffering. The church has no proper strategy or resources in place aiding as safe spaces of counselling.

When it comes to GBV, in the form of spousal or domestic violence, one assumes that the ministry of Jesus has to do with restoring broken relationships, fighting for social justice, and bringing relief from suffering which is a missed blind spot within the ACSA church community. Also concerning is the God-language that is masculine and which has persisted in Christian worship. While traditional texts retain the gendered language adjectives "God denoting power and hierarchy – categories with traditionally masculine associations – are being replaced with language that emphasises mercy, gentleness, and God's role as creator" (Nichols, 2021: 7). I recognise the current characteristics within the ACSA liturgy which allows the congregants to observe a moment of silence for absolution, to reflect and connect with God. Furthermore, there is 'peace sharing' as a sign of forgiveness as a requirement for admission to the Eucharistic Table. While these aspects of the liturgy play a significant part in enriching one's worship experience, in a situation where oppression and inequality is cultivated, more needs to be done to augment the liturgy of healing. In terms of DGBV, one assumes that Jesus' ministry has to do with restoring broken relationships, fighting for social justice, and bringing relief from suffering. It should also be about ensuring that all genders and all systems recognise all congregants as being made in the *Imago Dei* (lit: 'image of God) and ought to be treated as such. My viewpoint is that all these approaches still have a place and space in intervention. However, I am reimagining a situation in which the church steps up as it enlarges its role and responsibility in raising consciousness on issues of gender justice. I reimagine the church creating space for women lamentations, intentionally listening to traumas, and assisting survivors to deconstruct their painful experiences in exchange for healing. This also means creating a space for empowering men, uprooting patriarchal habits and attitudes. Women continue to suffer at the hands of DGBV. Women feel shame for daring to stand up for themselves, for raising their voices, and for arguing against injustice. Such women who succeed at standing up for themselves are considered mean and loud, the general perception being that they are just rude. According, women opt to be silent for fear of being framed negatively. Likewise, the church systems silence them.

Generations of women have endured suffering silently because of patriarchy, enduring the malpractices that lead to indignity. The *status quo* remains unchanged. They continue to keep silent, afraid of being shamed, but primarily keeping quiet to preserve their marriages. The church remains a catalyst for domestic and gender-based violence. Its history of taking no action or less action has rendered the church an accomplice of GBV. What is concerning by far is the recognition of the church struggling to present resources that can provide intervention, while all its systems devalue femininity (Norsworthy

& Khuankaew, 2004). This is a clear case of marginalising women congregants receiving no support when it comes to mental and emotional health. Instead, what exists are forms of oppression that make the church an unsafe place where women cannot voice their pain, neither can they break their silence in fear of shame and stigma. An interesting argument is posed by Norsworthy and Khuankaew, where they claim that:

> Oppressive behaviours and attitudes, acts of sexism, misogyny, and gender-based violence are embedded in a web of interconnected systems that support violence against women (2004: 260).

This is another obstacle as far as exploring the deconstruction of GBV and other forms of GBV.

Scholars who have researched GBV have noted certain notable tensions, one being that pastoral care tends to entrench male dominance. Perhaps this is because the ministry is a male dominated space. Bon-Storm (1996) thus maintains that pastoral care has always been performed in an androcentric manner, as theological reflections privilege the experiences of men for pastoral care and counselling. Bon-Storm further argues that:

> Women introjected the voices of dominant norms for women's lives, such as: Though shall not complain about your husband, neither about chores, nor about the wailings and bickering of your children, for thou shalt love them and not yourself (1996: 15).

Other efforts engaged by the church include the "Tamar Campaign," so named from biblically contextualised story taken from 2 Samuel 13:1–22. This campaign is used by churches as a resource to reflect theologically on a major issue confronting woman in the context of South African. It opens many fruitful avenues for discussing the theme of violence against women. In his research, Klaasen (2018: 54) proposes counselling training, as well as the forming of relationships with relevant State departments and associated stakeholders to facilitate first responders, counselling, as well as support for victims and their families. Programmes geared towards GBV prevention through proactive gender and life skills education are also encouraged.

In efforts to respond to GBV, this study recognises the contribution by the ACSA in terms of developing pastoral standards, values, and practices. This framework was designed to be utilised by the ACSA dioceses to empower the clergy and others for the training of ministers, assuring best practice standards, pitfalls in ministry, and the maintenance of healthy Christian lives and ministry. Moreover, it was designed to ensure ethical standards in ministry, and the prevention of misconduct. Although this is in

place, there is no platform where the church can be regarded as a 'safe church' where resources and support systems are put in place and are readily available.

We will speak out South Africa (WWSOSA)[11] is another community of support, being a coalition of more than 200 individuals, organisations and church groups determined to add their voice to the fight against femicide and GBV. It provides the sharing of cognitive resources as faith organisations share knowledge, challenges, jointly participating in activism and action for the sake of galvanising social justice for the previously marginalised.

Healing, as the work of God, is an important task of the church of Lord Jesus Christ. Pastoral care is the form of ministry that tends to the needs of the vulnerable (McClure, 2012). In this, the church is still obligated to play a large role in determining women's wholeness through Jesus Christ, where there is redemption and liberation. As such, the public continues to hold the church accountable in terms of being a place for healing. Being overburdened by so many responsibilities and pain, women still desire a space where they can weep for their healing. A space where they can lament and voice their pain without being judged or stigmatised. Kirk-Duggan (2020: 142) points out that too many people hurt in silence causing intergenerational dysfunction. Amid groans and grieving, women can have access to spaces that may provide healing. According to Kirk-Duggan (2020: 142), lament produce avenues of awareness, witness, hope, and healing.

Currently, less work on GBV is visible in faith communities, where:

> …the church's public theological role in addressing GBV within itself and communities remains less visible. Its beliefs, practices and interpretation of scriptures are not publicly practiced in a manner that sees the emancipation of women both in church and in society (Manzanga & Magezi, 2019: 6).

The authors go on to encourage pastoral enhancement networks, "linking pastors to institutions and bodies where they can refer affected members as well as develop the capacity of pastors to address societal GBV issues" (Manzanga & Magezi, 2019: 6). While Magezi and Manzanga recommend that the church must offer space to speak, I disagree with the inclusion of clergy and church leadership in these platforms as they have the potential to sabotage the process.

The scholarship on healing and flourishing is not a new phenomenon. It has become an area of research focusing on the pre- and post-democratic eras. The various studies on healing reveal priorities in

[11] See: We will speak out South Africa, *Faith communities ending sexual and* gender-*based violence*. https://www.wwsosa.org.za/ [Accessed: 13 December 2021].

disciplines such as social science and theology. In the African context, fewer studies have focused on DGBV. Most scholarship has responded to the HIV & AIDS pandemic, for example, the healing of memories together with storytelling as a tool for healing. A similar study has also explored the concept of the "African renaissance" in healing, recognising African traditional and religious faith healing practices in the provision of psychological wellbeing (Sandlana & Mtetwa, 2008). Another study conducted by Khoaseb (2014) has investigated the significance of having a culturally relevant pastoral care available which can embrace a pastoral approach of hope and compassion for communities. Observing the dynamics of transformation and diversity in our South African communities, scholarship also highlights the importance of the healing ministry in multicultural contexts (Hestenes, 2000).

Scholars have also studied the relationship between healing and culture, showing how women are torn between the healing offered by their churches and the restrictions of their cultures (Landman, 2012). Scholars have also examined the role of the church and healing, experienced within the parameters of church liturgy. Scholars have engaged on research establishing the role of the church, where religion is a community resource for wellbeing (Dortzabach, 2002; Maton & Wells, 1995), and healing as an expression of love (Cartledge, 2013). The latter has been examined with a view of focusing on healing that was found to be therapeutic to affected individuals within the congregation (Scott & Wepener, 2017). A study of healing memories has been conducted within the Lutheran church in Zimbabwe, where results have indicated how the church has failed to provide pastoral care or counselling of hurting communities (Moyo, 2015). Another study on healing was conducted by the Methodist Church of South Africa (MCSA), investigating why that church's healing programmes and interventions for women were steeped in patriarchy and colonialism (Sprong, 2011). Having alluded to these research studies, no recent study has theoretically reflected on the flourishing and the wholeness of women, as the ACSA provides safe spaces whereby voices and the narratives of married Christian women within the ACSA are privileged particularly when it comes to the GBV scourge.

It is important to explore how the church is regarded as a safe and supportive environment for emotional healing. According to the *Anglican guide for Christian formation*, the Christian understanding of healing and wholeness is a unique aspect of faith; it offers insight into God's mission and ministry in the world for all time (Kafwanka and Oxbrow, 1989: 51). The guide further explains health as a "dynamic state of well-being of the individual and society, of physical, mental, spiritual, economic, political and social well-being of being in harmony with each other, with the material environment and with God" (Kafwanka and Oxbrow, 1989: 51).

Given the set of circumstances surrounding DGBV, it stands to reason that ACSA parishes should engage with their contextual theology, to deconstruct and reform its practical theology, intentionally opting to revise and present an alternative pastoral approach that can enable married women to flourish

where men can be empowered through non-sexist methodologies and teachings. These efforts indicate progress towards integrating activities that address GBV in churches. They constitute a reactive approach to pastoral care, and none speaks to the support care systems in place at the parish level.

Attending to GBV cases has often been approached in a manner that is meaningless theologically, thus causing harm. When churches reclaim the mission of walking with the marginalised the church is called to respond to the traumatic memories encountered in abusive homes. This is a challenge when faith communities must respond with practical steps that brings justice and hope for healing. Moyo (2020) shares valuable insight that speaks to this:

i. The creation of a safe space where knowledge about woundedness, experiences, and questions of fear can be shared and translated into acknowledgement with the hope for healing and justice. This will entail the creation of a resilient and interconnected community where (mutual) vulnerability becomes a relational resource that allows people to accompany each other, as wounded healers, toward transformation and healing.
ii. Help for the wounded to embrace their will to freedom: freedom of will to find meaning and enhance their own meaning of life despite their traumatic memories (e.g., Frankl logotherapy).
iii. The construction of personal theologies and ethics of new life, hope, and transformation, where sacred texts (oral and written) are recited/read and reflected upon for restoration and wholeness;
iv. The enfolding of spirituality, sacramental life, liturgy, and ritual that can help integrate the body, mind (soul), and spirit in the mystery of wholeness using transformative religious and cultural resources (Moyo, 2020: 9).

Churches are still ambivalent in their approach to DGBV as pastoral care resides in the pastor's 'to do list' and this means men having to handle women's issues, a tragic approach when the patriarchal structures of the church are privileged by church systems which may deter women's wellness. This approach presents a negligible approach which may drive women further away, promoting silence, thus perpetuating more abuse. What is most disturbing is the popular stance of rhetorical talk shows. It is evident that it is a matter of urgency that proper safe platforms be created in parishes for hosting emotional wellness. Failure to provide pastoral care to African women is a grave mistake and it questions what salvation and faith stand for and thus distorts the image of God. It is for this reason that this research study intends to fashion a trajectory towards a healing theology that incorporates values and models that are concerned with redemptive acts of love and liberation (Marais, 2014: 704–705).

In contemporary times, there is a fundamental need for women's conversations to prioritise wholeness and wellbeing for a flourishing body, mind, and soul. In terms of theology, scholars ought to intensify their efforts in surveying the landscape of the psycho-emotional well-being of women with the intention

of restoring dignity and social justice. This is an area where the church needs to revise its patriarchal systems giving women survivors an opportunity to name and shape their healing liturgies. One large challenge is the grace to journey with the perpetrators of DGBV as they too need assistance with their struggles. On the other end of the stick, victims and survivors need a theology that seeks to teach, empower, liberate, and create space for lamenting.

2.10. Chapter summary

This chapter explored GBV as theological challenge. This discussion addressed the contours of GBV, presenting several factors that construct and shape GBV socially, culturally, and biblically. The chapter further highlighted the effects of GBV particularly on women. A comprehensive discussion also identified the pervasive carriers within religion that aggravates the challenge of GBV. The latter part of the chapter demonstrated the ways the ACSA has employed in responding to the endemic challenge of GBV, including its focus on coping, healing, and recovery strategies.

In the next chapter, more engagement will be premised on African women theology as a theoretical framework that supports this study. The chapter will also discuss in detail the processes of data gathering that were followed. Finally, the chapter will show how the study privileges a theology that honours lived experiences.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

"Only when theology is on the side of the outcast and oppressed, as was Jesus, can it become incarnational and Christian. Christian theology, therefore, has to be rooted in emancipatory praxis and solidarity. The means by which feminist theology grounds its theologizing in emancipatory praxis is consciousness-raising and sisterhood" (Schüssler-Fiorenza, 1975: 616).

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided an in-depth literature review, contextualising the research project. A comprehensive engagement therein focused on how church organisations such as the ACSA are accomplices of patriarchal oppression and women's indignity, as married women remain vulnerable to GBV in such communities. Moreover, the chapter reviewed how African community traditions and cultural practices embody prejudices which further subject women to marginalisation, abuse, and victimisation in their Christian households. These are women who have been shamed, hurt, harmed, and scarred by the dominant theological language and practices preached in the pulpit.

This present chapter intends to commission feminist theology as a critical theoretical perspective giving voice to women to unmask their pain and experience of GBV in their Christian homes. Furthermore, I engage the of use African[1] women[2] theology (AWT) as a theoretical lens to shine a spotlight on women's lived experiences in the church as they share their pain on GBV.

A mixed methodological enquiry was deployed to place the study contextually, the framework utilising Richard Osmer's practical theology tools in the interpretation of episodes, situations, and contexts that confront clergyperson and Christian workers in ministry. This is followed by the feminist theology of praxis by Denise Ackermann (Ackermann, 2013) supporting Mercy Oduyoye's African women theology (Oduyoye, 1994), which are articulated to reveal how African religion and culture shapes the lived experiences of African women. Hence, the chapter shines light in "the normative role of stories in Africa's corpus, and the role of biblical story, give women a paradigm for their theological reflection" (Oduyoye, 2001a: 11). The debates around colonisers and the colonisers are revisited, as they have had an impact in the subordination of women and the inferiority of indigenous culture. African theology is

[1] As an African I have opted to use the term 'African' in this chapter as it alludes to the women of the soil originating, that is born, bred, and conscientized in Africa, their ancestral land. These women are in South Africa in terms of origin, and they are a part of Africa. I am engaging in this work as an African woman who belong to the Zulu nation situated in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

[2] I have used the term 'women' as opposed to 'feminist.' This relates to women in the African diaspora whose experiences about God have been circumscribed by religion and culture (Oduyoye, 2001a). I here use African women theology as a lens to denounce the African man's theology and instead foreground a framework that articulates a liberative praxis where women theologise, telling rich stories of their context.

clear in its mandate "to define African cultural identity and autonomy" (Pui-Lan, 2004: 8). In current times, the African women theology enable women from all walk of life 'to do theology'. And, (Njoroge, 1997: 78) argues that this means wrestling with God's word as we confront the power and the principalities of this world". This means digging out all life-threatening elements that have never been challenged in the church whilst they potentially harm and erode women dignity. In this way Mercy Oduyoye calls out patriarchal elements that is embedded in African cultures. She then defines doing theology as "articulating the voices, cries, tears, fears, silences, images, songs, sermons, and prayers that are heard, seen and stored in the memory of the community of faith and in the society as people struggle to live out their faith" (Njoroge, 1997: 78).

In his (2019) book, *Children of the waters of Meribah: Black liberation theology, the Miriamic tradition, and the challenges of twenty-first-century empire*, Allan Boesak shares some interesting insights of what he calls the "poisoned well" of black theology, black preaching and biblical textual interpretation previously informed by colonial constructs (Boesak, 2019). This is an imperfect picture of black theology as it remains steeped in patriarchal theology, systems, and teachings. Boesak advocates for a renewed theological thinking, stating that black theology is challenged by its contaminated wells which are meant to dehydrate the church, but instead are creating harm.

By employing the theoretical tools introduced in this chapter, this study exposes and unpacks patriarchal teachings, awakens and conscientizes on the toxicity of religion and culture, as it has been used to invalidate and render women to the status of lower rank. This shifting could be the "rediscovery of the agency of Africans" as women take their rightful position in their liberation within the church, bring the Kairos moment with new defining offerings of theory and praxis (Maluleke, 2012). African feminist theologies stand firmly in critiquing culture, traditions, and religion, seeking to shatter every trace of injustice. This is done to ensure that women as faithful servants in various settings flourish and enjoy the promised abundant life.

Attempting to understand Christian theology is a gargantuan task. It can never be restricted to merely reading the Bible or praying in tongues, or participating in the religious rituals and traditions of the church. It is even more concerning to observe the church being visible from a pastoral point of view, when there is a "burial of the victims of GBV than from remedial interventions" (Banda, 2020: 2). It calls for platforms that unmute its women to promote healthy gender relationships thus redressing the divide between males and females.

Total theological reformation is critical as scholars, theologians and the church reflect critically, and empower congregants to reform, observe injustice, fight for justice, and ensure that the transformation

of congregants in the church and throughout the world has lasting effects. However, as Klaasen has pointed out:

> [The] narrative approach to gender-based violence explores women as the other, but not as the less significant one or the absolutely dependent one. The other has meaning for self and is meaning making (2018a: 3).

Women's narrative allows women to tell their stories, share their feelings, confusions, and uncertainties as they embark on the journey of healing (Hardison-Moody, 2011). A different viewpoint is articulated by Sokfa et al. (2013) as they make mention of transformative, liberative, and redemptive masculinities. These are directed at "freeing subjects of patriarchy and it is capable of freeing men from the negativity that characterises their behaviour" (2013: 171). In the past, much focus has eliminated scholarship on solutions rendered vital for women; hence there is a troublesome, yet significant gap in that most church members are women (Nyengele, 2004: 3). In the past, the academic theological discourse has been white and male oriented. Consequently, this has produced a one-sided approach biased towards men. Christian teaching, theology and practice in the past has failed women. All too often, it has missed the mark of considering women's lived experiences since it only represented world of men and male understanding. One scholar asserts that the theological discourse bypassed the cries, the silences, the experiences, the exclusions, the revelations, and the confused questionings of women (Moore, 2002: 7). For a while, Christian teachings have been missing women's distinctive voice that could be fundamental to shaping a pastoral theology that favours feminist orientations and a gendered landscape. This trend has always meant that biblical resources and religion were used to maintain patriarchy (Sokfa et al., 2013: 161).

In contemporary times, women find themselves struggling with layers of oppression as culture and religion ensnares and devalues them. Interestingly, these Christian traditions are socially constructed, and they all latch on to patriarchal norms. For McDougall, 2008), the Christian tradition embodies acts of political, imaginative, and theological judgment. Accordingly, the church has perpetuated violence through teachings that disempowered women, a detailed discussion of which was presented in the previous chapter. With the rise in cases of GBV, it now becomes critical to find the voice of the church crafting new solutions within religious communities and responding through care interventions to the survivors of GBV and their families. It becomes critical to ensure that women are empowered to take responsibility in their healing journeys as they are given tools for participating appropriately.

In this study, the researcher deliberates on and engages storytelling as an indigenous oral resource that assists women in their conversations, promoting the full humanity for women in Africa (Buckenham, 2010: 23). As Ayanga (2016: 1) points, *The Circle* ensured that the African woman is visible and that

her existence is given its rightful recognition and dignity. This aspect is discussed at a later stage in this chapter, where constructions of African women theology is discussed which created platforms for the African voice, thus shaping the epistemologies that seek to influence theory and practice in the African context. African women's theologies belong to a family of feminist theology, which is further categorised as liberation theology (Phiri, 2004: 16). It becomes utterly impossible to understand women's experiences if we fail to employ theory and practice that provides us with a lens that elucidates how Africa, by virtue of intersectionality, becomes exposed to violence that targets women. According to Dill and Kohlman (2012: 6), this conceptual tool has become integral to both theory and research endeavours, as it emphasises the interlocking effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which categories of identity and structures of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis. Thus, theology needs to speak to the lived contexts within which women find themselves.

3.2. Richard Osmer and his model of practical theology

I am using Denise Ackermann's feminist theory of praxis whose work contributes to the feminist practical theology. She is not the only feminist theologian who has engaged on the subject. Since her theology is devoted to human liberation, the implications of the study bears relevance to her reflections and theoretical framework. In so doing, Richard Osmer presents an epistemological stance that sharpens the theories of practice within practical theology.

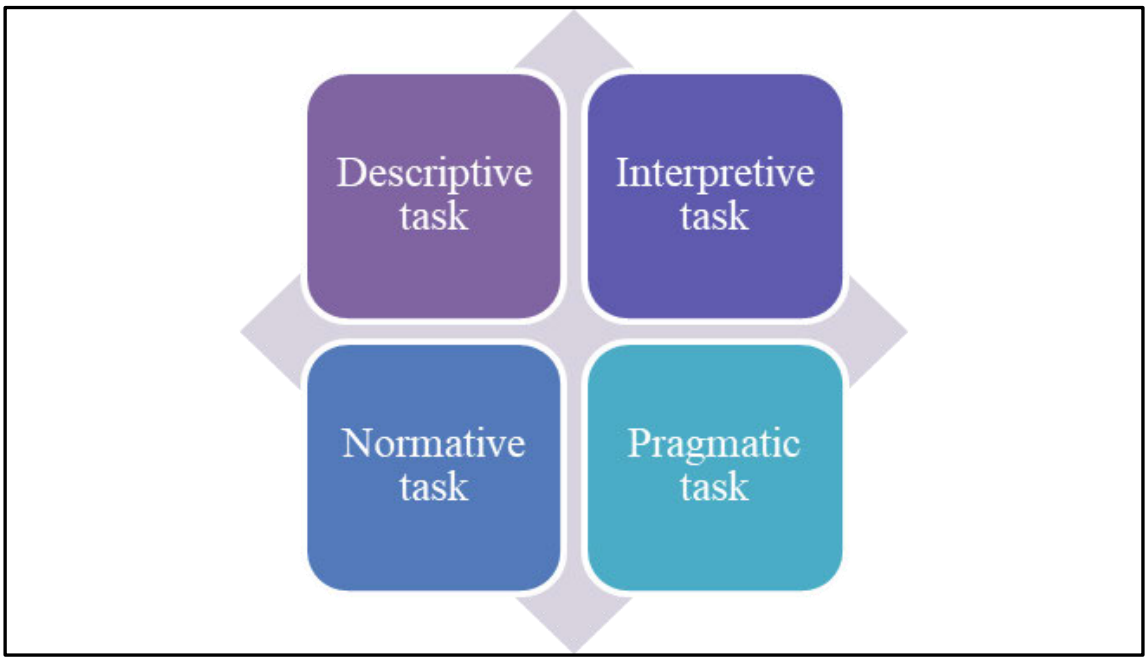

Fig 3.1. Richard Osmer's model of practical theology

Source: Richard Osmer

Richard Osmer is a practical theologian and his theoretical underpinnings of performing a ministry that is relevant for the studied theological challenge. The model uses four simple questions:

i. This question examines what is going on contextually (the descriptive task)? This question ensures that a proper examination is done to understand the complexities existing within a context. In relation to the present study, it compels that I question through analysis, tracking and tracing what has been done in previous instances when resolving the plight of DGBV as a theological challenge within the ACSA.
ii. This question examines why it is going on (the interpretive task)? This question establishes a platform for a great conversation as we create a conversation landscape trying to understand the theoretical positions of the church in approaching a practical praxis as a contextual intervention. This will provide an understanding as to how the previous and current systems have been inadequate and unsuitable.
iii. This question examines what ought to be going on (the normative task)? This question inspires change and informs justice and transformation.
iv. This question examines how we might respond (the pragmatic task)? This question enables change, disrupting the norms and the *status quo* such that has left women trapped, side-lined, and silenced, ensuring that they can have a space within faith spaces so that everyone can flourish.

Each of these four questions will be asked and the answers obtained will give depth and direction to this study.

As delineated throughout in this study, DGBV is a great concern. In the context of the church, more concerning is patriarchy, heteronormative cultures, and toxic theologies, together they form a recipe for disaster. These further alienate, shame, and cause unintended consequences, where women are biblically encouraged to submit to men who abuse. These are women who suffocate, struggle with mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, and/or living in shame. In committing to disrupting the *status quo*, inspiring change, and informing justice and transformation, the core of this study speaks to how women's rich narratives become a source of theologising. In a quest to reform and make changes to the communities where women have been previously silenced, side-lined, and unheard, with the appropriation of theology, women survivors are bound to be recipients of liberation.

The feminist theology of praxis by Denise Ackermann, offers a liberation praxis, which is "grounded in the actions that characterise the reign of God as exemplified in the praxis of Jesus" (Ackermann, 1993: 28). Church systems, doctrines, traditions, as much as they are theologically sound, are under scrutiny, as they may be toxic and life-denying to women congregants. Upon discovering the

constraints, the limitations within the current theologies, scientific prisms enable the researcher to reflect and present empirical evidence as the basis for scientific solutions.

In what follows, a discussion of the feminist theory of praxis as delineated by Denise Ackermann will show how it can be used to frame change in this study.

3.3. The contribution of Denise Ackermann

Premised on Denise Ackermann's contributions to the theory of human flourishing, this study presents a platform for women as 'othered,' an encounter with themselves where they can experience change, liberation, and wholeness. Ackermann argues that when embarking on work articulating women's contextual challenges where women are suffering because of their gender:

> A feminist theology of praxis begins with the critical analysis of a given contexts and a particular focus on how gender roles are understood and lived out. It then seeks to engage contextual situations with liberating and transformative praxis in order to encourage human flourishing, undergirded by the belief that such theology is done in service of furthering God's reign on earth (Ackermann, 2006a).

The study theorises pastoral care against gender-based violence as a primary role of the church on healing and gender justice (Ackermann, 2011). Flourishing is concerned with personal wellbeing, Christian theology, and positive psychology, primarily from the perspective of theology. According to Pennington (2015), human flourishing alone encompasses all human activities and goals, because there is nothing as natural and inescapable as the desire to live in peace, security, love, health, and happiness. The theory of praxis allows the researcher to explicate and theorise on how African women recount their experiences of wholeness and emotional healing against the backdrop of trauma, violations, and bullying, mostly precipitated by patriarchal-cum-cultural oppression. The lens prides itself for questioning the social context and presenting interventions to the oppressed. According to Kasomo and Maseno (2011), African women's theology contributes to Christian theology by outlining themes of community, empowerment, liberation, and praxis.

According to Oduyoye (2001: 50), God is ever present in the life of a human being as "He *[sic]* is the judge, healer and the one who takes sides of the weak and the vulnerable." Women in theology therefore appropriate liberation with God's image. The claim is that God is available to give freedom to those who are oppressed and provide dignity worthy for all. In the liberation model, the focal point is on Christ as liberator from suffering and hope is restored as they believe God is doing a new thing, hence belief in restoration. Since the concept 'community' is of prime importance in the theological milieu,

Oduyoye addresses the concepts 'community' and 'wellbeing,' showing how life is an integrated whole which ought to be reflected in human beings' lives and in their lives within the community (Pui-Lan, 2004). Consequently, the community should be a source of wholeness and wellbeing, which for Africans is an unalienable principle. As Oduyoye notes (Oduyoye cited in Kasomo & Maseno, 2011) community is not static. Accordingly, this study intends validating the ACSA churches as 'channels of hope,' whereby the church can become a catalyst, addressing key developmental issues which may touch on issues of wellbeing and healthier relationships that could help reduce gender-based violence (World Vison, 2016). Furthermore, this research study intends proposing a theology of praxis which can influence systemic and structural change. Hence the study's use of storytelling as a meaningful tool for decluttering emotional and agony against women violence.

3.3.1. A feminist theology of praxis

According to Rakoczy (2004: 17), feminist theology has two tasks:

i. To deconstruct and critique the male cultural paradigms in theological thought;
ii. To construct and formulate new perspectives.

In this instance, it is about ensuring that through critiquing structural and patriarchal ways of being and doing in social/cultural and religious settings, a new practical pastoral care or healing theology is borne, in a safe and non-judgemental milieu. This lens will seek to investigate what has been previously overlooked, including, wife abuse, domestic violence, marriage, and rape. Finally, Ackermann (2013) understands theology as a concept best done by those who themselves belong to the exploited classes and not on their behalf.

3.3.2. Denise Ackermann and the feminist theology of praxis

This study articulates the theoretical underpinnings influenced by Denis Ackermann who refers to himself as a practical feminist theologian. Ackermann thus opts to refer to her epistemological premise as a feminist theology of praxis. Women remain oppressed as a marginalised species. As alluded to earlier in this chapter, women face harmful circumstances where domination is imposed on them because of tradition, as well as religious institutions to which they belong. Hence their daily struggles, where there is domination of power, echo streams of pain and emotional disturbances that women endure. Praxis, according to Ackermann (2013: 6), alludes to a contextual theology that listens to culture, local church traditions, and to the wider community of Christians.

A feminist theology of praxis uses a particular language that recognises the rights of women particularly in settings that are male dominated, where women have been oppressed and abused. It acknowledges

women's pain and abhors all the detrimental experiences they have had to endure. In making amends, it seeks to liberate, equip, and empower women to read and understand their pain as sin and as inhumane, and by so doing makes their conscience desire change as they rewrite stories that depart from oppression. It rather endorses a terrain where faith spaces take a primary role of affirming and ensuring that women's healing is the priority of the church.

To respond theologically, there must be a meeting of the minds, which means theory and practical interventions should first centralise its theology of women survivors and yield life-giving messages. Praxis allows space for critical self-reflection, as 'ideas are put together' in search of a theology that 'speaks' to the realities of women. The feminist theology of praxis, as a theological framework, endorses liberation and justice which allows all human beings to flourish. It is to be acknowledged as a tool that enables Christian women who have chosen to incorporate silence within their lives as they acquire a platform to release their pain, speak their truth and exhale their negative emotions. It further calls for people of faith to be 'doers of the word' and practically become sisters' keepers. This framework is rooted in two needs: (i) the need for women to reflect on human relationships, particularly women's relationship with God, and (ii) the need to make theology, words of faith and church structures less one-sidedly male and more person-oriented (Marais, 2014).

In her article, "Engaging stigma: An embodied theological response to HIV and AIDS," Ackermann (2005: 387) asserts that:

> Theological reflection and theological praxis arise within the everyday messiness of Christian lives because what we believe and how we act, embody our efforts to meet the problems that inevitably arise when we are challenged by the values of the reign of God in our particular historical contexts. Furthermore, those who profess the Christian faith are called to be God's agents for healing this world. This means that the reign of God, as embodied in the ministry of Jesus Christ, demands the practical embodied realization of justice, love, freedom, peace, and wholeness.

By employing Paulo Freire's See-Judge-Act approach, a feminist theology of praxis in this study will embrace the following.

i. See: As part of surveying the GBV landscape, I have comprehensively engaged the work of various scholars, activists and researchers who have made contributions on the subject matter.
ii. Judge: This layer of interrogating women's narrative is critical as it unveils the unjust systems that are toxic and not serving the communities and certainly not representing ACSA parishes as loving communities.

iii. Act: This final layer creates an agenda for action and intervention as the opportunity is created to disrupt what has been normalised. It is a narrative that welcomes hope, justice, and flourishing. The feminist theology of praxis sanctions the appropriate intermediations between people of faith, as they represent their communities of faith and their societies; women sharing their stories and GBV experiences. It is part of bringing the gospel when people who are afflicted and in pain become whole and receive redemption.

Churches should never render themselves defeated or dysfunctional in the struggle against gender-based violence. However, praxis creates a platform that honours the survivors voice to direct the pastoral service by creating churches as spaces for healing. It is a sin and a crime against humanity to even see them taking a back seat as spectators. The feminist theology of praxis implores faith spaces to be actively responsible, taking an optimistic stance as agencies of hope. The veracities of shaming and self-silencing that predominantly exist in the four-walls of the churches warrant that a change of being and doing the gospel ought to alter its face. In doing feminist theology, other scholars pay attention to the interpretation of the Bible. In the context of theology traditionally done, there tends to be a lot of male biasness, which in this case, alludes to the hermeneutic of suspicion. An embodied feminist theology of praxis that seeks to respond to the healing theology, redefines a true reflection of the word of God, inculcating a new set of values that speaks to justice, humanity, and the restoration of women's dignity, to the church and in its entirety. Moreover, it is giving voice particularly to those who have personal stories and lived GBV experiences. African women theologians highlight and promote aspects of cultural significance. The Feminist theology of praxis offers an alternative theology that in "un-thinking the West might be the best option for us in the development of life-affirming forms of theological knowledge" (Vellem, 2017: 1). Moreover, it affords this research study a decolonial tool that affirms indigenous knowledge systems as feminist liberative praxis that can promote dignity and human flourishing.

3.4. Women in Africa

Patriarchy exists in both the public and private sphere. It has remained pervasive, and this has been achieved by using culture and religion as apparatus to conserve the domination of females. In precolonial times, patriarchy in religion cultivated women's subordination as a way of life. As Rakoczy (2004) has shown, males made women feel inferior and women made themselves to feel inferior. This patriarchal pattern has evolved through different structures, shaping how women are depicted and viewed. Colonisation ushered intense cultural debates relating to gender issues. According to Pui-Lan, this encounter "between Western colonising culture and indigenous cultures raised thorny issues pertaining to women's roles and sexuality, such as polygamy, child marriage, veiling, female circumcision, and widowhood" (2004: 8). Against this backdrop, women in Africa have been subjected

to numerous oppressive norms, systems and values which define cultural imperialism. Having alluded in chapter two, issues of masculinity and femininity have shaped how social roles are determined through socialisation norms. According to Nyangweso and Olupona (2019), femininity related to "reproduction, caretaking, generosity, modesty, and the dignity of perseverance, obedience, submissiveness, conformity and dependence." While on the other hand, masculinity alluded to "virility, strength, authority, power, leadership, and the ability to bear physical pain and offer protection and economic sustenance" (2019).

African women are subjected to a burden of atrocities relating to blackness, wrestling with culture and tradition over and above class and gender issues. A lot of unbecoming beliefs and attitudes about culture have been enforced upon women as a way of ensuring male power, dominance, and control. This was thoroughly discussed in chapter two with respect to maleness and the bride price (*ilobolo*), which as many scholars have shown has perpetuated violence against women where men are taught to believe they have exclusive rights to women's bodies. From their time of birth, women are subjected to a world that favours men, forever being 'put in their place' and that has had negative repercussions. They have been silenced, invalidated, and made invisible. As Ayanga (2016: 2) has argued, women's 'voicelessness' is a symptom of many other negative conditions or social ailments that afflict the women of Africa. Much suffering can be attributed to those unique experiences in the context of culture and religion. Scholars have argued that due to colonialism, women have been placed under the rulership and headship of men, which poorly translates to the abuse and victimisation of women in certain circles (Osborn, 2011; Stichter & Parpart, 2019; Yount et al., 2017). Indeed, there are numerous accounts attesting to the victimisation of young girl children, being forced to marry in puberty, and then struggle as widows when their husbands die.

It is argued throughout this study that DGBV is a social challenge. It is an unpalatable discourse of abuse, as South African women face injustice despite 27 years of the democratic state. Religio-cultural discourses regarding marriage in Africa manifests as gender-based violence. Women have found themselves co-existing with men at home and within the church, in an overwhelmingly sexist environment, being expected to fulfil sexist roles and duties. They have been socialised into being mere helpers and into satisfying their male counterparts sexually if not psychologically. Failure to give in to such demands has opened a can of worms for women who find themselves pitted against gender-based violence. Within the African context and within the borders of the Christian faith, intersectionality circumscribes the realities of African women, as individuals who are oppressed and vulnerable to abuse because of being female, and who are dependent on men for economic security. Now is a relevant time to ask questions as to how the church can provide solutions in a meaningful way to African women who are oppressed and suffering due to socio-cultural and religious constructs.

In amongst the teeming waves of liberation, (Hinga, 1992) argues that women in Africa have now realised that dealing with injustices requires a level of 'conscientisation,' and as such, awareness, transformation, and consciousness are necessary, since no amount of calling for justice, or preaching peace can curb this violence. The standard approach to preaching from a far and hoping that those who have personal experience of abuse will be 'delivered' and healed has proven not to be impactful. Proclaiming liberation, empowerment, and healing and women emancipation requires tools of engaging and eradicating all shackles of patriarchy. It is the renaissance of women politics that has given voice to women issues with an intention to liberate, transform and bring social justice, which can create a different narrative where women can flourish. Theologically, flourishing[3] means 'to blossom,' 'to bloom.' Consequently, to flourish is the manifestation of the type of beauty of which a given life is capable, by virtue of God relating to it. And gender justice is central to the gospel message of abundant life and must be at the heart of all our work and witness. Churches need to create safe spaces for victims/survivors to feel supported amid suffering where they can lament of injustices.

Figure 3.2 illustrates how the liberation discourse has trickled down into scientific research, inspiring feminist movements, which later gave birth to liberation theologies that relate it to the issues of African women. This approach has honoured the indigenous mode of conversing and, as such, African women's theologies, have informed feminist imagination, as articulated later in this chapter. In what follows, Figure 3.2 will be unpacked, and each layer discussed as it demonstrates a historical account of feminist theories, and how it is useful and suitable as a lens that 'connects the dots' to where African women's theology is central to African women's experiences.

[3]Ackermann (1993) employs the term 'flourishing' to mean 'wholeness,' 'healing,' 'well-being,' 'blessing,' 'fulfilment,' 'liberation,' 'justice,' and 'love.' Marais (2014) on the other hand uses different words and metaphors to explain flourishing and these refer to 'abundant life': living 'fully' and 'freely,' in relationship with God and others, with compassion, love, and hope. Salvation is described in such terms as freedom and grace, which forms, transforms, and performs the blessing of living fully and freely in human beings and human society.

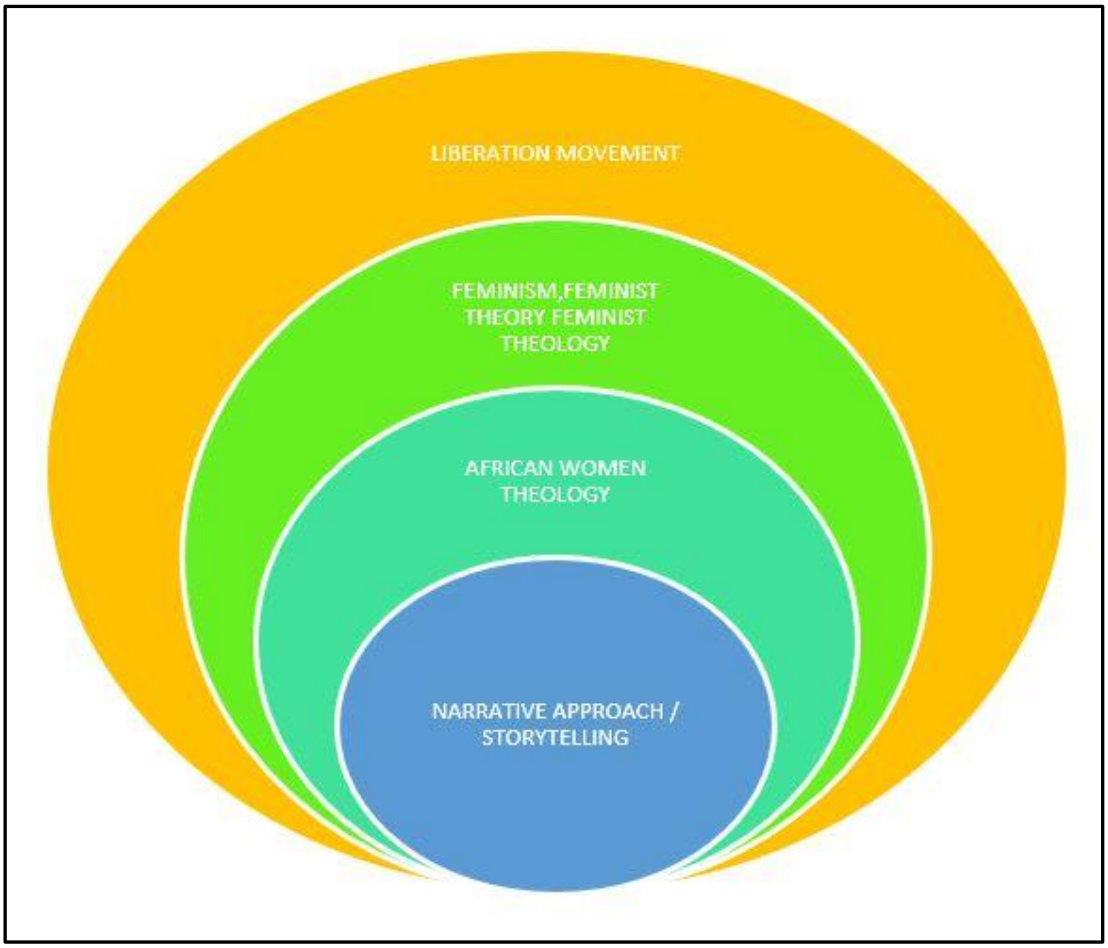

Figure 3.2. Feminist movements and African feminist theology in practice model

Source: Author

3.5. What is a feminist theory?

Figure 3.2 captures the relationship between the feminist theory and the feminist theology. The term 'feminism' is often accompanied by conflicting attitudes which are rather insensitive and not at all palatable. Women who claim to be 'feminists' are often regarded as against their male counterparts. Traditional theories and traditional theologies were premised on a male audience. Feminist theory affirms the accounts and experiences of women, which in the context of religion and gender have informed feminist theology. In a way, they are there to present newer paradigms and theoretical traditions that enable scholars to study the lives of women under the patriarchal system. Feminist theories offer scholars an opportunity to reinterpret the lives of women through a set of empowering tools.

Feminist theories were born in the 1970s from a collection of women's writings, books, artwork, and shared conversations about women. Feminism identifies four so-called 'waves.' The following discussion will look at these four waves of feminism that have sought to advocate for women's rights

and acknowledge that it is still a work in progress where women's rights have rightfully been tabled as human rights issues globally.

3.5.1. The first wave: The nineteenth and early twentieth century

Thinkers and scholars of women movements trace back the roots of feminism to ancient Greece with the female poet Sappho (c. 630 BCE – c. 570 BCE), or the medieval world with Saint Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), Christine de Pizan (d (September 1364 – c. 1430), Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), and Jane Austen (1775–1817) (Rampton, 2015). These women are considered "foremothers of the woman's movements" (Rampton, 2015: 1). Rampton (2015) further suggests that these women "advocated for the dignity, intelligence, and basic human potential of the female sex." Up until the nineteenth century, more ground was laid creating a climate for women to advocate for women's rights. The first wave of feminism was marked by the suffragettes. The goal of this wave was to open opportunities for women. Among many of its achievements, the first wave "established a clear presence in the public arena" (Magarey, 2001: 49). This was facilitated through forming organisations, developing publications, and conducting endless campaigns, all of which celebrated women agency in way that had not been done in the past (Magarey, 2001).

The first wave was heavily influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft and her (1792) publication entitled; *A Vindication of the rights of women*. Her reflections were fundamental to the social, economic, and political struggles of women in that era (Falco, 2010). Her call was for equal education for boy and girlchildren on the basis that they shared the same capacity for reason. She also put the spotlight on women with regards to access to education and employment. Other scholars have reflected critically on human rights of women in relation to the Bible and the church (not just the equal franchise for women). In her dissertation, Marissa Baker asserts that Wollstonecraft's claims counteracted the sentimental claim that women were inherently inferior to men by arguing that "God created the two sexes equal on a moral and spiritual level" (Baker, 2012: 3). Furter, she called for a balanced model in gender roles according to the Judeo-Christian model (Baker, 2012). Based on biblical creation story in the Book of Genesis, it portrays both man and woman who were "created to fill different, but complimentary roles" (Baker, 2012: 7).

Throughout nineteenth century writings, social activists that brought feminist consciousness included Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Matilda Joslyn Cage. They campaigned for justice-related issues including universal suffrage and abolitionism (Pears, 2019). Specifically, Cage challenged gender-based inequalities within Christian theology. Her work admonished the significance of the Bible as a central tool for oppressing and marginalising women (Pears, 2019), her contribution raising serious concerns about the Bible being used to reinforce historical gender-inequalities and oppression against women

(Pears, 2019). According to Stanton, the Bible was used to control, silence, and blame women for sin and death. In her work, Stanton, endeavoured to present biblical texts from a position of Christian feminist consciousness and thereby encourage the development of the women's movement.

3.5.2. The second wave: 1960s–1990s

This second wave unfolded alongside the black civil rights movement of the 1960s and grew momentum centred on the voices of women as they advocated and raise consciousness on issues relating to the reproductive rights of women (Rampton, 2015: 3). The introduction of the oral contraceptive pill allowed women to claim power over their own bodies and having a voice as to whether to have their children or not. This period women challenged the illusion of femininity which was associated with doing of housework and looking after children. This became a bone of contention as women confronted this mindset. Another concern was that women needed to compete equally with men in the public domain. This era marked the emergence of contemporary feminist theologies. For example, contributions by Valerie Saiving marked the beginning of a feminist theological discourse. Her work revealed that women's experience had been left out of theology, so that 'sin' has been identified in relation to male experience alone – as pride, selfishness, arrogance. Saiving argued that attention to women's experience quickly shows that women's sin is not the same as man's – if he is sinful because he thinks of himself too much, she is sinful because she does not think of herself enough. Her sin is better named as a tendency to servitude, dependency, and being overly relational (Goldstein, 1960). Saiving's contention was that contemporary theological doctrines of love had been constructed primarily upon the basis of masculine experience and had thus viewed the human condition from the male standpoint (Goldstein, 1960). Her argument was that these doctrines provide limitations of understanding the evolving situation of women in contemporary society.

Although Saiving's contribution has been criticised significantly from both within and without the feminist arena since it was written in 1960, it still marks a central shift in theological reflection: a shift which identifies that:

i. Theology has traditionally been done from an exclusively male perspective;
ii. This has led to a skewed theology which fails to take account of women's experience.

Popular issues in the second wave highlighted the church and women's access to ministry/priestly roles. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, issues of gender justice gained momentum as highlighted in Mary Daly's reflections. Daly wrote two ground-breaking texts: *The Church and the Second Sex* (1965) and *Beyond God the Father* (1973) where she counteracted masculinist theology. These two publications demonstrate her own journey towards a more radical 'post-Christian' feminist approach. *The Church and the Second Sex*, focused on the church and identified tradition with patriarchy and the

oppression of women and in its quest for change. It declared a need to reform harmful male-centred traditions within the church, and more widely within Christianity. The scholar, Audre Lorde argues that, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2003: 27). The basis of her argument was that patriarchy, racism, classism, heteronormativity has caused so much damage, that it is impossible to try and dismantle it from within the tradition, using the tools of biblical interpretation. In her work, Rosemary Radford Ruether is concerned with reforming Christian theology. In her (1983) book, *Sexism and God-talk*, Ruether maintains that Christian theology is not irredeemably sexist, but must be reformed according to Christian-feminist values. Ruether scrutinises male and female images of the divine in her chapter on 'Sexism and God-language,' appraising the theology of creation, Christian anthropology, Christology, Mariology, the problem of evil, the understanding of Christian ministry, as well as socio-economic aspects of sexism (King, 1984b: 700). Reuther further postulates that Christian tradition is a place from which a liberating feminist theology can emerge. She argues that there is a "prophetic liberating tradition" in the Bible which can be discerned (Ackermann, 2008: 43). These prophetic texts of the Bible display God's continued protection and absolution of the oppressed, calling all to repentance and towards the vision of a new age to come in which the present system of injustice will be overcome, and God's intended reign of peace and justice installed. When applied to women, this can only mean a divine call away from patriarchy towards repentance, equality, and a new humanity – one where all be recognised as equally human. According to Reuther, the prophetic liberating tradition is central to the Hebrew prophets and to Jesus. This tradition is claimed by feminism as a norm through which to criticise the Bible. Reuther goes on to argue, "what have been called the objective sources of theology; Scripture and tradition…are themselves codified collective human experience" (1983: 12). Her scholarly contribution proposes a brave new world by relating the struggle of feminism to culture, nature and politics. The vision can be attained "as both a female and male conversion journey" to give new meaning (King, 1984b: 700).

3.5.3. The third wave: 1990s–onwards to intersectional feminism

The third wave of feminism unfolded in the mid 1990's. It is premised on destabilisation of the concept of universal womanhood (Rampton, 2015). Accordingly, its contribution was centred on disrupting notions of body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity, and that the narrative of oppression is multi-faceted and not just bound up with gender. The women's movement claimed their presence in the feminist arena "as strong and empowered, eschewing victimisation and defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy" (Rampton, 2015: 4). This wave launched girl movements and girl issues on the world wide web. The third wave refused to identify "feminists" and rejected the words that they find limiting and exclusionary. The Grrl-feminism and Grrl-culture as it is fondly referred, expands through the global shores. It is global, and multicultural. Its peculiarity is evident in handling issues relating to "artificial categories of identity, gender, and sexuality"

(Rampton, 2015: 5). Third wave feminism breaks boundaries by celebrating differences of ethnicity, class, and sexual orientation. Reality is conceived not so much in terms of fixed structures and power relations, but in terms of performance within contingencies.

The fourth wave is situated in intersectional feminist positioning where women's suppression can only fully be understood in a context of the marginalisation of other groups and genders. Feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along with racism, ageism, classism, ableism, and sexual orientation. Millennials have taken the centre as their embodied lived realities empower them to self-title as feminists. This wave is governed by a profound understanding where women are conscious of being vulnerable bodies who are constantly at risk due to various intersecting complex layers. In the context of this study, the underpinning wave through the intersectional, is the basis of theorising. Intersectionality recognises women are not just oppressed and vulnerable because of their gender, but also because of their class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality. In the intervening years, this wave has gained power, inviting women activism where women co-exist and where they remain vulnerable bodies. Intersectionality helps us to understand the interlocking systems of oppression that marginalise women of colour and this also applies to LGBTQIA+ persons who are vulnerable to violence and homicide. The social, economic and the cultural realities of these categories create a high level of vulnerability to domestic and gender-based violence. These are just two examples of why intersectionality matters. To truly bring about change that is meaningful for all, everyone's voice needs to be at the table. The wave of intersectionality pronounced and exposed the racial biases of feminist theology. In conversation, one recognises a great scholarship which has endured significant abuse and oppression because of factors such as social identities, race, class, gender identity, sexual identity, sexuality, religion, physical ability, neurological type, immigration status, and more. Speaking to this, Mary Grey, in her chapter "Feminist theology: A critical theology of liberation," in *The Cambridge companion to liberation theology* defines feminist theology as "a global theology, or rather, a family of contextual theologies committed to the struggle for justice for women and the transformation of society" (Grey, 1999: 89).

A critical theology of liberation is thus engaged in the reconstruction of theology and religion in the service of theology and religion in the transformation process, and in the specificity of the many contexts in which women live. Encompassed in this definition is the fact that the trends have shifted with feminist ideals centred on justice for women, global and contextual, all of which are geared towards the transformation of society in general, and not just with the church or Christian doctrine. This kind of theology deconstructs and reconstructs. More critically, it the essentialising of women's lived experiences which informs women's justice and well-being. In essence, Feminist theology is made up of multiple voices reflecting multiple challenges and experiences where women are situated.

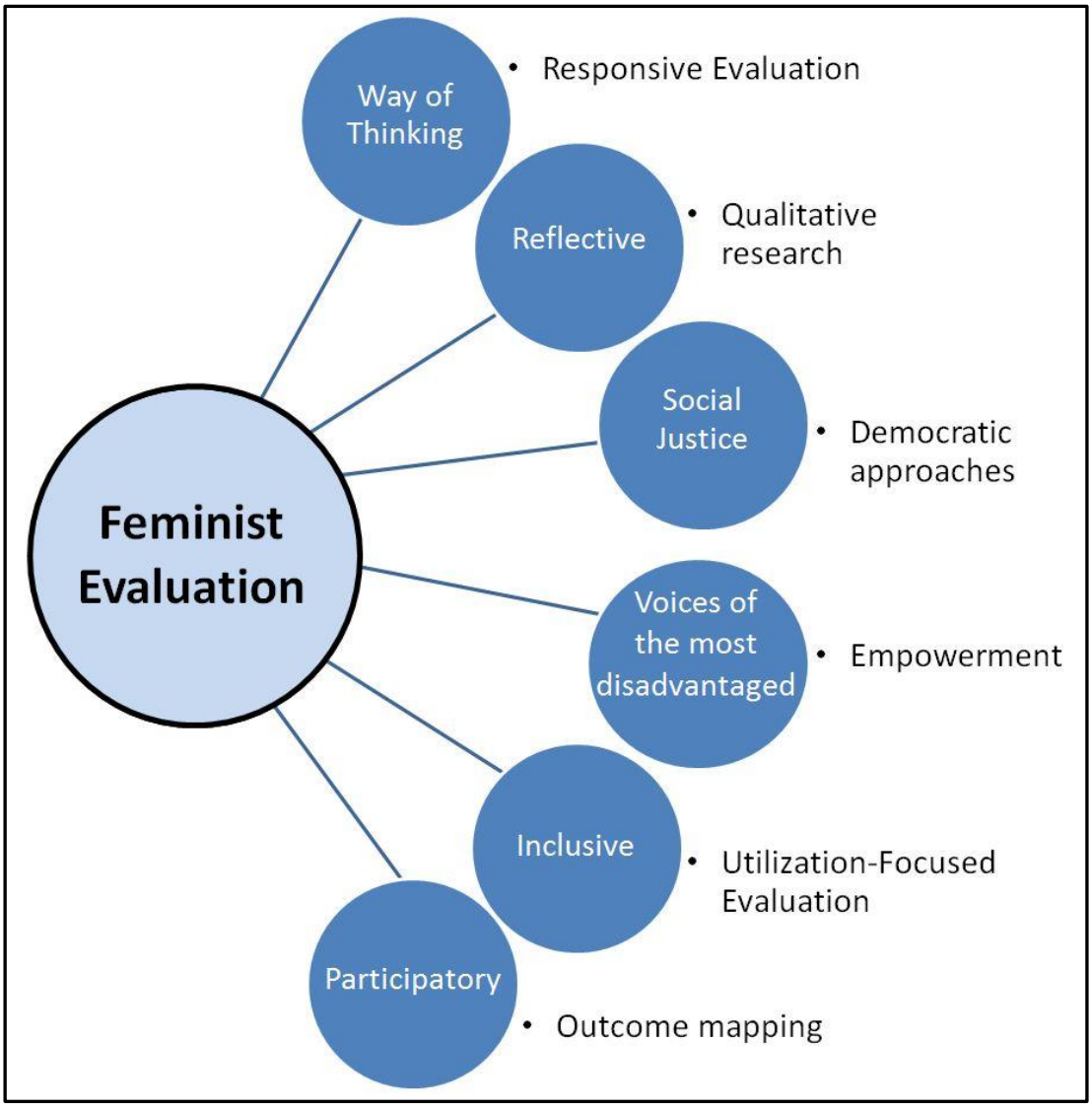

Figure 3.3. Feminist evaluation and research processes (honouring the survivor experiences in research)

Source: BetterEvaluation, *Feminist evaluation* (2016)[4]

When evaluating feminist theories, the goal is to survey the gender inequalities that create systemic and structural injustices. Hence, the feminist imagination is not limited to any discipline. In fact, what the framework does is to present diverse scholarship with tools that can analyse contexts where women have experienced oppression and marginalisation. Jones (2000) proposes that special interest should be taken in the lives of women, their stories and their hopes, their flourishing and failures, and their multi-layered experiences of oppression. These realities range from problems, harms and injustices faced by women, with society having normalised them. The stories of women can be summed up as the multi-faceted oppression of women. Premised on the feminist movement, these womanist lenses

[4] See: BetterEvaluation, *Feminist evaluation*. https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/feminist_evaluation [Accessed: 18 December 2021].

bring relief and hope to women who are liberating themselves and the world. According to Jones (2000: 13), feminist theory and feminist theology emerged to challenge traditional views of women's role in religion and society.

Feminist theories value the flourishing of women regardless of their historical, geographical, and cultural differences. Jones (2000) submits that feminist theories view women as both active agents and protagonists. Accordingly, anything that suggests oppression and the marginalisation of women is critiqued. While the focus of feminist theory is on women, the liberation of all the oppressed and marginalised is the goal. It is the patriarchal mind-set which has been legitimised by systems and practices in various sectors and spaces. Feminist authors have sought to question the *status quo* in faith organisations, intentionally bringing forth newer, affirming, and theological frameworks or reflections. In fact, a feminist theoretical approach provides a theoretical justification of women's situations, while considering women's experiences. These experiences may vary from sexuality, socialisation, and reproductive rights (Young, 2000: 23). Schüssler-Fiorenza has focused her work on feminist biblical interpretation and views theology as a theology of liberation. Her theory begins with the experience of women who are struggling with liberation from patriarchy and calls for eradication of this oppression (Young, 2000). Schüssler-Fiorenza (2011: 2) further argues that feminist theories in religion articulate the dream of justice, searching for transformative theories and practices of well-being in an unjust and violent world.

Feminist theories are about wholeness and life-giving mindfulness, censuring patriarchal religion through alternative theological formulations. Oduyoye (1986) maintains that the life experiences of women should be considered when defining what it means to be human. In her work, she states that for full humanity to thrive, both the female and the male should shape a balanced community within which everyone can experience the fullness of being (Oduyoye, 1986). Mainstream theology has always delineated men's experiences, totally neglecting women's experiences, within spaces and cultures that legitimise oppression. Schüssler-Fiorenza (2011) reasons that Christian churches and theologies still perpetuate the "feminine mystique" and women's inferiority through their institutional inequalities and theological justifications of women's innate difference from men. Christian ethics has intensified the internalisation of the feminine, including passive attitudes such as meekness, humility, submission, self-sacrifice, self-denying love, which impede women's development of self-assertion and autonomy. Holding a similar view to that of Schüssler-Fiorenza, I contend that the ACSA churches, despite being progressive, have struggled to ensure the liberation of women through provision of psycho-emotional programmes that are gender sensitive to the healing of married women who have suffered trauma due to GBV.

Finally, the section will look at how the church, in lieu of DGBV, can transform or decolonise theology and religion in the light of liberation and feminist frameworks. All these leading questions embody a discussion on how religious and theological discourses influence transformative religious forms of contemporary post-colonial and liberationist theorising. In womanist theology, on which this kind of reflection centres, the realities of black women in which issues of class, economy, sex, sexism, and sexual exploitation are studied as theological challenges. It is about ensuring that in faith spaces these issues give life and do not act as a deterrent. Gender-based violence is a common problem as it intersects the issues of class, gender, and race. The healing of Christian women requires a thorough appraisal, as one recognises the relevance of gendering a healing, so that investigations can reveal gendered oppression and discrimination in church and the society at large.

Feminists and womanists consider the experiences of women and girls, recognising male power and oppression. Women studies acknowledge the centrality of women's experiences, and this has also been the targeted research area for the present research study. This departs from mainstream theories which previously marginalised women in social, political, economic, and theological discourses. Feminist theories examine the oppression and the victimisation of women by virtue of gender. Scholars use feminism to understand and explicate how women and men define their co-existence in a manner that honours gender equality (Russell, 2004; Forti, 2018).

Dolores Williams redefined the liberation of black women within the church context (Williams, 2006). Her insight gave birth to womanist theology. She traces motifs of suffering and surrogacy as a tangible, transgenerational phenomenon. Furthermore, she exposes a long history of suffering endured by black women by deconstructing the Book of Hagar. Stewart (1993) maintains that her scholarship sought to expose and repair major cleavages between theory and method, reason and faith, race and gender, history, and culture in black theological scholarship, especially in the womanist approach to God-talk. Her use of Hagar as a biblical narrative of hope and survival, as well as her womanist approach to the issue of theodicy, clearly demonstrate her deconstruction of the theological invitation to partake in suffering within Christian traditions (e.g., atonement theory). These have undoubtedly had far and wide implications on the activism of women studies and praxis.

Theologians postulate that black women scholars in religion, seek to use the womanist perspective as a point of reference (Sanders et al., 1989). Methodologically, womanist scholars tend to process and interpret these sources in three specific ways:

i. The celebration of black women's historical struggles and strengths.
ii. The critique of various manifestations of black women's oppression.
iii. The construction of black women's theological and ethical claims.

Globally, women find themselves embroiled in a matrix of oppression and South Africa is no exception. Churches, by virtue of being male oriented, hierarchical, and patriarchal, have condoned the challenges pitted against women, who have been sadly side-lined as an entity worthy of justice. Sanders et al. (1989) maintains that far too often the organisation of the church mirrors male domination in society and normalises it in the eyes of both female and male parishioners. Having outlined this background, it therefore become extremely difficult to try and understand issues affecting women and interventions without looking at liberation and ethicist paradigms. Womanist theologies and ethics consider the Christian doctrine with black women as a point of departure.

It is important to note here that womanist theologies highlight the experiences of African-American women, who are different from those of African women. While Williams's scholarship is premised on the American context, one recounts similar socio-cultural terrains and religious contours to that which South African woman have had to navigate. Women understand themselves within the confines and parameters of the church and religion and that has tainted their inward perception, further clouding it with stereotypes. African women theologians have latched on the use of Western models to critique African cultural practices such as polygamy, *lobola* (lit: bride price), circumcision, and so on, in the context of marriage (Phiri & Nadar, 2009). Obviously, this way of understanding and being has been subjected to criticism as other scholars feel that critiquing patriarchy is about demonising the African culture.

Despite these criticisms, African women have endured domestic and gender-based violence. These are the women who go to church and have found solace in their faith, as they survive abuse and resist the oppression in their own homes. In her analysis, Mitchem (2014: 87) argues that women constantly negotiate the parameters of the matrix of domination. Mitchem further argues that the matrix of domination is transformed through the culture of resistance into an arena where black women can become self-empowered to be agents on their own or the community's behalf. This is the reality of women as they are bombarded by biblical texts reminding them, they are subordinate and subject to men and hence must accept abuse.

It is in this context that issues of married Christian women need to be studied and analysed with the intention of promoting their liberation and awareness of gender equality and justice as basic human rights. African women's theology appropriates an agenda that is important to African women, where theology must enable the betterment of those oppressed in patriarchal societies. This framework engages a radical critique of Christian life and enables the liberation of women by foregrounding their experiences and needs in a patriarchal context. It also gives women the space to tell their own stories and write about their own healing and liberating identities, as they are the experts and authors of their own stories. In the African context, there has been a call by women to use the platform to claim their

own position, as they grapple with socio-cultural issues or recognise, affirm and celebrate the theology according to their own meaningful experiences (Adonis, 2017).

3.6. Feminist movements

Feminist movements are driven by a desire to witness change in women's experiences that is born out of oppression or patriarchal settings. These liberative movements have emerged as a transformative agency. Different scholars demonstrate their understanding of what the term 'African feminist' denotes. Furthermore, different scholars expound different models that describe feminist theologies, which are unpacked at length in this chapter. Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 155) thus argue that the term 'African' facilitates discussions that address issues that cut across the continent and command solidarity in the pursuit of liberation. On the other hand, scholars such as Collins (1996: 12) define 'feminism' as constituting both an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group. Feminist movements have pursued an agenda for women by women; it has focused on issues of human rights, education, industrial opportunities, race, employment opportunities and equality in employment policies. In their focus, they have been inspired by their desire to change the mainstream of women's lives, taking an approach that is praxis-based, looking at social change for the betterment of theologies. What Schüssler-Fiorenza et al. (1985) highlight is an appropriate context where theology can be adapted to address the cries of the women. Here, these scholars allude to empowerment that consists of four principles:

i. Feminist theology needs to have in its conceptual framework of pastoral praxis as its base, whereby it encompasses concrete, personal, and communal experiences, as it ends with insights used to change social structures.
ii. Feminist theology must aim at bringing about social change, thus making a difference in context. For example, in the reality of women being stricken by negative emotional and psychological repercussions, storytelling as a resource and methodology ought to yield positive results and bring about social change. This manner of theologising eradicates hierarchies, and instead appreciates mutuality and equality.
iii. Feminist theology places a priority on ethics and ritual, acknowledging the processes and systems that have violated women's dignity and justice.
iv. Feminist theology takes a leap, challenging the *status quo*, by choosing a different pathway of healing and empowering, and recognising lived experiences.

Teevan (2003) alludes to the models of feminist anthropology which have influenced Roman Catholic feminist theology, which thrives on the notion of human personhood. This stance is premised on the

notion that women are created in the image of God, which is not life-denying, but instead calls for a shift to what is a fully human life. Teevan (2003: 586) goes on to outline four models that foster an understanding of the theological anthropology of feminism. These are as follows:

i. The dual nature model, which stresses that although the sexes are different, they are complementary, with pre-ordained roles in the created order.
ii. The single nature model, which stresses the humanity common to both sexes, without predetermined roles both based on biology.
iii. The transformative person-centred model, which focuses on the model to transform social structures and relationships, questioning oppressive systems and structures.
iv. The multi-polar model, which speaks to human persons constituted by a set of essential elements.

Underpinning this post-structuralist feminist theology is the theologian's quest for meaning in terms of humanity destabilising the meaning of masculinity and femininity.

Over the years, the discourse has evolved as it incorporates the rights of women in as far as women's reproductive rights are concerned. In other circles, the terms 'feminist' and 'feminism' have been stigmatised, as the terms have been problematised. For example, Oduyoye (1994: 169) reports that "in parts of Africa, feminism is often associated negatively with women who have 'difficulty' relating to men – that is, difficulty in keeping their marriages intact, through thick and thin." Concerning the use of terminology, Phiri argues that in the African continent:

> African women theologians accept the fact that African culture is important because it gives us our identity as Africans. Therefore, African women theologians endorse African theology's initiatives of taking African culture as part of our source when doing theology (2004b: 152).

This notion is critical when doing theology because culture need to be regarded as ever-changing and dynamic (Phiri, 2004b). Phiri makes a move from theology to theologies and maintains that "African women theologies" is used instead of "African women theology" to acknowledge the fact that within Africa, there is a diversity of women's experiences due to the differences in race, culture, politics, economy and religions (Phiri, 2004b: 152).

3.7. Feminist theology

Patriarchy has attracted feminist theologies as women cry for liberation, and craft an egalitarian society. In this instance, feminist theology offers a critical voice claiming humanity and the dignity of

humankind. Hogan (2016: 16) maintains that feminist theology was born out of women's experience of oppression under patriarchy and an engaged desire for change. Feminist theologies examine practices and values of theology determining women's place. It also enables scholars to create deeper conversations in faith spaces, questioning theological traditional doctrines and systems. In this study, the researcher creates a conversation that has been ignored if not unattended to, being the pastoral care and psycho-emotional support of women exposed to DGBV within Christian faith spaces. It is a tool that is pro-active in the experience of GBV, as it empowers women to take charge as they engage productively on the issues of injustice imposed in the church. This means women courageously speaking out to be heard. Feminist theology clarifies how we engage and understand domestic and gender-based violence as a pandemic that has been perpetuated by church doctrines.

Ackermann (2006b: 255) describes feminist theology as a discourse that focuses on "the lives of women, their stories, their hopes, their beliefs, and their experiences of oppression and liberation." In this instance, feminist theology should be embedded in women's experiences and lived experiences should become the norm and source of doing theology. It requires that structures create a new culture of creating space and shattering shame. Feminist theology as a contextual theology means the stories of women should be the source of knowing, as the Bible is a traditional tool for doing ministry. Women's lived stories will help us understand the context and thus evoke empathy and an authentic understanding of their experiences. It means allowing a safe space for vulnerability so that the wounded can cultivate cultures of healing. It is therefore vital to understand women's journeys, critically perceiving and analysing the patriarchal backgrounds where women have been demeaned, shamed, abused, and violated. It aggressively seeks to change the narrative of injustice, intentionally restoring dignity, and echoing a new season filled with optimism.

There is much harm in preventing women's actualisation in religious spaces as women are pressured by societal roles and those prescribed by the churches. Isherwood and McEwan (1993: 28) argue that feminism and feminist theology involves critiquing the politics of tradition to trigger a process of investigation, rethinking, changing, and ultimately engendering a transformation within the patriarchal society and religious institutions. It is important that newer ways of doing theology aim at shaping newer experiences with means and resources that reshape and undo the wrongs of the past. This needs to ensure that shaming and judging does not serve its purpose by haemorrhaging the efforts of wellness and wellbeing.

In this chapter, constituent norms defining African feminist theology are described. First, it is important to deconstruct the term into three sections: African, feminist, and feminist theology. According to Dube (2001:10), "African" refers to a colonial and colonising category that disregards the great differences in and among African people. "Feminist theology" on the other hand, encompasses the liberation of

women. In the context of American women's liberation, it is referred to as the "womanist or women's theology." In fact, both terminologies can be used interchangeably, where womanist and feminist theology equally advocate for the liberation, transformation, and social justice for women who have, for a very long time, been marginalised in unique contexts.

The term "feminist theology" is used by members of *The Circle* to address issues of liberation for African women. According to Phiri:

> *The Circle* is a community of African women theologians who come together to reflect on what it means to them to be women of faith within their experiences of religion, culture, politics and social-economic structures in Africa (2005: 106).

As women wrestle with victimisation, oppression, and sexism, it is critical that the ACSA work towards a gender-sensitive intervention that is shaped by African feminist theology. In this case, the researcher considers contextual theology appropriate for the socio-cultural and economic perceptions or narratives that must be altered and empowered. This will lead to the definition of new methodologies and frameworks that can unleash the experiences of African women, reflecting theologically on issues of women oppression.

According to (Hinga, 2002), African women have been disregarded and even considered dead:

> They had been discussed, analysed, and spoken about and on behalf of by men and outsiders as if they were not subjects capable of self-naming and analysis of their own experiences (2002: 80).

In localising their concerns, feminist theology speaks to experiences of Christian women the world over. On the African continent, their reflection has been named 'African women's theology.' African women's theological contributions are recent and may be traced to the 1980s. African feminist work represents the work of members of *The Circle.*

3.8. *The Circle* and its legacy

A Circle[5] *expands forever*

It covers all who wish to hold hands

And its size depends on each other

It is a vision of solidarity

It turns outwards to interact with the outside…

And inward for self-critique

A circle expands forever

It is a vision of accountability

It grows as the other is moved to grow

A circle must have a centre, but a single dot does not make a circle; one tree does not make a forest.

A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality, and care.

The Circle is largely conceived as African and an interfaith institute which addresses the issues of African women within the realm of African culture and religion. What was apparent in the late 1980s is the spread of HIV & AIDS, which made women vulnerable because of religion and culture. In responding to the plight of women because of religion and culture, there was a call for publications as women needed to reflect on the oppression making them vulnerable to the HIV & AIDS pandemic. *The Circle* is not different from Womanist ideologies as it pursues "a heritage of voicelessness" where there is mutuality, accountability, self-critique, and care. In response to this plight, *The Circle* has provided a new set of interpretative tools and lenses for women and men to seek gendered interventions considering systems that oppress women.

Gathogo (2008: 11) asserts that African women's theology has become a theology for every "concerned" African woman or man, as it empowers the society that God has bestowed humanity to steward. It is a theology for all genders to begin to rebuild the wall (Nehemiah 2:18). It is a liberation theology that seeks to liberate women from socio-cultural forces that dehumanise and oppress them,

[5] This poem defines what *The Circle* denotes. It is a beautiful visual depiction written by Mercy Amba Oduyoye, its founder. *The Circle* connotes a community where both women and men join hands in challenging cultural expectations and disempowering religious teachings and practices that have diminished women in faith spaces. *The Circle* was inaugurated 25 September 1989 in Accra, Ghana to facilitate the writing, research, and publication by a Pan-African multi-religious and multiracial network of women (Pemberton, 2003). The African woman is now visible, and her existence should be given its rightful recognition and dignity. Oduyoye in her article, "The story of a circle" (Oduyoye, 2001b) highlights that an "I" becomes a "we." This is not an objective story: it is being told by the initiator of *The Circle.*

barring them from being fulfilled as true images of God (*Imago Dei*) (Phiri, 1997: 68). These liberation theologies detail the history of slavery and colonisation, cultural and spiritual imperialism, struggle in the shape of racism, female circumcision, cultural identity, poverty engendered by globalisation, neo-colonial structures, widowhood, childlessness, inheritance, the tragedy of HIV & AIDS among other issues (Phiri, 1997: 68). This work of this community of academics and theologians has changed the narrative by employing a new set of skills where women interpret their world from their own context. It is a rich heritage in which African women consciously look at how they reclaim themselves and their dignity in a society that preys on their perceived vulnerabilities. The birth of African women's theology was an indication that previous theologies were insufficient in remedying the realities faced by African women. Oduyoye (2001), affectionately renowned as the mother of African women's theology, voices her concern in the structures of theology, incorporating strategies such as storytelling as a form of a narrative theology. African women's theology is thus a theology of relations replacing hierarchies with mutuality (Oduyoye, 2001:17). African women's theology is therefore a theology that is 'society sensitive.' Culture, in the African context, is considered pivotal, where in the African milieu, culture is community oriented and therefore requires sensitivity, not only towards the needs of others, but also towards the wellbeing of the community as a whole (Kasomo & Maseno, 2011: 156). This implies that those engaging with issues of women be bilingual, as they need to be fully conversant with the social and cultural languages in a manner that makes them connect and relate. In unpacking the entire terminology of African women theologies, one can study women's experiences within religious communities.

African women's theologies explore experiences of African women in their locations and settings as they grapple with issues of culture and religion. Hogan (2016: 10) holds the view that women's experiences and women's praxis are the basis upon which feminist theology endeavours to reconstruct and create new religious forms. African women thrive on storytelling, using stories as a source and profound way of underpinning a liberative theology. This alludes to how African women place themselves in their own contexts, understanding their world and relating to their plight. It is how they interpret their situation and context. This is an acknowledgement and an appreciation of centring African women's insight in search of solutions as they challenge contemporary issues. African women theologies garner affirmations and statements of faith that shaping a type of theology and practice that speaks to the contemporary and contextual challenges also found in South Africa's democratic era. For a very long time, the church has used culture as the lens through which it understands women. It needs also to be noted that use of the Bible as a sacred text has been treated and regarded as the only source of truth. While it opens far too many wounds, it also sheds attitudes and values that subject women to abuse and victimisation.

African women theologies acknowledge that women's rights are human rights. Theology ought therefore to present life affirming and life enhancing positions as it liberates and emphasises the wholeness of human beings. It is in this context that Oduyoye (2001: 17) highlights a theology that replaces hierarchies with mutuality. It focuses on the needs of the church community as a whole and proposes a feminist theology of praxis. This lens constructs a discourse where women render their authority and authenticity in a manner that constructs meaning, flourishing and wholeness. This is a welcome conversation in the current context where women grapple with abuse. This does not only speak to the currently married Christian women but is a type of conversation that ought to courageously transcend generation after generation, audaciously and intentionally crafting new meaning for future women. In terms of this understanding, the womanist ethics and theology is the hybridisation of women's theology that unleashes a feminist theology of praxis, shaping a new theology that considers women's struggle and honours their experiences.

3.9. The theology of African women

Oduyoye (2001) underscores the fact that *The Circle* has been used to formalise a description of African women's theology. It is characterised by numerous features that focus on cultural hermeneutics and narrative theology, storytelling. The Bible is a central source that theologises social advocacy and communal theology as it involves doing theology in the community. In this instance, this community is about enhancing a community of joint efforts between women and men, advocating for an interrelationship and mutuality. Okure (1993) maintains that the approach of African women's theology is not to exalt women's place in a redeemed humanity, but rather to establish genuine cooperation and mutuality between women and men. At the same time, when characterising African feminist theology, Oduyoye (2001), asserts that African women's theology is a "theology of relations replacing hierarchies with mutuality" (Oduyoye, 2001:17). African women's theology is therefore a theology that is 'society sensitive.' Consequently, there is a marked emphasis on relationships because African culture is more community-oriented and therefore requires all to be sensitive not only to the needs of others, but also to the wellbeing of the community. The effect for this is the characterisation of interrelationships. There is a theology of inter-relationship being developed as women emphasise the inter-relationship of humankind and the rest of creation. This theological engagement and reflection highlight a dialogue between cultures as well as within cultures. Its main objective is to criticise the oppressive systems and doctrines, advocating for liberating systems and transformative change in African women's lives.

Kasomo and Maseno (2011: 159) suggest that within African womanist theology, stress is placed on inter-relationships, on culture sensitivity, and on dialogue across cultures, races, and ethnicities. It is a theological framework that thrives on empathy, marked by an "ongoing process of introspection and mutual reflection that allows one to show one's vulnerabilities" (Claassens, 2019: 15). This creates an

opportunity to appreciate openness as women may be presented with an intersubjective context that is enriching, allowing the afflicted to connect at a deeper level, being witnesses to each other's pain.

African women's theology is an effort to contribute to Christian theology in Africa. This approach enables women and men, lay and ordained, teachers and preachers, to contribute in the making of its theological framework. African women's theologies include men in the vision and struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression (Phiri, 2004: 1624). The approach of African women theologians has the distinctive characteristic of inclusiveness, calling for the recognition of the full humanity of both men and women. Moreover, it presents a commitment to revisit violent pasts without repeating traumatic of GBV. African women's theology reimagines change theologically and offers platforms that moral space of collectively reimagining means of finding solutions that favour the 'Other.' Various themes are the locus of African womanist theology, but more profoundly work that encompasses community and empowerment is central to the work that pertains to women. The theme of community is a phenomenon that is easily designated in isiZulu as: *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (lit: 'a person is a person through other people'). The sense of community characterises virtues of care and caring to those affected and those marginalised. Another theme that alludes to empowerment is that of liberation. Liberation allows the voices that have been silenced by oppressive systems and doctrines, in a manner that grants them a voice, creating safe spaces of social change. With this concept of empowerment, African women theologians are provided with 'enabling powers' that change, create and shape new visions and new commitments. The term praxis alludes to doing theology as an activity that is ongoing and rooted in praxis.

3.9.1. Storytelling

Storytelling within the indigenous context, is understood as a means of communication linking people from origins to the present. In Africa, it has been used informally to convey messages in poetry and folktales. As Gathogo elucidates:

> Stories are the domain of all human beings who want not only to make sense of life but to open up all sorts of possibilities in life. …Through storytelling, Africans can confess their experiences in order to obtain healing for the individual and society. …in storytelling, we confess our 'sins' of commission and omission for both our individual misdeeds and those of our ancestors, and thereby seek a genuine healing of our society (2007:12).

Indigenous people have always appreciated oral history. The preservation of history has been passed on from one generation to the next through sharing tales of courage. Through telling stories, married Christian women share their experiences. The second aspect of storytelling contributes to the study by

offering resources for healing, pastoral care, wellness, empowerment, and potential counter narratives to resist socio-religious and economic oppression and patriarchy. This aspect of the research is unpacked and described in chapter four.

Storytelling has been adapted as an essential methodology in doing African Women's theologies as it validates women's lived experiences. It has been recognised for authenticating epistemologies, experiences of indigenous peoples, nurturing relationships and the sharing of knowledge (Iseke, 2013). There is power associated with telling the world personal stories. By telling personal stories, individuals are disrupting dominant notions of intellectual rigour and legitimacy, while also redefining scholarship as a process that begins with the self (Sium & Ritskes, 2013).

Stories can contribute to the transformation of the church and society. In the work of van den Bosch (2009: 537), stories are identified as a major source for theology. He thus highlights five different reasons why narrating stories is fundamental in liberation theology. These are as follows:

i. They complement the history of the African church by acknowledging the often-ignored role of women in building the African church and society.
ii. Narrating stories revise unbalanced perspectives and offer women the chance to reclaim their own voice and reshape their own identity.
iii. Participation in storytelling tends to shift the position of women from being observers and victims to being participants and actors in history.
iv. The telling of (often painful) stories have a therapeutic and cathartic effect on both the narrator and reader or listener.

According to Marais (2014) the second theological mode which exemplifies Ackermann's work is that of poesis. For Ackermann, poesis is the activity of telling of stories by way of theological letter writing. In this, Marais cites Landman (2000:236) where such stories are seen as "a source of women's experience and an important beginning to the retrieval of women's voices in South Africa."

In her (1995) book, *Daughters of Anowa: African women and patriarchy*, Oduyoye (1995b) can write:

> Any strategy to achieve greater power of women must be accompanied by voicing… For if we do not deliberately attempt to break the silence about our painful situations, as African women, others will continue to maintain it…We, must not let our voices grow quiet, for simultaneously with our cries for change, a vigorous campaign is waged against change by men and women (1995b: 170).

One of the fundamental contributions by *The Circle* has been the importance of naming and sharing injustices in working towards a just society where everyone can live freely. The power to voicing things out is precipitated by the desire to bring action that transforms and enables women to be agencies of change in their localities. Stories in indigenous communities have been used to pull down powerful hierarchical legacies and defining identity. According to Ayanga (2016: 3), this kind of theology has been born out of the lived experiences of the African woman. Women are encouraged to tell their stories as a way of doing theology. The raw data is then the basis of the research and publications that *The Circle* theologians were committed to. African women would not only retell their stories and create new ones for the future, but they would also recognise that they are not just spectators, but actors on the stage of life. Telling stories empowers women to think and reflect on their lived experiences.

Gathogo (2006: 7) posits that, through storytelling, Africans can confess their experiences to obtain healing for the individual and the entire society. By interrogating the experiences of women who have been affected by the traumatic realities of DGBV, storytelling is an appropriate methodology as it allows married women to narrate their personal encounters with trauma. This activity empowers them to gather the distorted and fragmented pieces of their identities. Kanyoro (2001:168) encourages the use of storytelling to examine the cultural conditioning of African women's thinking to discover the roots of their belief system. Storytelling is used in a theology of inculturation from a women's perspective, while drawing on the wisdom used by African and feminist theologies of liberation. This method of honouring individualised experiences and voices allows women to trace similarities and differences in each other's experiences. Upon listening and hearing, and listening to the stories of others, a woman connects with other women's realities while reflecting on her own perspective.

The feminist methodology challenges cultural socialisation by rejecting the assumption that the roles of women and men have been fixed either by the Creator or culture (Kanyoro, 2001). Both feminist and inculturation theologies are contextual. They are involved in the present state of the world and thus adapt a hermeneutic approach to the text. They base their power of analysis on people's own named experiences (Kanyoro, 2001).

Kanyoro (2002:23) reminds us that stories are the basis of theology. Globally, women are saying that theology should begin with their stories, what people feel in their society, how they feel about their children, families, what enrages them, what makes them laugh, what their lives mean to the next neighbour and how they experience God in all these circumstances. Having been silenced, telling their stories through their own words and experiences affirms women as equal and precious in the eyes of God. Kanyoro (2002) highlights the importance of storytelling as a way of sharing people's different experiences and thus advancing liberation theology. Stories help to make connections between faith and action because they make use of experience and reflection as the intervals of connection (Kanyoro,

2002:23). Through liberation theology, theology is no longer only an intellectual exercise, but also an expression of the religious experience of God's people (Kanyoro, 2002:23). It is also important to be reminded that stories must be told collectively as corporate stories of a community of God's people moving forward in faith and hope (Kanyoro, 2002:24).

Phiri et al. (2002: 4–9) advise on the importance of storytelling and shares five reasons why women of faith need to tell their stories:

i. To complement the African church's history.
ii. To revise and retell their stories from women's perspectives.
iii. Telling their stories shifts women from being observers and victims into participants and actors in history.
iv. Telling their stories is therapeutic and a process of narrative therapy, so that healing and wholeness can be attained by African women.
v. The importance of telling their stories is that we can find a way forward in terms of transforming society into one that values the humanity of all people. Telling stories collectively includes the stories told by men as well.

Phiri (2004: 21) recommends that African women's theologies include men as they envision the struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression. A partnership and mutuality with men for the exclusion of all forms of violence against women is sought. The need for safe spaces for women and men, where it is safe to be vulnerable to interact with each other on issues of culture and community, is thus understandable. These spaces need to be safe so that both the personal as well as the communal experiences of people can be listened to and analysed. Africa is diverse and therefore the experiences of all people, women, and men, are also diverse.

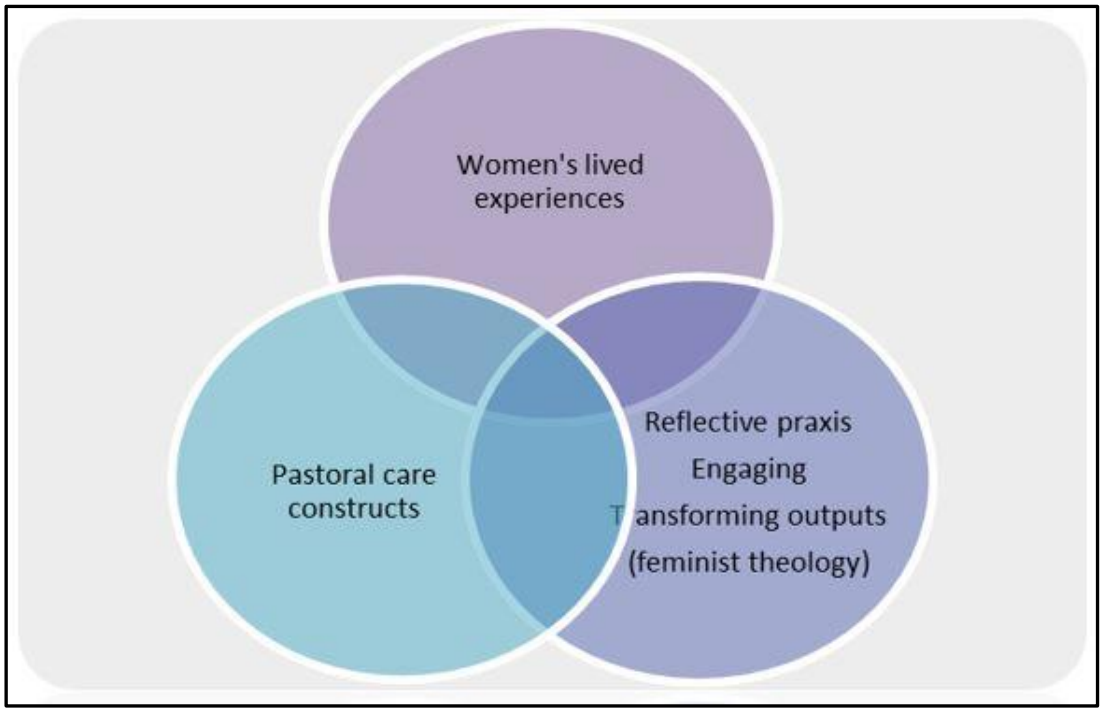

Figure 3.4. Guidelines of a pastoral care praxis (with theological reflection) in a feminist study

Source: Author

Having unpacked the differing models that signify feminist theologies as studied by scholars, Figure 3.4 visually described how feminist theology is utilised in this study.

The data set for this research emerged from the women survivor narratives. Twelve (12) semi-structured interviews were conducted where the focus was on exploring what has been happening and why it is currently happening. Another data set emerged from focus group discussions, where visual maps presented another set of data for this study. Premised on Richard Osmer's practical theology process principles, coupled with interpretive tools provided by Denise Ackerman, at the centre is African women theology that envisions a scholarly imagination that articulates a redemptive and liberative discourse.

Figure 3.2 exemplifies the research design and the methodology undertaken in this project, which is discussed in chapter four. This is explicated through methodological processes, how this study engages pastoral care praxis for married Christian women. Doing theology in this context means confronting gender inequality and systems of oppression and power. It also means being open to listening and hearing the stories of women survivors as they share their lived experiences. It eradicates the notion or metaphor of theology as an entity for those with power, but it directly strikes a chord with the marginalised, the hurt and the victims. This methodology enables survivors to share their pain, fear, anger and shame, something they may have never experienced before. This kind of conscientising allows women the space to gain their agency. It articulates that theology is not only about heavenly

revelation, but about listening. Using the African Women's Theology themes that emerged as data are articulated by the theoretical framework.

3.10. Chapter summary

This chapter has presented womanist and feminist theologies as part of a theoretical framework underpinning the liberation movement. In this chapter, the researcher made special reference to African women theology and presented the background to *The Circle,* which has sought to collate African women's stories of their lived experiences in the context of challenging social and cultural constructs, which has subjected women to GBV. More knowledge needs to be uncovered regarding women's experiences as victims of gender-based violence. It therefore rests upon this research study to find these voices and honour them, as women of faith are a part of birthing a theology that liberates and transforms the lives of those who have been marginalised and oppressed by religious and cultural narratives.

Chapter 4: Methodology and Design

"Lived experience is the breathing of meaning" (Van Manen, 2016: 36)

4.1. Introduction

In chapter three, I introduced and discussed the theoretical framework that underpins this study. African women theology was engaged as a theoretical tool in a manner that motivates how the lived experiences of African women ought to be honoured and authored as social justice is sought against the realities of women in abusive marriages. Having cited this as the foundational background, this research study utilises the politics of intersectionality, consciously and meaningfully engaging ways of decolonising knowledge through amplifying women survivor voices. It therefore becomes critical to embody indigenous methodology in curating lived experiences which in this research study is uncovered through storytelling as one form. This is done to enhance churches as gendered spaces where systems of patriarchy and all other patterns of inequality can be demolished, thereby giving back power to the previously marginalised.

According to Blanche and Durrheim (2006: 6) "methodology specifies how researchers may go about practically studying whatever they believe can be known." This chapter will discuss the nature of this research project and outline the research methods and techniques that were deployed and engaged in the data collection and analysis. Further, I will describe how I collated data using interviews and how I engaged focus group discussions. Moreover, I comprehensively outline and unpack how visual maps were engaged in shaping a new healing/wellness discourse for women survivors who have experienced abuse first-hand in their marriages. In addition, I detail through a hybrid of different research methods, how interviews, focus group discussions, and visual maps gave answers to the research questions asked in chapter one. Semi-structured interviews informed an integral part of this study as they enabled the gathering of inspiring stories of courage from the women who have survived levels and layers of DGBV, which were shared as personal narratives. In this specific project, to align it to feminist research design social structures and practices that invoke injustices on women have been exposed and hierarchies challenged (Ackerly & True, 2019)

This methodology has enabled me as the researcher to make meaning of their stories, creating connections, dismantling, deconstructing, and decolonising traditional ways of doing science (Denzin et al., 2008). It is vital that I disclose how I situate myself in this study in my role as a researcher, reflecting and interrogating about my identity(ies), as it may link to the outcome of this study. The focus group discussions presented another dimension in the study, an interactive discussion where the questions fastened on surveying changes that may be affected in creating safe spaces within the church.

Lastly, the study also drew inspiration from the fieldwork, incorporating the creative use of visual maps. This layer of data collection was intended to paint a visual picture that deconstructs how pastoral care can create space that surveys the DGBV landscape and its complexities, making a shift towards a healing theology which the churches need to facilitate. The latter part of this chapter is critical as it highlights the ethical considerations that were adhered to, thus protecting both myself as the researcher and the research participants.

As discussed in chapter one, the research objectives of this study were as follows:

i. **Research Objective #1:** To understand Christian married women's knowledge and perceptions of GBV, including patriarchy, toxic masculinity, church, and marriage, within the ACSA.
ii. **Research Objective #2:** To explore how the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handles GBV as a pastoral challenge.
iii. **Research Objective #3:** To critique current theological practices and pastoral case interventions which the ACSA uses for the advocacy and healing of its women members, to establish how they engage the afflicted and wounded.
iv. **Research Objective #4:** To propose and develop a feminist strategy, drawing insights from African women's theology and the praxis of narrative theology that could assist Christian married women in the context of pervasive GBV.

In relation to these objectives, this chapter will delineate the methodological processes undertaken in the field when data was collected. In this, I discuss the different stages and processes pursued during the data collection. In addition, I give a detailed account of what a qualitative study entails and how through a feminist lens, this research sought to unleash and expose GBV. The latter part of the discussion will outline and unpack the methods used to gather data which includes the sampling processes, the criteria for participant selection, the characteristics for selecting participants for both segments, and lastly, the ethical considerations adhered to throughout this critical process.

4.2. Qualitative research design

Data collection in this research study was gathered using a qualitative research design. Qualitative researchers study people in their own natural setting; this is done to identify experiences and behaviour shaped by the context of their lives in which they exist. As discussed in chapter one and two, this study tracked the lived experiences of Christian married women within the ACSA, exploring how their experiences of toxic and patriarchal theologies have shaped their experiences of DGBV, as well as their healing experiences in the church.

According to Creswell and Poth:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meanings of individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (2016: 42).

This is achieved by establishing meanings, nuances, and constructs that give meaning to the phenomenon studied. Moreover, it involves the "collection of a variety of empirical materials such as case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artefacts; cultural texts and productions that describe problematic moments and meanings in individual lives" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 14).

A qualitative research study allows the researcher to examine the participant's experiences using various research approaches and methods. A qualitative research study has become popular in research as it constitutes what (Flick, 2018: 5) coins as the "pluralisation of life worlds." By so suggesting, qualitative research provides answers and perspectives to life's complex challenges and problems. According to Flick (2018: 8), qualitative research considers "viewpoints in the field that are different because of the different subjective perspectives and social backgrounds related to them." It therefore rests upon the researcher to hold on the proper values such as to be "open-minded, curious, empathic, flexible and able to listen to people telling their own story" (Hennink et al., 2020: 10).

In carrying out a scientific enquiry, it is important that the researcher decides how the process will be carried out, which speaks to the choice of a paradigm deemed relevant to a study. In this section, I define qualitative research as a scientific field of enquiry that explicates the methods undertaken. Qualitative research places "emphasis on the qualities of entities on process and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured (if measured at all) in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008b). A researcher brings to the study various assumptions that provide direction to the study such at the researcher's view of reality (ontology), how the researcher knows the reality (epistemology), and the value stance created by the enquiry (axiology)" (Creswell & Poth, 2016: 18). It is a "situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008a). Qualitative research allows one to gain insight utilising different approaches and methodologies. Qualitative research also allows the researcher the opportunity to dig deeper into the complex world where the problem is situated so that there can be more understanding. It highlights and privileges experiences and, in this instance, makes visible the life stories of women survivors. It is vital to engage in this process of enquiry to "hear silenced voices" (Creswell & Poth, 2016: 45) and ultimately give meaning to such acts of violence perpetrated against women.

4.3. A feminist research study

Feminist studies allow feminist theologising across different disciplines. Being grounded in feminist theory in research, the feminist approach focuses on the "investigation of women's and men's lives convinced on the arbitrariness of exclusion based on sexual differences" (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2018: 2). The personal becomes political where the personal lives of the researched people are at the heart of the research itself. These critical focal points of theologising where women's experiences are pivotal were systematically excluded and neglected in mainstream research in the western context until the 1960s. From a feminist standpoint epistemologically, this research aims to privilege the narratives of Christian married women, as knowers of their own experience. This is about legitimating women's stories of emotional, psychological, and physical violence endured through gendered social power relations affecting the intricacies of their marriage lives. In this way, this study hopes to amplify the voices that have been ignored and relegated in the past. At the end of the study, women healing programmes, women folk and women ministries will be directly impacted. This is affirmed by Oduyoye when she states:

> In Africa gender became a theological issue when The Circle asserted that the gender parameter in African culture and religions has crucial effects on women's lives and on how womanhood is viewed by Africans (2002:39).

4.4. Purposive sampling and recruitment

In this study, random and purposive sampling was administered. This alludes to the "deliberate choice of an informant due to the qualities the informant possesses" (Tongco, 2007: 147). This selection is described as a "typical case sampling" (Struwig & Stead, 2013: 128). Purposive sampling as a form of non-probability permits the researcher to access "rich information based on the participants deemed relevant" (Struwig & Stead, 2013: 127). In terms of this study, semi structured interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory workshops were used to gather data. Typically, women survivors within the ACSA were recruited to participate in this study to share their own narratives on GBV experienced in their abusive marriages. These are women whose narratives are unpacked and used in shaping a healing theology that restores women's dignity.

Early in 2019 and again in 2020, I approached Parish Rectors from the ACSA Diocese of Natal whenever we met at Diocesan gatherings, finding out if they would be interested in having their parishes take part in the GBV research study. In 2021, I made further follow-ups via email and telephonic conversations as to how the church could facilitate my research study. An invitation to participate was shared on the church WhatsApp groups and participants who were interested contacted me privately.

The first level of participation was to encourage women survivors from the participating parishes to be willing to a part of the study. Secondly, the invitation for attendance was extended to the parish members regardless of gender, class, power, position, prestige, or influence, thereby ensuring an inclusive participation. This level of participation was scheduled to meet as a focus group discussion. There were three different focus groups. Each FGD met once. Four of the eleven participants who self-declared as GBV survivors volunteered to participate in the FGD. The volunteer profiles based of the characteristics given by the researcher. The first FGD group was composed of married (MU and AWF members) and unmarried women who identified in the church structures as the youth (fondly referred to as the St Agnes guild). They were all keen to air their inputs in how the church can create space for pastoral care in churches. The second FGD group was also composed by females who sit in the leadership structures of the church where they exercise some agency in the decision-making. These participants volunteered to be part of defining the guidelines for a pastoral care praxis which will be more of intervention guideline tool for the churches. Lastly, the third FGD group was composed of women (MU members who sit in parish and regional structures of ACSA) and there was only one male who is a leader in church, serving as a Lay minister and works in the Justice sector. His participation raised awareness on the role of the Law in handling abuse. His participation did not threaten or silence women's voices since his positionality was the one that seek to honour justice and advocate for humans' rights and women dignity. Collating data during a global pandemic has been a difficult terrain to navigate and with the realities and challenges imposed by government-imposed COVID-19 restrictions, it became extremely difficult to locate the congregants since there were no church gatherings allowed and the churches were closed.

All the participants that agreed to participate in the study were from the participating parishes. Two of the survivors brought a rich conversation, comprised of complex nuances of generational abuse and hence were both interested to become a part of the study. Their recruitment was in collaboration with a Diocesan Priest who sits on the Diocesan Gender Ministry desk which is a recognised structure where such access to information on women survivors is readily available. The participants that were recruited from the parishes to partake in the individual interviews and the focus group discussions (FGDs) were sent a digital poster with all the details. These were also shared via the women's ministry WhatsApp group.[1] Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the participants were sent an official invitation, together with a consent form to be signed,[2] as well as typical questions to be asked during the interview.

[1] See: Annexure B: Digital Poster.

[2] See: Annexure A: Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent Form.

4.5. Data collection

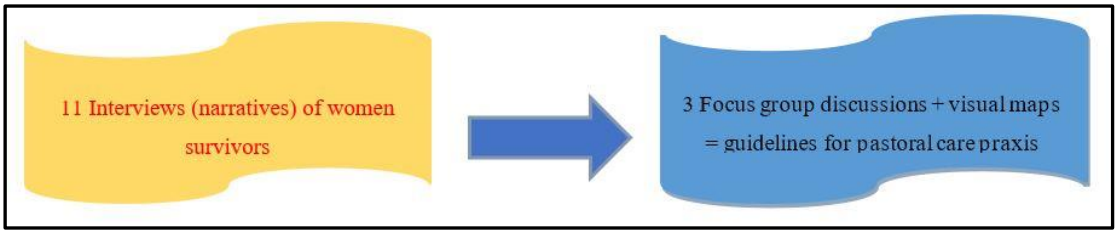

Figure 4.1. Data collection

Source: Author

Table 4.1 unpacks the selection criterion and the role played by participants in each segment.

Table 4.1 Research participants selection criteria

Interviews Criteria	Focus Group Discussions Criteria
Eleven (11) married women survivors who identified as Christians and as the ACSA within the Diocese of Natal.	Three (3) focus groups sat on different settings, e.g., via online platforms and one-on-one settings.
All eleven (11) participants had experienced DGBV in their Christian marriages.	Invited were women survivors who volunteered to partake.
	These women survivors participated in the first segment, sharing their lived stories of DGBV.

Source: Author

4.5.1. Sampling criteria and participant recruitment

Table 4.1 presents information regarding the characteristics of the participants who took part in both segments. The study invited participation in interviews, where the women survivors recruited shared their lived experiences. The second segment of data collection was through focus group discussions and visual maps. This study attracted and recruited twelve (12) women survivors who were willing and ready to share their lived experiences of DGBV as they identify as Christian married women within the ACSA. The first part of gathering data created safe space for holding these interviews. Eleven (11) participants accepted the invitation to participate from the two (2) parishes and one parish excused herself from participation after contracting the COVID-19 virus.

The selection criterion set for the participants exclusively recruited women survivors between the ages of 21 and 68 years old who have been vulnerable to DGBV, thus having rich survivor's experiences of DGBV. In recruiting, I clearly mentioned that participants should at the time of this research be free from violence for at least two years. This specific clause was to maximise participant protection and

discourage any form of retraumatising the participant in the study. Understanding the dynamics of marriage, the study made a reasonable accommodation to interview not only married women, but to hear the voices of women survivors who had divorced, separated, and remarried, and all these women shared first-hand experience of DGBV in their Christian households.

The unique contribution of the study was to ensure that the participants have in one way or another experienced emotional and social sufferings and struggles in their lives, precipitated by patriarchal tendencies and cultural/religious oppression. This sample is deemed relevant because the women recruited as participants in the study were familiar with the spiritual resources and rich ACSA/Anglican liturgy, prayers, and dogmas, being part of their faith practices as believers and communicant members. Other considerations ensured that the recruited participants embodied the following attributes: intersectional particularities of age, social class, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Two common characteristics that the participants shared in this study was their faith as Christians and all subscribed to the ACSA denomination. Some were born, baptised, and confirmed as Anglicans and were married and continued to be Anglicans in their marital homes. Other participants described themselves as being Anglicans by virtue of being married into an Anglican family where the in-laws currently worship and consider the ACSA their spiritual home. The second part of data gathering recruited women survivors including other women, church leaders, men and this was premised on the GBV issue as a church challenge, as opposed to the common narrative where it is normalised as a women issue.

All interviews used a specially prepared interview guide to solicit participants' narratives. The interview guide channelled and structured the interview process, encouraging generous engagement on relating an individual story. The research questions that were asked included semi-structured questions framed in everyday language, allowing the participants to understand and relate with the topic such that they could provide detailed stories.[3]

This interview schedule merely served as a guideline, allowing the researcher to engage freely without interrupting the flow of storytelling.

[3] See: Annexure C: Interview Schedule.

4.5.2. The study context

Data for this research was conducted within the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal between the months of January and June 2021. The following are the list of documents relating to the participant selection, and participant interviews:

i. Annexure A: Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent Form
ii. Annexure B: Digital Poster.
iii. Annexure C: Interview Schedule.
iv. Annexure D: Focus Group Discussion / Visual Mapping Questions.

4.5.3. Research sites

This study randomly identified four (4) research sites. These identified sites provided a representation of urban, urban township and peri-urban locations:

i. Parish of the Valley, Valley of a Thousand Hills, Molweni, Durban West. This site is in a peri-urban area.
ii. St Matthews Anglican Church, U Section, Umlazi. This site is in an urban township area.
iii. St. Etheldreda Anglican Church, Woodlands, Durban. This site is in an urban area.
iv. St Martin Anglican Church, Edendale, Pietermaritzburg. This site is in an urban area.

The parish church of St Etheldreda Anglican Church, Woodlands, Durban had already developed GBV content available on the church's YouTube channel,[4] and this gave me confidence that they were ready to hold a conversation on this subject. My decision for having it included was to hold a rich and engaging dialogue during the healing workshop. This will hold meaning towards the objectives of the study, taking advantage of the conversation that was already in motion about GBV.

4.6. Methods of data collection

4.6.1. Stage #1: Semi-structured interviews

The first phase of data collection was gathered using in-depth, semi-structured interviews seeking the narratives of embodied lived experiences on GBV. The research participants were interviewed

[4] See: The Parish of Woodlands, Montclair & Yellowwood Park, "Stop gender-based violence service," 12 September 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8XrdDfUJJs&t=1s [Accessed: 15 December 2021]; The Parish of Woodlands, Montclair & Yellowwood Park, "Gender-based violence dialogue, Episode 1," 20 August 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYiIoSym6aU&t=136s. [Accessed: 15 December 2021]; The Parish of Woodlands, Montclair & Yellowwood Park, "Gender-based violence dialogue, Episode 2," 27 August 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-dSLIaP_I2o&t=13s [Accessed: 15 December 2021].

individually at a location mutually agreed upon suggested and agreed upon between me and the participant. The date and time were also agreed to mutually. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions imposed by national government, traditional face-to-face engagements were prohibited. I was thus forced to look for alternative, yet innovative options of obtaining data that speaks to the lived experiences of GBV survivors. I took advantage of the fact that most of the participants were owners of smart phones, so this device became pivotal in leveraging data collection. Interviews were thus conducted utilising the 5G cellular network either via Zoom Video Conferencing or WhatsApp Messenger, thereby observing all social distancing protocols. One (1) participant out of the eleven (11) participants requested that I conduct their interview using WhatsApp Voice Notes (VN) where the questions and responses were recorded via Voice Notes which satisfied the participant's request for complete anonymity and privacy as the participant did not want to video call, but instead would use her voice only. It was important that participants use a facility that was easily available and which each participant was comfortable in using. This had certain cost benefits and deficits, for example, while it significantly reduced my travelling costs as the researcher, I had to cover the data costs for each of the participants when we held 5G cellular network interview sessions via Zoom Video Conferencing or WhatsApp Messenger. One of the significant benefits of using WhatsApp Messenger is that it provides an automatic transcript of the interview and was thus a good way of storing the research data and thereby guaranteeing easy access.

The narrative enquiry enabled me as the researcher to understand DGBV in the context of a Christian household, how it manifests, how it is sustained and perpetuated. The questions focused on the forms of GBV experienced, the patterns of DGBV, and the effects of DGBV. Moreover, it asked about ideo-theological and biblical teachings, as well as socio-cultural teachings which have subjected women to abuse, such that it had become difficult to leave toxic marriages. Lastly, a portion of the questions asked about the church's response to abuse, establishing if there were any protocols currently in place or lack thereof at the parish level. It further asked participants what they would have desired in terms of how the church aids in their healing and recovery process. These questions facilitated their engagement as participants freely shared their own narratives and viewpoints on how the church can change the narrative of GBV. This process on its own played a crucial role as it allowed the participants to dig deeper sharing their traumatic scenes and experiences, which opened a platform for healing. This type of engaging is defined as a conversation whereby reflecting to past as "a healing effect" (Denis, 2007: 4).

The storytelling session was inspired and facilitated through a series of questions. The interview guide[5] served as a guideline for the interview. Each of the participants were given the questions prior to the

[5] See: Annexure C: Interview Schedule.

actual interview so that they could acquaint themselves with the research tool. Each interview was scheduled to take place for a period of between 60-90 minutes at a venue suggested by the interviewee. The interviews offered a safe space for women's narratives based on lived experiences. During the interviews, the participants shared their personal lived experiences on domestic violence and gender-based violence, marking how the experiences shaped an unhealthy 'unholy' marriage setting.

The research questions were written in English and isiZulu, to accommodate the research participants. Although each of the participants intimated that they were bilingual and fully conversant in both languages, nevertheless they were encouraged to use the Zulu language as it was their mother tongue. However, most participants preferred that both isiZulu and English be used interchangeably during the interviews. Accordingly, as the interviewer, I switched languages from time to time to engage in isiZulu and then in English to ensure that the participants fully understood the questions and could easily express themselves. This enabled a smooth flow of conversation. In situations where the interviews were conducted in isiZulu, transcriptions had to be prepared in English, and so those sections conducted in isiZulu were then translated into English.

Data presentation in this study is presented in two forms. Excerpts in isiZulu are directly taken from the transcripts, and these are translated into English. Some excerpts in chapter five and chapter seven are presented in isiZulu (to avoid poor translation), while others have been processed and translated into English. In instances where they are kept in the original isiZulu version, this was an attempt to preserve the original meaning of the text. My greatest challenge was to translate some isiZulu idioms and sayings. As a result, I was convinced this was the correct way of preserving the essence of the meaning without running the risk of misinterpreting some profound meaning in the text. In this study, only the transcribed versions are provided. As detailed later in this chapter, issues of anonymity and confidentiality were adhered to give participants space to freely share their lives in this research study.

Storytelling enables the use of indigenous research methods to journey with the wounded and the afflicted. Using the narrative interviews gives space for "reconstructing social events from the point of view of informants" (Muylaert et al., 2014: 186). Creswell and Poth (2016: 67) suggest that the narrative method begins with the narrated experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of the individuals. Narratives does not only help women to expose the injustices done to them, but it also brings healing to their lives. Stories thus become the raw data by which researchers receive insight into the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, it is expected that women will share their experiences as they frame their own individualised meanings and experiences of DGBV.

To avoid the risk of re-traumatisation, due to the interviews being conducted virtually, a list of professional assistance in the form of a social worker or registered counsellor with a strong focus on

clinical specialisation was forwarded to each of the participants in the event they required support. The interviews were fundamental in creating a platform for self-emptying their pain and survivors were given time and space to reflect on how they envisage a pastoral care praxis. At some point during the session, women survivors used this time to formulate a healing ritual. Each participant was afforded an opportunity to lead or close the interview session with a prayer. This was done to demonstrate that the participants stories relate to many other survivors and whose stories have shaped their married lives. Moreover, these prayers were regarded as another form of healing ritual: of crying out, a language so important in exhaling, of being seen and heard.

4.6.1.1. *The ritual of lighting a candle and a prayer*

Prior to starting a virtual interview session, I lit a candle and began each session with a prayer. My understanding of these rituals particularly within my faith tradition is that the use of candles is a rich symbol of the Christian faith and relates to Jesus Christ as the being "light of the world." A candle lighting the darkness has a way of communicating this truth symbolically much more powerfully than a room filled with fluorescent light bulbs. There is a natural beauty and power emanating from a lit candle that communicates joy and illumination in a way that no artificial light source can. With different celebrations in the church calendar such as The Holy Eucharist, the Four Sundays of Advent, Baptism and Confirmation, and Holy Matrimony, candles are lit to signify the resurrection of Christ. Recognising the sombre mood and the feelings that arise due to trauma and violence, these the rituals of prayer and lighting a candle were paramount for me as a researcher to honour the memories of the many women we have lost to DGBV. In this instance, I wanted to reiterate my solidarity in the fight against abuse and to recognise that despite being survivors of DGBV, they still possess God's love and light.

4.6.2. Stage #2: Focus group discussions

Focus group discussions were held in the season where there was spike in COVID-19 cases in our region. Hence, as a researcher I had to navigate data collection differently. In this section, I will discuss what transpired during the second segment of data collection. Out of four (4) planned focus groups, only three (3) focus groups sat. For this second phase of data gathering, the participants were recruited in the first segment, during the one-on-one interviews where they were asked to take part. This is how they volunteered to take part which enabled the extension of the study. Moreover, the focus group also invited the men's society lay ministers to be part of the discussion. Participants in two (2) focus groups were mainly women from different women's guilds. One focus group presented a male participant and that representation offered diversity and cooperation when seeking transformation in the church space. Upon the initial plan, the participants that were deemed suitable to be a part of the conversation of

deliberating intervention/preventive work of DGBV in the participating parishes, meant that both women and men were invited. Invitations to focus group discussion were extended to church leaders, male clergy, female clergy, and the executive leadership of both the MU and AWF women ministries.

Each focus group began with worship, a prayer, introduction, and administrative duties. In the live sessions, I began the workshop by introducing myself. The purpose of the study was clearly articulated, allowing each participant to introduce themselves and thanking each participant for taking part in the study. In completing a session, I asked for a volunteer to lead in prayer, reflecting prayerfully and faithfully in solidarity with many survivors whose stories remain unnoticed and unhealed.

The objective behind the focus group discussions were to collaborate minds and ideas in developing strategies. Nyengele (2004: 3) refers to this process as "transformative pastoral praxis." Such strategies can be used empower ACSA parishes in responding and handling the lamentations of women survivors who have endured suffering and silencing on the issue of violence and victimisation in their marriages. The questions asked in the focus group sessions were thematically categorised. However, the heart of the issue was to ask how the parish envisions change, and what their contribution would be in the shaping of a pastoral care praxis?

4.6.2.1. *The seating position*

As discussed earlier, the State-imposed regulations and guidelines with respect to the COVID-19 pandemic caused the study to shift its method of collating data. As a result, there was only one (1) person-to-person focus group discussion session. I there resorted to the use of Zoom Video Conferencing to conduct two focus group discussions. This move was deeply affected by poor attendance due to concerns I cite in later in this chapter. In the first focus group session, the participants sat in a horseshoe/semi-circle to optimise discussion where everyone could easily follow the facilitator and be encouraged to participate. Guidelines for group discussions were outlined where respect and politeness were emphasised. Group dynamics were constantly monitored, for example, avoiding power dynamics to interfere with the research process. This study encouraged mainly an engagement that was relational and intercommunal, and by so doing it meant that the ACSA began to look at DGBV as a male and female challenge. All the participants engaged in shaping a GBV intervention framework towards meaningful feminist healing praxis by honouring the lived experiences of women. Each session began with an icebreaker. This was done intentionally to create rapport and ensure that all participants connected and felt free to participate, and thereby stimulate discussion throughout the session. Each ice breaker activity was be chosen so that it resonates with the research programme to be achieved.

This phase of data collection put together theory and practice, engaging the messy world of research about justice and women's wholeness. This was inspired by Ackermann's hermeneutical point of

departure where all theology should be done in service to, and fulfilment of God's reign on earth (Ackermann 2005). Ackermann's viewpoint is that theological reflection and theological praxis should arise within the everyday messiness of Christian lives. All efforts should embody acts as solutions to meet the problems of historical contexts. In this case, if we call ourselves women of Christian faith, we are called to be "God's agents for healing this world" (Ackermann 2005: 387). Moreover, Ackermann posits that "the reign of God, as embodied in the ministry of Jesus Christ, demands the practical embodied realisation of justice, love, freedom, peace and wholeness" (Ackermann 2005: 387). This study reiterates and echoes Ackermann's hermeneutical position by merging theory and praxis, conceptualising, and designing healing programmes that can launch selfcare and psychospiritual care to those who have first-hand experience of DGBV. Svašek and Domecka (2020: 107) uncover domains of psychosocial experience that may be hard to reveal in a normal interview. Furthermore, they suggest that "emotional remembering can be experienced by narrators as a transformative process" (2020: 107). As the researcher of this project, I concur with both scholars, and hope that this type of gathering data will also empower the interviewee to have a safe space for reflecting, expressing insights and the emotional clutter of painful past experiences in a manner that may give clarity to the lived experiences.

4.6.3. Stage #3: Participatory session and visual maps

The third phase of data gathering was participatory in nature and form. The initial plan was to draw participation from the focus group discussions. This session was meant to be a healing workshop where the parish community was to be invited. However, to observe COVID-19 regulations and guidelines for social gatherings, I asked the women survivors to volunteer and participate in the drawing of visual maps. This form of data collection created a platform for visually designing an intervention map explicating pastoral care guidelines on how the ACSA responds to DGBV. The session engaged a participatory action research design. This participatory research approach is considered appropriate in enabling participants in shaping a healing theology inscribing women's voices for a theology while being inclusive in its approach.

In conceptualising the visual maps, the women survivors generously shared rich data of their lived experiences, and volunteered to do the visual maps at a time that was convenient to them. In tackling this task, they were given a scenario of a typical GBV manifesting in an abusive marriage and were expected to respond in terms of how they would desire to see the church as an ally to social justice and liberation of women in the context of DGBV. The participation in visual mapping was intended to be a collaborative exercise producing interventions that would drive social change in practical terms. The

questions asked sought responses on how ACSA can respond in the context of DGBV transformation and justice.[6]

4.6.3.1. *Mapping as a visual methodology*

Visual mapping refers to visual imagery turned into raw data, thus allowing the researcher to drive social change and draw insights for the purposes of shaping interventions and empowerment models on the phenomenon studied. It is a collective effort that gathers the voices of the women survivors, male congregants, and ordinary females who join forces for a good course. This data collection method allows for an inclusive space for learning, reflection, and expressing ideas. According to Herlihy and Knapp, participatory mapping:

> …constructs knowledge beginning with cognitive mental constructs and converting these to consensual images and then into conventional map or descriptive forms. It is a bottom-up methodology because it builds on the understanding of place from the individual level to progressively larger social aggregates at progressively smaller scale, working from mental maps to regional maps. It is a powerful tool capable of producing qualitative and quantitative, as well as scientific and humanistic, results concerning the relationships between societies and environments (2003: 308).

In this study, visual maps are to be understood and considered as pivotal towards shaping a healing praxis that charts a way forward for the church as it responds to the wounded and afflicted by GBV. Over the years, mapping has been engaged in various research and has been utilised and adapted in various contexts that include participatory mapping, social mapping, intervention mapping, concept mapping (used to build understanding) (Govender, 2013). To legitimise empirical evidence, visual maps were used here as a research methodology. Women survivors participated in this layer of data collection.

4.6.3.2. *Required materials*

For the visual maps, the following materials were made available to the participants in the third data collection. An A3 size white chart for constructing visual maps. Different coloured felt tip markers and pens were provided. An audio recorder was made available to capture data. For data capturing, a digital camera was provided to take close-up photographs of the visuals map at the end of the healing

[6] See: Annexure D: Focus Group Discussion / Visual Mapping Questions.

retreat. Five visual maps are attached in this study, providing useful guides to the healing/pastoral care praxis. In chapter eight, each of these visual maps will be unpacked and analysed.

This section draws its inspiration from an academic background in Media and Cultural studies using intervention mapping as an empowering tool and was deemed a useful resource towards rethinking healing, incorporating, and interweaving visual images as a source of reflection, opening and reforming pathways that could lead to pastoral care praxis which the church space could embody. I believe working within this mode of inquiry has a great potential for empowering the church and its people to amplify the women survivor voices as they are given a chance to reflect, design, document healing guidelines, and engage with pastoral care resources. The nature of this study is thus forward-looking, cooperative, and productive, as each focus discussion intends conceptualising and developing interventions representing ACSAs feminist voices.

Visual maps have been used in this study for generating data that can be used to develop guidelines of pastoral care praxis for those who endure the reality of DGBV within the ACSA. This aspect of data gathering draws its inspiration from an art-based enquiry, where scholars have used body mapping to understand young people's experiences of HIV programmes, and their possible participation in developing HIV programmes (Wienand, 2006; Ebersöhn & Ferreira, 2011; Govender, 2013). This approach is also inspired by the work done by the Institute for Healing of Memories (IHOM) founded by Father Michael Lapsley (Lapsley et al., 2002). The methodological resources and processes as used in this specific research project allowed participants to bring their cultural and personal experiences into context towards developing a healing theology involving a healing praxis for women affected and suffering from the aftermath of DGBV.

Amid numerous options available to heal and recover trauma, this avenue of capacitating ACSA churches to develop their own healing maps, this adapted work is premised on victim orientations as the congregants contribute to shaping their healing theology. One major characteristic in choosing this approach, is the recognition of the entire church community standing in solidarity with GBV survivors. During the sessions, the approach was to remove the stigma and mindset that GBV is a women's issue. It was also important to dispel the idea that the formulation of a feminist liberative pastoral care praxis was the sole reserve of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In a way, this process intended changing the systemic causes of structural inequality, while redressing the emotional and spiritual well-being of women survivors. This portion of data gathering explicates a participatory approach as participants visualise a healing theology consisting of a visual language highlighting the parish context, assets, and value systems that could be adapted at a parish level to formulate a feminist liberative pastoral care praxis. A praxis engages practical strategies that supposes a constructive and meaning system that will be followed as an intervention for reflexivity during a healing workshop. It is for this reason I selected

the name 'healing retreat' as each session provided a safe and a solemn space for reflecting while enabling healing to take place inside and out. The pedagogy of a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework was adopted to "facilitate community engagement and generate research that was cooperative, inclusive, and useful to each group" (Berman, 2018: 147).

4.6.4. Planning processes prior to the focus group discussions

In the initial stages of data collection process, parish rectors were contacted and arrangements were made that I would be invited to attend prayer meetings on one of the Sundays or Thursdays. This was to be regarded as an opportune time to introduce myself and create a positive rapport with the participants and allow the parishioners to get to know me and thereby build trust. However, the plan had to be revised due to the COVID-19 regulations. In each parish, a coordinator was selected who worked with me in coordinating the focus group discussion workshop/retreat. Two processes were engaged in selecting and recruiting suitable participation. An official invitation was forwarded to each of the parishes, and this was accompanied by a digital poster[7] which was circulated via email and WhatsApp group platforms to reach parish women guilds, for example MU, AWF, Men's Society. Those who showed interest in the study were contacted privately and reminders sent via email. Dedicated WhatsApp groups were then created for the GBV research and immediately closed after data collection was finalised. The session ran for 90 minutes. At the end of each session, the participants were thanked for their involvement. Those who attended a live session were served with individually packed refreshments while strictly maintaining COVID-19 protocols, including masking, sanitising, and social distancing.

4.6.5. My researcher diary: A record of personal experience

The work of this magnitude warrants that I tabulate my reflections of the research itself, the research processes utilised, as well as my connection and challenges with the entire proceedings. In hindsight, I recognised how I underestimated the complexity and the vastness of the project. I came to reflect not only on my own life, but the lives of all those connected to me with respect to the numerous abusive episodes experienced either at work, in the church space, or in the home. Nevertheless, the journey while it was challenging, was rewarding as it gave me clarity on certain aspects of how patriarchy manifests itself in various settings. It also helped me grasp the realities around what I call strongholds that resurface as generational curses. Finally, while it re-opened my own emotional scars, the kaleidoscopic experiences that the survivors shared was a sweet-smelling healing balm.

[7] See: Annexure B: Digital Poster.

4.6.5.1. *Observing COVID-19 regulations during interviews and focus group discussions*

The reality of navigating research during the global COVID-19 pandemic has presented challenges which I managed to overcome with time. All that I had envisioned methodologically had to be amended and altered to yield the same results required. The initial plan was to ensure that all the interviews were conducted live as one-on-one interviews. This would have meant meeting participants in their safe spaces suitable for a private conversation. However, when the number of COVID-19 cases spiked uncontrollably across all provinces, the safer mode of engaging meant revising the data collection approach. Accordingly, most the interviews were conducted virtually on the Zoom Video Conferencing and WhatsApp cellular platforms. Only one (1) focus group discussion was conducted as a live session. In preparation, I had to ensure that the venue set aside for the session met the State-imposed COVID-19 regulations, recommendations, and protocols. Each of the participants wore their masks, we sanitised and practised social distancing. "No mask, no entry" wall signs were erected. Temperatures were taken and recorded in a register prior to each session. It is important that I reflect on the challenges of participation, migrating to the Zoom Video Conferencing cellular platform presented its own challenges and this revealed that most of the participants struggled due to having no cellular data. Some it was due to no having smart phones, tablets, and computers which proved to be a serious challenge. I offered to procure data for the participants; however, the issue was more complex as some mentioned feeling uncomfortable about sharing online, especially having trust issues when it came to sharing their personal loves online. Most importantly, was the reality of being ignorant when it can to the use of such technological applications. These limitations restricted participation.

4.6.5.2. *Entering "the world of survivors"*

I have learnt a lot listening to the narratives of survivors. I am humbled by their generosity, their courage, and the will power to continue to live courageously and do amazing things in their lives. Some aspects of women survivor experiences invoked pain, anger, fear, and confusion. There were times when I had to disassociate myself intentionally and consciously from the survivor stories and from the research itself, to avoid harming myself. I realised that having spaces in between the interviews allowed me enough time to recover from the interviews while processing the aftermath of these experiences. I found myself detesting some scripting from our Zulu culture, everything and anything that caused women to endure the suffering, all in the name of culture. In some instances, I found myself disappointed at how the church has failed women and how they have shaped religion such that it silences and numbs the pain. Moreover, I was disturbed by how the church had created more pain than relief. I was more disturbed learning how women themselves have tilted the patriarchal script, as they lead in harming other women and this continues to be uninterrupted in their prayer meetings and conferences. It is disturbing that the women's guilds continue to share toxic teachings about marriage, cultivating

shame and fear, further making it difficult for women to come out and share their abusive narratives so that they can heal and recover from their ordeals.

It is important that I draw myself when the nature of my scholarship is feminist oriented. When there is awareness of our own biases, we can speak to these issues and not cloud the data. Ruther (1983: 12) argues that:

> Human experience is the starting point and the ending point of the hermeneutical circle. Codified tradition both reaches back to roots in experience and is constantly renewed or discarded through the test of experience. "Experience" includes experience of the divine, experience of oneself, and experience of the community and the world, in an interacting dialectic.

In this study I was afforded the opportunity to engage my personal experiences within the process of conversation with the participants. Noting my own biases in adventuring the nature of the work within this field of study, I recognise that since I work in the space of public theology, working as a human rights activist I feel obligated to destabilise the norms of patriarchy. However, it was pivotal to note my own biases and feelings in my engagement with the participants. Moreover, it was important to note my thoughts and feelings about my vulnerability through this thesis writing. I therefore kept a journal to note down my personal thoughts, and feelings within this process.

4.7. Positionality

In the introductory chapter I briefly stated my positionality. Here, I will comprehensively unpack it. It is of utmost importance that the researcher defines her/his standpoint which describes his/her "individual's actual location in the social and physical world and the work that she/he does there shapes her/his understandings" (Engler & Stausberg, 2013: 55). Being able to define your position in the research space guides the reader into understanding what manifests in the research field. Hence, reflexivity is important. Feminist research enables a researcher to approach research from her social positioning. I am certain that my own background has made a profound contribution in terms of how I have always understood gender roles and hegemonic roles. As a researcher, I am an insider, I am approaching this study from that position, this means my awareness of gender stereotypes, patriarchy, and nuances of a sexist stance are still rife, not only is social circles but in faith spaces too. As such, such sexist and patriarchal systems that continue to marginalise mainly women requires reversal and immediate modification. I am also aware of my own biases as result of religious fundamentalism that was deeply scripted in my heart and soul. I therefore take caution when biblical texts are presented as problematic, and all that is rubber stamped as the "Word of God." As a young girl, I was conscientised

to challenge traces of inequality and to have courage to fight on. Now as a mother of two boys I feel my greatest assignment on earth is to shape and nurture boys who are conscious of their actions, boys who have sympathy and empathy for equality, and hence I constantly must conscientise my own boys concerning gender equality and gender justice. I wish to make my own admission though, citing how I consider myself a survivor due to childhood exposure to violence.

In my adult life, in this study I also bring my own personal unique experience of abuse replicated generationally. This stems from observing the effects of excessive alcohol consumption and struggles of what I refer to as male entitlement, coupled with the nuances of male privilege resulting in snippets of domestic violence showing up as sibling abuse in my own family particularly after the passing of my father. I recall how this pattern of abuse worsened when my husband was retrenched, and we lost our house. Hence, I had to move back home with my children for the purpose of stability. However, this move was unwelcomed, and instead was accompanied with hostility and aggression. This kind of victimisation continued, premised on cultural and traditional stereotyped values which meant since being married I was an outsider and therefore not entitled to anything belonging to my father's house. I cannot explain how this kind of abuse and victimisation impacts one emotionally and psychologically, to be on the receiving end of insult, the strong use of vulgar language and threatening language. My own psychological scarring emerges from being vulnerable in such an unhealthy situation which I believe was triggered by the discourse of maleness and male privilege as men are culturally and religiously groomed as superior to women. I therefore consider myself in this research study as a survivor. Like all the GBV survivors, I lament at having no space to express my vulnerability, frustration, and anxiety. What I have experienced is the experience of many women single, married, or unmarried, where they find themselves in abusive situations. My passion about DGBV issue springs from this personal account. However, this study privileges the voices of women in the context of Christian marriages, where it is pivotal to explore the impact of DGBV and further explore how the church as a faith space can create platforms for processing trauma and transforming people's lives, and thereby develop interventions and guidelines for healing in the ACSA.

Positionality helps the reader to understand from which angle the writer/researcher is situating her or himself within the borders of the research context. In this instance, the research study tackles a topical subject that is a global challenge. However, as a researcher the approach in this context is the peculiarity of GBV as a challenge in the broader South African and African terrain when coming to this study. On embarking on this journey, it became important to locate and position myself as an insider and outsider without compromising the study. This empowers the reader as she/he understands the context and the proceeding which I as the researcher will engage for the study and its findings to remain credible. This will further guide the process of data analysis as I ensure that the study provides an alternative to the designs that are pro-European in nature.

It is pivotal therefore that the research design utilised in this study is of an Afrocentric nature. This way of thinking and doing alludes to the African women's lens engaged as a research framework in chapter three. In this study therefore, African Women enabled a process of discovery as the study explored the subject African and the one of woman. The focus is on the discovery of interventions for black African Christian women, studied by another African black Christian woman, and their relationship to theology. This explicates and clarifies how has their grasp of theological doctrines and teachings made them vulnerable to gender-based violence. This is deemed a suitable methodology of ensuring that the study moves towards a solution within a particular context, which I confidently feel is a move towards creating and expanding a knowledge base which is geared towards strengthening a proactive approach where the ACSA responds to endemic DGBV through honouring the voices of women.

In the sub-section which follows, I will explain my identities linked with the study as they depict frames of my epistemological positioning.

4.7.1. Locating the researcher in the study: The cradle that birthed and nurtured me

As the researcher in this project, I am a black woman born and raised in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. My roots are in KwaCaluza in Edendale, a semi-urban location in Pietermaritzburg, where women are placed at the axis of vulnerability, because of age, sex, race, culture, and religion. I was raised in a close-knit family set-up where I stayed with my mother and my father in a middle-class family home, both parents being teachers in local high schools. Later, my family relocated to Umlazi, Durban. I was raised in a Christian home by parents who were devoted Anglicans, who brought me up with my siblings, passing on their Christian values and ethos. While recognising my strong Anglican background, it is vital that I indicate my paternal grandparents were members of the Assemblies of God, an Evangelical/Pentecostal church denomination. This meant their approach to spirituality exemplified fundamentalist perspectives towards gospel truth and spirituality. Profoundly, I define myself as an African woman born and raised in the urban parts of KwaZulu-Natal. In this study, my positionality is that one of an insider as I embody much familiarity with the Anglican church. Also, to demonstrate how own my cultural and social landscape has also furnished me with Zulu tradition, culture, and knowledge. I am aware that such elements of my Zuluness may mean something else to another person.

4.7.2. My role in ministry and how it informs my positionality

Throughout this study, I was conscious of my own biases of my insider and outsider positioning. Being in ministry as a licenced Lay Minister within the ACSA, I observe how harmful biblical interpretations disempower women. I became a licenced Lay Minister in 2017 and I realise how the church is a space that is still male dominated. I find myself navigating this space as an itinerant preacher where I openly bring awareness and awakening to the subject of women oppression and to the norm of *ukubekezela*

(patient endurance or resisting) within marriages. My talks are often based and often centred on the importance of women investing in their emotional health as part of women empowerment. Such platforms have always denoted the oppression black women endure and hence my talks are inevitably geared towards inspiring a new consciousness. Therefore, I use the space for challenging biblical texts and systematic doctrines that do not serve women in their plight of abuse and victimisation. Sometimes I find myself performing numerous pastoral duties on behalf of parish priests. This is where I have great encounters with depressed and scarred women who are seeking psycho-emotional support. Such spaces are usually meant for spiritual retreats, and panel discussions across interdenominational forums, where the discussions and dialogues held are on transforming the church landscape in terms of gender equality and gender justice.

4.7.3. The researcher as a lay counsellor

In my previous life, I worked with people as an Education Specialist and a Guidance Counsellor (as a lay counsellor) in public schools. My experience in handling cases of psycho-emotional and psycho-social support taught be to create boundaries, extending myself as a resource for healing without traumatising the client, while be sure to shield my own vulnerability. This environment has always meant helping the vulnerable and the emotionally wounded as they sought healing, wellness, and social transformation.

Having been born and raised as a Zulu Christian woman, the social, cultural, and historical context provides a fertile ground as to how society shapes one to think, to serve, and to submit, living in a patriarchal society with numerous cultural and religious stereotypes which perpetually legitimise and reinforce women oppression. In lieu of these enlightenments, I began raising serious questions on how the church can continue to be male-dominated in this twenty-first century democratic South Africa, and yet still play its significant role of bringing healing and the restoration of justice, while conscientising women from various contexts (i.e., layers and levels of brokenness) in a manner that restores who God made them to be, born in the *Imago Dei*. The appetite for this study therefore emanated from this background as I began to question what the church can do for the suffering and the emotionally wounded. How can women become agencies of their own healing? How can the vehicle of spirituality creatively engage women and meet their brokenness, vulnerability, and despair?

Like many scholars and theologians, I am of the view that gender oppression and restrictions imposed in religious spaces is detrimental to one's state of being, dignity and identity. As women continue to be in bondage, vulnerable and fragile, the church becomes a site that oppresses and silences women. I argue that if such a narrative is not challenged, women can lose their sense of self, slowly dying in a

space that cripples one's identity, a space that shatters one's dreams, goals, and aspirations, thus crippling African women from flourishing abundantly.

Table 4.2. Profile of women who participated in the interviews

Name[8]	Age	Education level	No. of children	Profession	No. of years married	Relationship with the ACSA	Current marital status
Cebi	29	Incomplete Degree in Radiography	2	Unemployed	1	By marriage	Separated
Tholi	39	Bachelor of Social Science	1	Process Technician	18 months	Born Anglican	Divorce & remarried
Nala	56		3	Teacher	27 years	Born Anglican	Divorced (after 27 years)
Jane	59	Bachelor of Arts	3	Teacher	17 years	Anglican by marriage	Divorced
Abigail	68	Honours in linguistics	3	Retired teacher	36 years	Anglican by marriage	widowed
Nomusa	64	HED and Advanced Life Skills Diploma	4	Retired teacher	20 years	Anglican by marriage	Still married but not staying together since 2017
Ntombi	48	PR Diploma (Damelin)	1	Unemployed	17 years	Anglican baptised as a baby, confirmed, and married	Divorced
Nolitha	42	Electrical engineering s6, Transport management Degree	2	Fleet Specialist	Fiancée for a period of 12 years (Lobola paid, hence regarded as traditionally married)	Born, baptized, and confirmed Anglican (both Father and Mother are Lay ministers)	Separated

[8] To ensure that research ethics are maintained, the names of the persons profiled in this study are not the real names of the participants. These are pseudonyms, used by the researcher to protect the identity of the participants.

Zuzeni	58	Grade 9	4	Unemployed, but worked at a Retreat Centre as a Supervisor	39 years	Born, baptised, and confirmed Anglican and later married but decided to remain Anglican whilst husband is a Roman Catholic	Separated but stay together with husband and sleep-in different bedrooms (for the sake of the children)
Kholiwe	68	Nursing course	4	Nursing sister	45 years	Became an Anglican by marriage	Married (recently widowed)
Phiwe	40	No formal education	4	Domestic worker	19 years	Became an Anglican by marriage	Still married

4.8. Data management and analysis

Stories collated during the interviews Data collected will be thematically analysed (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Terry et al. (2017: 23-25) various phases are engaged in the process of qualitative analysis. These are described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3. Phases in data handling and data processing

Phase	Description of data handling and data processing
Phase 1	*Transcription and typing up of raw data; Reflection on possible themes.* I will familiarise myself with the data which I will be doing as and when I collect data. This will mean processing data, then transcribing data, spending time reading and re-reading the data while noting down initial ideas.
Phase 2	*Coding of data; Reflection on possible themes.* This phase entails generating the code and creating blocks of analysis. This will enable me to strike similarities and commonalities across the data.
Phase 3	*Identification of deductive themes in data according to initial theory that relates to answering the research questions; Reflection and identification of inductive themes that relate to answering the questions and objectives of the research and addition of new relevant theory.* This phase will allow me to construct themes based on the codes generated which allows the draft of the first phase of data analysis.

Phase 4	*Allocation of coded data to deductive and inductive themes; Reflection on possible themes if they relate to the research questions and the objectives of the research and revisiting of themes if necessary.* In this phase I will start look for themes by way of defining, refining, and naming prominent themes that emerge in that collated data. Moreover, I will refine the specifics of each theme, engaging in ongoing data analysis as I generate clear themes.
Phase 5 & Phase 6	*Comparison of thematic data from the two research sites. Reflection on possible themes if they relate to answering the research questions and the research objectives and revisit themes included if necessary.* These last two phases will be approached, as I further define and name emerging themes which will eventually produce the final analysis report. This final analysis will be linked with the research questions and literature.

To ensure that data analysis becomes a fruitful venture, I will be approaching this task from a position of eliciting and revealing meanings of women survivor narratives. When working with life stories, it is crucial to have the skill of interviewing and asking relevant questions. It is fundamentally important to listen with tact, bringing your heart and soul, which is key to elucidating the underlying meanings and crucial when you attempt entering people's sacred lives.

4.9. Ethical considerations for data collection

According to Silverman (2011: 418), there are three main issues of concern in Western research, each of which need to be respected and adhered to; gain access; ethical guidelines on codes and consent; confidentiality and trust. It becomes critical when studying the sensitive topic of violence against women to ensure that such ethical concerns are adhered to, particularly if the study potentially threatens the participants.

4.9.1. Gatekeepers and gaining access

It is crucial to gain access prior when undertaking a research study. This means negotiating with "key persons may also have the role of gatekeeper, someone with the power to open the door" (Stausberg & Engler, 2013: 312). A gatekeeper letter was written and forwarded to the Diocesan Bishop via E-mail in 2019. This letter requested access to the ACSA parishes where the participants were recruited for participation. A couple of months later, I was furnished with a letter acceding to my request. Early in the year 2020, further communication was held with parish rectors who assisted me greatly in inviting suitable participants who would be keen in participating in the study. Some rectors invited representatives to be liaisons between myself and the participants. These persons were pivotal in linking me with the suitable candidates for participation. This also includes the necessary administrative processes guiding the ethical considerations which need to be strictly adhered to, whereby participants signed consent forms agreeing to take part in the study.

As has already been discussed, parish rectors were approached. Parish priests also approached me privately, expressing an interest to have their parishes take part in the study. Upon receiving ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, the necessary arrangements were made with the participants.

4.9.2. Debriefing the participants

At the beginning of each interview and healing workshop/retreat, I clearly explained the purpose of the research study and how it would be undertaken. From the outset, the significance of voluntary participation was emphasised. The participant's rights to participation were shared since they were not coerced to divulge information. The participants were given the telephone numbers of practitioners who deal with therapy and counselling in the event they would need specialist attention.

4.9.3. Informed consent

The principle of respect for persons includes two essential ethical principles: respect for autonomy and protection of vulnerable persons. These are administered by individual informed consent procedures that ensure that participants are informed about the purpose of the research and their voluntary participation. In any research, the principle of free and informed consent is widely vital and needs to be acknowledged at the core of the ethical treatment of human participants. Free consent means that individuals voluntarily consent to participate in research and are not induced to do so using any form of undue influence or coercion. Moreover, it means having a right to know that they are researched and on the nature of the study. Consent is something freely given by the research participant and may be freely withdrawn at any time. The freedom of consent is always considered to be compromised when the researcher is in a position of power or authority with respect to prospective research participants, even when there is no explicit coercion to participate.

4.9.4. Confidentiality and privacy

Confidentiality is considered as key in the "protection of the respondents' identity, the place and the location of the research" (Ryen, 2011: 419). I will critically explain the importance pseudonyms whereby I protected the identity of the participants using study ID codes. These codes were assigned to each research participant prior to collecting data as an effective method for protecting the confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects during the qualitative data collection and analytic processes. The participants agreed to have the interviews audio recorded. The consent form cited the rights of the participants which emphasised their position regarding issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The interviews were digitally recorded, kept safely and no one had access to these recordings other than the researcher and were at a later stage transcribed verbatim. Confidentiality was

ensured using pseudonyms and no actual names of participants was used or identified. Confidentiality and anonymity could not be ensured for the FGDs given the nature of the data required.

4.10. Actual research proceedings

4.10.1. Openness

I presented images depicting gender-based violence to provoke a discussion. This was consciously done to encourage openness. Questions were set in a manner that were easy and straightforward so that the participants would easily understand and find it easy to respond.

4.10.2. Disclosure and psycho-emotional support

Research in a field that involves violence or uncomfortable terrains, and requires thoughtfulness and empathy. I ensured that during the interviews I utilised my counsellor skills to ensure that while I collate data, I use the space to handle certain sensitive questions and allow moments of emotional expression. Those participants who displayed emotional vulnerability during data collection, were referred to psychological resources in their respective areas.

4.10.3. Challenges experienced during the data collection process

Data collection was accompanied by numerous struggles. First and foremost, recruiting the participants proved to be a challenge. My reflections on this, is three-fold. Below I highlight my observations and the possible reasons why some of the potential participants were not keen to participate in the GBV research.

4.10.4. Inability to track parishioners during pandemic

The impact of COVID-19 upon the lives of many South Africans was severe, leading to many deaths and the interruption and loss of many livelihoods. Due to restrictions imposed by the government, it is evident that somehow the concept of communal gathering would cease to exist, and this disintegrated the church since gatherings were no longer allowed.

4.10.5. Stress and Depression due COVID-19 deaths

Due to many COVID-19 related deaths in many parishes, the complexity and the sensitivity of the study proved to be a challenge. Parish rectors were reluctant to have their congregants take part in the study, citing widespread stress, anxiety, and depression, since many had lost their loved ones to the virus. Congregants were reported to have been struggling with social isolation which had severely affected the mental and emotional wellness of many. What was more striking was when I would meet a

participant, this session was always welcome, and the participant would take time to share her narrative. The conversation always went far above the research purpose, my thinking processes around this having to do with the treasure of social contact during the pandemic.

4.11. Difficulties in recruiting and ensuring participation

Gender-based violence still carries so much shame and silence in the church. It also remains an enemy of the church in such a way that even the clergy demonstrated serious challenges in opening up about it, let alone engaging the church on its effects and its realities. The participants were also reluctant on participating in the project. I kept on being referred from pillar to post. Some would keep cancelling or postponing their interview sessions. When paying attention to the clergy and the leader's language, they did not sound ready for engaging on this critical matter. This was observable is that some clergy struggled in their willingness to recruit participants for the study. The clergy people contacted either kept on delegating the task to women leaders in the church. It seemed in this instance they were acting as gatekeepers, trying to condone or engage in GBV. For the first focus group discussion, nine (9) participants were recruited, and all showed interest, while three (3) confirmed they would attend the meeting. However, on the actual day only one (1) participant arrived. The Zoom Video Conferencing cellular app was suggested as another option, but it emerged that other participants struggled connecting online, while technology was another barrier. Interestingly, on this day, there was a MU meeting in the hall, which is another interesting point to note that while the guild may have their monthly meetings, the approach is still prayer and lamentations, and of course the monetary contributions that are constantly collected; and yet nothing that relates to the support for women who are trapped in abusive marriages.

4.11.1. Issues of power

It is difficult not to cite power dynamics at play. Some parishes were contacted more than five times and still expressed challenges imposed by aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, I tend to think that these are parishes that may not have been ready to engage about GBV. Observable also, in this process was the role of leaders who would delay the process by not acting.

4.12. Depersonalisation of GBV in their own Christian marriages

It was evident that possible participants when contacted would express no interest in the study, yet they would make claims that even clergy spouses and Bishops spouses were suffering in their own marriages. This was a clear depiction of detachment and depersonalisation. They shared no interest in the study and disconnected and detached themselves from the discourse of suffering. When approaching parish

rectors, these were some of the questions they asked me "Are you abused in your marriage? "Of all research topics why are you tackling this one?" Some clergy members even made comments that GBV is a difficult subject, and I would be lucky to find willing participants in their parishes since no one wants to talk about it.

4.13. Limitations of the study

Limitations of the study are based on the characteristics of design and methodology used in gathering data. As specified earlier, this data will compose of eleven (11) narratives of ACSA women, while data from the healing workshop will be from three (3) ACSA parishes in the Diocese of Natal. It is vital to state this as a limitation since the findings of this study will not be generalised.

4.14. Trustworthiness of the study

According to Struwig and Stead (2013: 136), trustworthiness is about the "truth value" of research. This speaks to how the research findings are worthwhile and how they are to be trusted and believed.

4.14.1. Credibility

Ensuring credibility in this study was seriously thought out. This was managed by ensuring that suitable respondents were recruited based on personal exposure and experience to GBV in their Christian households. In addition, they had to be members of the MU or AWF and be between 21 and 69 years of age. Second, the interview schedule was an important tool utilised to ensure that all respondents were asked the same questions and this consistency was key in establishing credible findings during data collection.

4.14.2. Dependability and transferability

All transcriptions were undertaken by the researcher and areas that were unclear were pursued with the respondents through follow-up emails ensuring that all data collected was a true reflection of the interviews. The accuracy of the transcriptions was also confirmed by listening to the audio recording of the interviews several times.

4.14.3. Validity and rigour

Transcriptions of data were given to the participants to verify the authentic records of the interviews. In this way, I was able to eliminate errors, incorrect capturing, and incorrect transcriptions.

4.15. Chapter summary

In this chapter I detailed the research methodology processes and the research design employed in this study. The studied pursued a qualitative feminist approach in studying the narratives of Christian women within the ACSA. I also discussed and explained in detail the sampling procedures that I employed and the challenges I experienced during sampling. The latter part of this discussion provided the challenges presented, while clearly articulating how each presenting challenge was addressed. Toward the end of this chapter, I thoroughly explained the importance of ensuring that the ethical considerations were strictly adhered to, to protect the participants and the research from harm.

In chapter five, I will present a thick presentation of data that emerged from the fieldwork. The data presented here is based on the stories of Christian women within the ACSA who have been subjected to abuse in their marriages.

Chapter 5: Data Presentation – Phase I: An Account of the Participant's Narratives

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 New International Version)

5.1. Introduction

This chapter will present a thick presentation of data that emerged from the fieldwork. The data to be presented is based on the stories of Christian women who have been subjected to abuse in their marriages. It was insisted prior to participation in this study, that at a participant must not have been exposed to violence for a period of two years. Prior to data presentation, I will in this chapter begin by providing a brief profile of each participant. Data was analysed using an interpretive approach. I conducted eleven (11) interviews, all of which were audio recorded and later transcribed by myself. Pseudonyms were used for all the participants.

In terms of the central research objectives of the study, this chapter will seek:

i. To find out what challenges Christian married women face as they suffer at the helm of gender-based violence because of patriarchal ideologies, culture, and religion.
ii. To understand Christian married women's knowledge and perceptions of gender-based violence, patriarchy, church (operational theologies) and marriage within the ACSA.
iii. To understand how the ACSA in the diocese of Natal handles this type of pastoral challenge.

Finally, I will present my analysis of the eleven (11) narratives.

Feminist theology has made its impact in practical and pastoral ways. This has been achieved by allowing space for women to share their stories. According to Graham (1999: 109), feminist theology "is being enabled to root itself in the stories of women's pains and joys: to articulate words about God out of the human passage through the life-cycle." While the old way of doing theology meant focusing on spirituality, this has been nothing but an indictment to humanity, inflicting pain and endorsing women subservience, further subjecting women to harm, trauma, and suffering. In this research, women survivors were able to tell their own stories about abuse. The embodiment of personal experience is important because it brings tangible sources of ministry in practical terms. It demonstrates what it "means for God to be revealed in a human body, broken and suffering, whose resurrection proclaims that love is stronger than death" (Graham, 1999: 114).

These stories gave context to the abuse women have faced and endured in unique spaces. Moreover, the survivor stories highlighted patterns of GBV, revealing the history and gravity of abuse endured by

survivors individually. Narratives are unique tools allowing each survivor to tell their story through their own context and language, making meaning of a contextual lived experience which is healing and liberating at the same time. Most of the stories shared reveal how patriarchal beliefs, culture, and life-denying religious language and doctrines continue to present a fertile ground for gender abuse. In this regard, the latter part of the narratives will disclose how the ACSA currently handles DGBV as a pastoral challenge. Also, to be discussed will be the socio-cultural constructs that have made marriage unbearable, whereby Christian women endure levels of violence in their households, which brings the entire concept of marriage as a holy sacrament into question. Correspondingly, the rhetoric of biblical authority to justify abuse will also be discussed. These narratives thus open a window of understanding that GBV is a reality within faith spaces. It is a reality of many Christian married women who are silent about how GBV has shaped and shattered the image they once had about marriage.

The chapter has the intention of exploring what survivors understood as GBV and how stories reveal their experiences. It is important to note that those narratives are just a sample size selected for research purposes and are not intended to be a representation of all women who have experienced domestic and gender-based violence with the entire Anglican Communion. The eleven (11) narratives engaged in this study are evidence that women in the ACSA are not immune to violence. The narratives demonstrate a trend across all ages, socio-economic standards, and levels of education, and how DGBV remains uninterrupted as it marks a significant contextual challenge in patriarchal society.

Narratives are context bound and therefore shaped by cultural, social, political, and historical factors (Boonzaier, 2008: 187). Narratives depend on contexts, they are reliant on the art of language, demonstrating what is told and how it is told. According to Klaasen (2018a: 97) "women should occupy the space that causes transformation, and they should not be eliminated or marginalised in the process. They have worth and give worth." According to Klaasen (2018), women can contribute to their own healing. Hence, these narratives present a safe space for debriefing their pain, deconstructing their clutter, and deconstructing meaning from their lived experiences. However, most importantly, they gave women a space to be listened to without judgement. These components are pivotal for healing. This healing praxis has demonstrated that women survivor's matter and their stories are valid. Likewise, a praxis that restores hope is required in the healing journey. Klaasen recognises this healing praxis as an "intersection between personhood and culture for effective care" (2018a: 7). My take is this is a restoration of *Ubuntu,* demonstrating that churches have the capacity to be caring spaces. Also, the sharing of traumatic narratives gives voice to silence, shifting the traumatised victim into a survivor-warrior. This initial step of 'coming out' shattered shame and created a robust space for a healthy conversation, removing the stigma of painful experiences in the context of Christian marriages.

In terms of this study, research questions were developed in English and isiZulu and the participants were welcome to respond in Zulu. However, they preferred to use English and isiZulu interchangeably. I encouraged the use of indigenous language to allow more discussion and content to surface, while allowing for a flawless flow of conversation. I met participants on different occasions. Some of the participants preferred that I meet them prior to data collection, which necessitated rapport creation. These meetings were held in a local restaurant, and in some instances in their own homes. For example, two (2) participants were met in their homes, three (3) were met in local restaurants, while six (6) of the interviews were conducted online. The restaurant identified and used for the interviews adhered to COVID-19 regulations such as social distancing, checking temperatures and COVID-19 symptoms, and sanitising. As the researcher I ensured that temperatures were taken and recorded, sanitising done, social distancing observed, and masks always worn throughout the interview session.

5.2. Research participant profiles

5.2.1. Participant Cebi

Cebi, is in her late twenties and is turning thirty this year. She met her husband when she was young and at high school. They have two (2) children: a boy and a girl. Due to poor financial resources, she could not complete her radiography degree. Her husband promised to take care of her financial needs. They lived in Bloemfontein when the events of violence erupted. Her narrative of violence relates to physical beatings and vulgar language. She also relates on how her husband would often not give her money or make financial contributions for their children's school fees. When she visited Durban to cool her head, she learned that her husband had moved out, selling their flat. All this happened while still married. People saw his social media updates that he had moved on with another women who is now mother to his third child. It became clear to her that it was time to let go and leave her marriage, sending the children to her in-laws for support while she moved in with her friends to start afresh in life.

5.2.2. Participant Tholi

Tholi dated her now late husband for four years and got married to him at the age of 27 and had a daughter. Tholi was raised by her paternal grandmother and spent part of her childhood with her aunt and uncle where she was exposed to gender-based violence as a young girl. Her uncle kicked and slapped her aunt; however, this act was condoned, and was never challenged by the elders in the family. Despite being born

and raised in difficult circumstances, as soon as she started working, she demonstrated her maturity and confidence as a young woman. Tholi took the responsibility of building a family home, thus creating a haven for her family and siblings. When she got married, she advised her husband that she would be forced to look after her family while being married. The violence in their relationship began shortly after they first married and continued until the relationship ended. When she narrates the onset of her abuse, she speaks of being degraded and constantly shamed for coming from a poor family. Her story is shrouded with episodes of cheating, and rarely was there physical abuse present. But the words she endured were damaging and hurting. After her divorce, Tholi remarried and met her current husband with whom they have son, and all stay together as a family with her daughter from her first marriage.

5.2.3. Participant Nala

Nala is a 58-year-old woman who met her husband in her late twenties and later married him when she was 28 years old. They had three children. She is a secondary school teacher, while her husband worked as a sailor and had a strong financial basis. Her parents were both teachers. Nala's first exposure to violence was in her childhood years. Her father was physically and emotionally abusive. Nala's marriage replicated her childhood experience with similar episodes of violence that manifested physically and emotionally. Nala relates about her abusive marriage, indicating that the abuse started when they were still boyfriend and girlfriend. However, she was hopeful that at some point the abuse would stop. In fact, she mentions that after she was married it became worse as the episodes increased. Her husband would be triggered by minor things and thereafter he would use vulgar language and then get physical, beating her and the children. She calls her abusive marriage 'a living hell' *(isihogo).* In her narration, Nala spoke of her father as a difficult person, and how her mom would 'walk on eggshells' when around her father. Nala also related to her daughter who married at a young age and whose marriage life ended brutally when her husband stabbed her to death. Nala mentioned how GBV has been generational pandemic in her family.

5.2.4. Participant Jane

Jane is a 59-year-old teacher, soon to be retired. At the age of 24-years-old straight after training as a secondary educator, she married her husband who had been a police officer, promoted through the ranks. Both spouses contributed financially to the household for its upkeep. She is a mother to three adult children. She was born and

raised in the Presbyterian Church and later joined the ACSA because of marriage. She highlights her love for the ACSA further inspired by her love for liturgical music due to her background in choral music. Jane beams with joy and so much warmth when she shares how they started off so well, yet how shortly after marriage she was told to change her dress style from head to foot. She claims her husband was a traditional Zulu man, so as a *makoti* (lit: Zulu bride or wife) she had to cover her head, wear no make-up, stop wearing pants and short skirts/dresses. Her marriage abuse stems mainly from strong patriarchal doctrines, that reminds a woman to 'remember her place' and be in submission to her husband. She tells of how she was reminded by her in-laws that she did not belong in the family, only to be embraced by her father-in law. Her story of abuse is unique in a sense that her husband was unfaithful. This is a case of infidelity manifesting abuse. Her husband's own siblings organised him girlfriends which drew them apart. It is a story of verbal abuse and intimidation which caused her to live in fear, especially because he was a police officer and always having a gun in his possession. His famous line was, "I don't want any promiscuous wife" (angifune'sfebe) and after 17 years of marriage, they divorced. Her husband moved out of the home, taking the furniture, and stopped maintaining the children.

5.2.5. Participant Nomali

Nomali is a 68-year-old who qualified as a teacher in the 1970's. She upgraded herself educationally while raising her young children, studying through UNISA. She is now retired. When she married her husband, they were 22 years old and 24 years old respectively. They were blessed with three children, one girl, who is the eldest and two boys. At the time of marriage, when she worked as a teacher, her husband worked as a supervisor in a Foil Company. He earned more than her, but was later retrenched. After years of unemployment, Nomali sent him back to college to train as a Secondary School Teacher. However, having supported him financially, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually, the narrative changed when he started working. Nomali recalls numerous violent episodes in her marriage. Mostly, it was physical abuse which manifested itself as beatings and yelling, with no regard for the presence of the children. This got aggravated by overindulgence in alcohol. There were episodes of vulgar abusive language, which she believes may have affected her boys in their adult life. When her husband got paid, he would not come back home and instead be engaged in extra-marital affairs, which created a huge burden at home leaving Nomali to be solely responsible for the running of the household. Due to this ongoing behaviour, there was

a deliberate attempt on the part of her husband to neglect his responsibilities to contribute towards their children's school fees and stationery needs and the support of the household This abusive behaviour went on for years up until Nomali served him with maintenance papers.

5.2.6. Participant Nomusa

Nomusa aged 64 years, met her husband while they both studied for their teacher training qualification at Madadeni College. Immediately after graduating, they worked only for a year, after which they began *lobola* (lit: 'bride price') negotiations followed by wedding arrangements. They were blessed with four children. Nomusa shares that her husband was a gentleman, and all seemed smooth before their marriage. However, things began changing after they got married. He started making demands about food and sex. He would come home drunk demanding food, yet he would spend his money outside the home. Whenever it was month end, he would sometimes not come back home having spent out his salary. During his bonus month, he would get paid and simply disappear, leaving Nomusa to care for the house expenses and the school fees. His disappearing acts were always associated with infidelity, and one time he had a relationship with a neighbour. He would buy them groceries and support his girlfriend's family. He made friends with low class friends and bought them alcohol. Afterwards, when he went home, he would fight with Nomusa, yell and scream at her. He would get violent and use vulgar language swearing at Nomusa and her children. He made family life a living hell.

5.2.7. Participant Ntombi

Ntombi is a 48-year-old mother of one child who worked in different organisations as a public relations practitioner and researcher. She was born as an Anglican, being a member of the St Agnes Guild until she became a member of the MU. She was married for nearly 17 years. Her husband always went to church and was loved and respected by the elderly. Her husband was unemployed for many years and during that time Ntombi was the one taking care of the family financially. At first, when the abuse started, she attributed it to insecurities and an inferior complex due to her husband being unemployed. Three years later, Ntombi's husband got back to work as a merchandiser and one of the issues they fought about was his infertility. They struggled for years to conceive, and this also caused tension. He would beat her and use vulgar language and all the time Ntombi would run back home to her parent's house for refuge.

Her parents would remind her that they had received *ilobolo*; hence, she must go back to her marital home since she belonged to his in-laws.

5.2.8. Participant Nolitha

Nolitha is a 42-year-old Xhosa woman who was traditionally married to her Zulu husband for a period of 12 years. Both their families had engaged talks on *lobola* negotiations, but processes were rendered incomplete. Nolitha mentions that they started pre-counselling sessions with the Anglican priest in preparation for their civil wedding, but eventually decided not to proceed since red flags started resurfacing in their relationship. The couple met at work where they both were qualified as electrical engineers. However, when it came to household duties and sharing the costs of maintaining their household, Nolitha's contribution was 90%, and her husband, 10%. Nolitha always carried the burden of the costs and her husband saw nothing wrong with that, even though he was able to make additional income when he was on callout on weekends. Marriage seemed like the biggest swindle to Nolitha and she eventually realised that this is not the woman she wanted to become, and this was not the lifestyle she was prepared to endure for the rest of her life. She called off the wedding, but they consciously agreed to successfully co-parent.

5.2.9. Participant Zuzeni

Zuzeni, (58) left formal schooling at a young age when she had just completed her grade nine. This disruption was triggered when she became pregnant. During those times, it was considered highly taboo when young women fell pregnant, and therefore her family expected her to start a family right away. Fortunately, her then boyfriend was working and was able to pay *ilobolo*, which speeded the marriage proceedings. Zuzeni married her lover in November 1982 and they had four children together. Her husband was the breadwinner and years later Zuzeni was fortunate to be employed as a supervisor in a local Conference Centre. Her introduction to abuse manifested itself when her husband struggled to support his family and Zuzeni became overburdened with the responsibility of carrying her family. He only managed to contribute R 700 towards maintenance which got deducted from his salary, all which he paid via lawyers. His brother-in law would often organise girlfriends from the village and sleeping out and cohabiting *'ukukipita'* became a habit. Her husband eventually left his family to live with another woman. After a couple of years, Zuzeni checked her marital status at the local Department of Home Affairs, and sadly learned that her husband had secretly

divorced her and had married another woman. Zuzeni chose to re-establish her life, building a large house with two rondavels. Years later, after staying with other women, her ex-husband came back home, and are today still together 'for the sake of children,' while sleeping in separate rooms.

5.2.10. Participant Kholiwe

Kholiwe is a 68-year-old who has been married for almost 45 years. She has recently been widowed. She and her husband have four adult children. Her husband was a businessperson for many years. He owned liquor stores and years later moved into fulltime politics. She met her husband when she had just finished matric. They were 12 years apart in age. It turned out her husband had hidden the information from her of having been married and divorced from his first wife. He insisted on marrying her without having a post-matric qualification. She forced her way into training as a nurse, but her husband refused that she worked. She would get offers from clinics and hospitals, but her husband did not want her to work. Life was never easy, as he was a womaniser, having extra-marital relations with different women, sometimes three to four girlfriends at a time. He struggled with alcohol and his recreational drinking become addictive, leading him to become a verbally abusive man. Kholiwe struggled to raise all four of their children with no financial support from her husband. Her husband started being violent the day she was offered a job; he came back on that same afternoon, throwing a violent spat, swearing at her, and refusing to allow her to go to work. He then convinced her into believing that he was once a Sunday School teacher. His daughters despised him for the suffering he put their mother through. Kholiwe's only son is currently receiving psychological therapy, struggling with keeping a legacy of a father who was always absent, violent, and abusive. Kholiwe shared a recent episode that happened on the day of her husband's funeral. Her sister-in-law grabbed her, sat her down and with a pair of scissors cut shaved her hair without her consent. When Kholiwe's daughters intervened, they said this is how the ritual is conducted culturally.

5.2.11. Participant Phiwe

Phiwe is a 40-year-old who is married to a 49-year-old truck driver. She has worked most of her life as a self-employed seamstress. Their 14-year-long marriage brought her much pain and many tears. Her husband was never home most of the time because his job entailed travelling across the border delivering goods. They have four daughters

together. This never sat well with Phiwe's husband as he believed that a wife must bear him a son. Phiwe's father always emphasised the importance of respect (*ukuhlonipha*). In his own words, "*Mtanami uze uziphathe kahle uhloniphe umyeni wakho, sadla izinkomo zakwaGumede. Kumele usakhele igama elihle"* (lit: 'My child carry yourself well in your marriage and respect your husband. We 'ate' their *lobolo*. You need to build a good name for us") Her husband would come home fortnightly, sometime drunk, demanding food and sex. The sexual encounters were usually painful and aggressive. He used to swear at her and verbally attack her, accusing her of bearing him girls only. He often suggested he would bring a second wife who will bear him an heir (*indlalifa*), suggesting that Phiwe had failed in being a good wife. All these incidents greatly affected Phiwe, eventually weighing in on their marriage. She approached the MU guild leader, telling her about her abusive marriage. The church kept telling her she must pray harder for her husband and for the situation. She was even ashamed to mention how her husband often forced himself on her sexually, claiming he had paid *lobola* for her. Her situation has created shame, anger, and confusion on how to live, since her family and church reminded her that she must become a good wife and always submit to her husband.

In this section, I have provided a snapshot of the participant profiles to give understanding and context to each of the eleven participants and their unique GBV experiences. In what follows, I will provide extracts from the interviews that demonstrate the themes and sub-themes of woman abuse that emerged as the participants were asked to share their understanding of GBV.

5.3. Themes and sub-themes of woman abuse

In the first phase of data collection, interviews were conducted, the interview schedule being used to guide the interview conversation. The main question in this phase of the interview was to establish the following:

> How are Black Christian married women suffering at the helm of gender-based violence because of tradition, culture, and religion?

Various themes and sub-themes of woman abuse emerged as participants were asked to share their understanding of GBV.

5.3.1. Theme #1: Types of woman abuse

During the interviews with the Christian women, their stories contained many examples of GBV.

Table 5.1. Theme #1: Categories and forms of woman abuse

Categories of Woman Abuse	Forms of Woman Abuse
Physical abuse	Kicking; Slapping
Economic abuse	Refusing to give money; Money spent on extramarital affairs
Verbal and psychological abuse	Infidelity; Controlling behaviour; Swearing; Using vulgar language; Oppressive behaviour
Sexual abuse	Forced sex; Painful and aggressive sex

One participant shared her definition of woman abuse as follows:

> *According to my understanding GBV relates to the suffering, victimisation of women. You find that the wife is miserable in her marriage. Her husband uses vulgar language, swearing every time he is at home. He acts like a lion that always roars for no apparent reason. When he comes back from work, he depletes his salary with friends and girlfriends. You also find that he drinks excessively and wastes his money without supporting his family at home. But again, this thing of GBV it is vice versa because there are males who suffer in their homes, abused by their wives. ...GBV relates to the abuse in a relationship with a partner. It may not necessarily mean you are abused physically. It can be physical abuse with visible scars and emotional abuse* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Nomusa connects to Nolitha's story. In her narrative, Nolitha further expanded upon the abuse she had suffered when she reported:

> *GBV refers to intentional infliction of emotional, physical, and psychological pain with the aim of either wielding power, instilling fear and/or to control the victim* **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

Nomali summed up her understanding of abuse, underpinned as it was by patriarchy. This is how her narrative expanded:

> *The issue of patriarchy happens when men overpower wives/women no matter how educated they are. All the time a woman is always oppressed. No matter how the man*

may love his wife, but the wife must know her position and remain subservient **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

A similar understanding was shared by Kholiwe during her interview:

> *GBV is the emotional violation without any use of physical power. You begin to ask yourself questions, about the church and about God, asking where is God in this situation? You thus ask the question: "God are you testing me? Are you checking out how much can I endure?"* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

Likewise, Jane could recount:

> *GBV refers to the suffering women endure in the marriage. You find that no matter how educated a woman is, but a man will remind her of her place* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

Ntombi also stated during her interview:

> *My understanding is that GBV happens when couples don't see eye-to-eye in most things. Perhaps sometimes it happens that males lose their temper and beat their wives? Sometimes it is the way a man speaks to his wife that is so degrading to a woman's self-esteem* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.
>
> *My understanding of GBV, if I can mention what is obvious, it is violence based against another gender. It is a male abusing a female physically or it is female abusing a male. They could either be in a relationship or marriage* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.
>
> *But also, I have come to understand that me personally GBV may not be necessarily physical. I am not sure whether does it mean it has to be physical, or we can say abuse can be physical, emotional, or financial [***Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

5.3.2. Theme #2: Exposure to domestic gender-based violence

This theme focuses on exposure to domestic gender-based violence (DGBV).

Table 5.2. Theme #2: Exposure to domestic gender-based violence

Types of Exposure to DGBV	Identification of abuse
Early childhood exposure to abuse	Father beating the mother using a knobkierie
Exposed to DGBV in marriage (By husband)	Infidelity Controlling husband Wife stopped from working
Abuse by in-laws	Policed by in-laws on what to wear

The research participants were asked to reflect on when they became first aware of GBV in their own personal lives. The responses that emerged to this question revealed that the survivor experiences arose in early childhood due to trauma in the home, or from personal experience in an abusive marriage.

Four (4) out of the eleven (11) participants indicated that their first exposure to domestic gender-based violence was in their formative years where they were exposed to traumatic scenes, either between their parents or caregivers. For example, one participant reported:

> *My father would beat my mother into a pulp until my older brother was matured enough to see the abuse. On one fateful day, he beat my mother and my younger sister using a big stick called isagila (knobkerrie)* **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

Another participant would recount:

> *I got exposed to gender abuse from a very young age. One day my father chased my mother and told her to go and leave his premises. He took out his tools and removed the corrugated iron ridiculing her for being iMpondo* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021].**

Two (2) other research participants shared scenes of abuse from their extended family members. Jane cited a different experience whereby her exposure to abuse was from her uncle, who was her caregiver. As a modern urban and educated woman, Jane reflected on the controlling behaviour she categorised as abuse:

> *My aunt was married to my uncle. She was a qualified teacher but when she got married her husband said no wife of mine will work, when I look at their lifestyles, I realise how they have struggled in life. She is so primitive. I realise that she has been*

denied her freedom. Even today, she wears full length skirt, draping her scarf and cover all round with her doek [headscarf). She would remind me that a woman is not supposed to show her arms. This is what she also expects from her daughter's in-law. Years since her husband died, you can see that she was abused a lot **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

I observed GBV at home. When my parents died, I stayed with my uncle and aunt, they would fight when they are drunk. They would go outside naked, and neighbours would see this degrading behaviour **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

Other participants reported that their first experience of oppression and abuse occurred when they were first married:

My experience dates back in our in the early stage of our marriage as young newlyweds who were inexperienced in the field of marriage; approximately in our first five years. My experience of abuse was three-pronged: money, alcohol abuse and infidelity **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

My husband stopped me from studying **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

He would slap me on the face (ngempama). After those violent episodes he would say, he is whipping me just to show how much he loves me **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

My husband refused me from working. Instead, he recommended that I must have a skill a dressmaker so that I work from home. He was afraid that I would be seen by other men and that might lead to unfaithfulness. That time his work entailed a lot of travelling. He would come every month end. He failed to support me and the kids. He will be violent when he is at home demanding food and sex. His infidelity with extramarital affairs led to an infection with HIV. He was never selective in his extra relationships. He would also get mixed up with sex workers and at home he will compare our sex life with all those women. One major sore point in our marriage was that I could not give him a son. He desperately wanted a son to carry the family name **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

In another interview, one of the participants revealed the source and form of her pain, when she recounted:

> *My abuse was not physical. It was only once when we had a very bad fight, he pushed against the wall. So, when issues of infidelity started creeping up and finding out about his cheating. But that did not hurt me so much me but what shattered my spirit and hurt me a lot was being reminded of my poor background* **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

Another participant could narrate:

> *He was beating me up like a boxer. I posted my photo on Facebook. ...My eyes were big and swollen. In fact, my eye closed and to such an extent that I could not see. I got hospitalised and he never came and see me. I reached out for counselling. They called him to be a part of the session and yet he chose not to come* **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

While three other participants could also reveal that:

> *He would come back home and sometimes he would choose not to come back home. So, one time he came back after one o'clock midnight* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.
>
> *We would go together to church, once we are at church, he would act different, greeting and shaking fellow congregant's particularly oGogo (the elderly). He would charm them and call them mkhwekazi (mother-in law)* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.
>
> *I got married very young at the age of 24-years-old. I was doing my second year of teacher training at college when the traditional wedding proceedings started. I was pretty, wearing size 32/34. That when the laws and restrictions started. I was not allowed to wear jeans and tracksuits. Those were a no, no! I had long beautiful hair. During those times we did perm (curly hair) They called me Diana Ross, the singer. My husband I must stop doing my hair, and he said I must plait, the traditional style. My in-laws demanded that I wear a doek (headscarf). People who made those demands was my mother-in-law and my sisters in-law. Another expectation was that as bride and a daughter-in law (makoti) when you are married, you are there to serve them*

(serving the whole family). I would come back from work and there would be dirty dishes and no food on the stove. I would then clean and cook. I submitted to their demands because I did not want them to think I am arrogant **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

He wanted to get married to a second wife and have isithembu (a polygamous marriage) **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

Tholi further recounted that husband would say bad things that humiliated her. He would belittle, by wanting to remind her that:

I am your passport to a beautiful life and without me there is nothing. You are now Mrs, you know descent families because of being associated with me, prominent families **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

Participant Nomusa, Cebi, and Thola shared similar experiences of physical abuse. As Nomusa narrated:

My abuse took place for a period of 10 years before I said enough is enough. He was violent, he would almost hit with a bottle when he was drunk. He would spend time with friends, drink and that contributed to our family situation of abuse. He would show off to his friends, he would listen to the advises from friends. His friends were influential in my suffering. He would oppress me, pushing me to a point that I may leave my house **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Nomusa further expanded on her emotional and verbal abuse, where name calling and vulgar language became a major source of emotional pain in her marriage, when her husband would come home drunk:

He would spend all his salary through drinking alcohol. When he comes back home, he would demand food and when I speak, he would shout and me and the children using foul language. After a while he became a financial burden **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Participant Nala also shared how she was constantly put down by her husband:

He reminded me every time that he has lots of money and making insinuating comments that he can 'buy me' with cars because I have nothing, and I am nothing **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Participant Ntombi could also recount:

> *When I was also diagnosed with MDR TB, I struggled with side effects. I lost my hair, feet getting swollen, and I was always sick. One morning when before he left for work, he asked me "Have you checked your HIV status?" In other words, he assumed I must be unfaithful* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

Again, participant Nala could narrate she was often the recipient of abuse by her husband:

> *My husband used to beat me, insult me in front of my kids. I was not allowed to take decisions on my own. He was the one who decides for the family. There is no form of abuse that I didn't experience* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Yet another participant could similarly narrate:

> *My husband called me names; he would often say I am a slut. On another day he took out his gun and punched me on the head. He even demanded sex* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

While participant Ntombi could recite:

> *I was not allowed to touch my phone at home. At the time WhatsApp was already there but I was not allowed to use it, in fact I was not allowed to even use it. In the event, I would have incoming calls from work while I am at home. When I would respond to these calls, he would say I am cheating on him. After some time, his anger started appearing, and his insecurities revealed. Every time as call rings, I was expected to explain what is happening* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

Reproductive injustice emerged in the stories when women's bodies and women's reproductive health challenges become political.

> *When I miscarried our baby, his argument was that I did not have any ectopic pregnancies, and instead he accused me of abortion, claiming that I did not want is child* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

The research participants also highlighted different experiences of economic abuse, which ranged from being overburdened with financial household responsibilities.

Hence, participant Nomusa could recount:

> *I heard in the neighbourhood that he had resigned from being a teacher. He finished his pension fund with his girlfriend's* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Participants Nomusa and Zuzeni shared similar narratives:

> *My husband would overindulge in alcohol. He had extra-marital affairs in the same location, next to the informal settlements. When he gets paid, it would be difficult to make family plans because his money would be depleted. All other responsibilities will fall on my shoulders. Knowing that I have children I will have to be a responsible mother so that they do get affected. When I think about the abuse, I suffered I realise that my in-laws never accepted me. They will show me that they do not like me. Eve when I seek advice from my mother in-law, she will take my husband sides and blame me for everything* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

> *I suffered in my marriage. He did not want to financially support and maintain his children when he was working. I lodged a court case in Pinetown. I only wanted R1200 because I had a piece job and earned a bit* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

> *He said he can't support 3 children above the age of 21 years and only maintained one child, under the age of 21 years old* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

> *After the court case since the year 1998 he only paid R700 a month. In 2005 he left his marriage home to stay with another girlfriend and left me with the burden of raising the children alone* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

While Nolitha could recall:

> *My abuse was different. It was financial abuse. He worked as an Engineer, and he would get paid overtime. I was never happy since we were together. He contributed 10% and I would contribute 90% for the upkeep of the family. I was overburdened with house responsibilities. He would not buy grocery and not pay school fees and an official would come driving the municipality van to disarm our electricity* **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

Ntombi shared different experiences of abuse which revealed the controlling behaviour of her spouse:

> *He was never bothered when I would wear pants but when wearing a skirt, he would say it is short. He would ask angrily, "who do you think you are?" He would go on and ask, are you a maiden or a married woman? He would make those funny remarks* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

She further expanded on the main struggle her marriage faced:

> *The main things that also made our marriage difficult, is that we struggled to have our own children. When I got married, I already had my daughter and I had two ectopic pregnancies. The last one was so severe, I was hospitalized and stayed in the ICU for four days* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

5.3.3. Theme #3: Impact and consequences of abuse

The research participants were asked to reflect on the effects of abuse in their lives. Each of the participants indicated that the abuse which they had received had had different consequences, affecting their physical bodies, as well as mental and financial health.

Table 5.3. Theme #3: Impact and consequences of abuse

Effects/Impacts of Abuse	Signs and Symptoms of DGBV
Mental effects	Forgetfulness
Emotional effects	Weight loss Lack of confidence Loss of self esteem Self-blame
Socio-economic effects of abuse	Overly burdened with financial responsibilities

The research participants were asked how their various experiences of DGBV had impacted their lives emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually. Moreover, they were asked how DGBV had affected their sense of self and identity.

Three participants could narrate the following experiences:

Mentally I am forgetful, and my mind is crowded with many things which are unfinished. Emotionally I give up easily if something doesn't go my way, because I'm always trying to prove myself **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

The abuse meted out early in my marriage impacted negatively mostly in my emotional state. I used to cry a lot hide my feelings to other people and would pretend as if all was well. My mental state was not so much affected because I learnt very early in life to deal with each incident by trying to communicate my feelings to him; and then moved on without dwelling on the events of the past. My spiritual being was not at all dampened, because of my intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Resorting to prayer was my only option **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

I lost weight due to abuse. I was even diagnosed with bell's palsy. I dropped dress sizes I lost my dress sense **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

The participants revealed how the abuse endured in their homes had impacted their emotional and psychological wellbeing.

Participant Nala disclosed how they have struggled with self-esteem and self-confidence because of being in abusive marriages:

Abuse made me lose self-esteem; I don't trust my judgement **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Participant Phiwe also shared how abuse had affected her self-confidence:

The abuse affected me a lot and shattered my self-confidence. It affected my spirit. I would get emotional and cry day and night because of the abuse I had faced **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

Participant Nala also narrated how the abuse she received disturbed the image she had about marriage and about God:

The suffering I went through destroyed my self-esteem. I lost my confidence. This affected me emotionally and mentally. The whole abuse destroyed the image I had about marriage. All I imagined and thought was that marriage must be about happy parents and happy children living lovingly and peacefully. I asked myself every time why God would let me suffer like this **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Other participants indicated that they had struggled to handle the abuse. Hence, some would self-blame, thinking they were the cause of the abuse:

> *I used to blame myself that I got into this marriage having worked, with assets. So, I would blame myself thinking I have caused myself to be irresponsible. I would worry that I struggle to beg* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Nomusa and Kholiwe, now with adult children, recounted the damage that DGBV had caused to their children. They shared experiences when their children were affected by early exposure to violence:

> *My children were affected negatively because they witnessed fights almost every weekend, they didn't reach their goals, but they are striving to get there* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

> *I always look at my only son and realise that exposure to abuse deeply affected him. I am advising him to get psychological help from the specialists* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

> *My eldest child – an only daughter has not been much affected negatively; I think what saved her from her life being ruined was that she is strong charactered, resistant, and invincible, because she looked up to me as her role model. My younger sons were adversely affected, because they looked up to their weak-charactered father who was not a good role model in numerous ways. I learnt very late where his struggles emanated from* **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

5.3.4. Theme #4: Culture and religion as co-conspirators of DGBV

The interviews focused on how culture and religious teachings, practices, and doctrines became sponsors of pervasive abuse. The stories revealed so much about the church and its toxic teachings on gender equality and marriage

Table 5.4. Theme #4: Culture and religion as co-conspirators of DGBV

Surveying Religion and Tradition	Toxic Indicators of DGBV
Language of oppression (Biblical teachings)	Survival (*Bekezela*): Endure and resist Forgiveness Church anchoring silence and shame
Religion/Faith	Source of help and support A source of keeping woman in a life-denying place
Language of submission (Biblical texts suggesting gender hierarchy)	The man is the head of the household Respect and prayer
Zulu culture and rituals	Signifying a long-lasting bond *Ilobolo* (Bride price) and its implications The marriage kist (marriage chest)

One participant could narrate that:

> *There are church teachings that insist on submission, where a wife must submit to her husband. Everything is put on the shoulders of a woman, everything to make a marriage survive. To men, this may create an impression that they husband have no significant role, to play in marriage. At church we were taught that marriage is a sacrament and by so saying they emphasised that marriage is sacred. They reminded us that not every woman was lucky to chosen for a marriage. But nobody said anything on what one needs to do when there is abuse or any marriage problems* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.
>
> *I can say there is a common belief that a married woman must be patient (bekezela) and stay in her marriage because there is no place where it does not smoke* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.
>
> *At first, I thought marriage was a gift from God and that it would only death that would do us part. I thought death would separate us and come out with a coffin* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Each of the participants were asked to reflect and engage on cultural beliefs and teachings that have permitted abuse to enter marriage life.

One participant could narrate:

> *I was so sacred of the word – divorce. I was afraid of having failed in marriage. I was afraid to fellowship with other believers. Every time I come back from church I would be encouraged by this verse, "This battle is not yours but the Lords"* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

The intersection of religion and culture has manipulated and blackmailed many women survivors to the extent that forgiveness is considered Godliness. This corelation is encouraged by biblical verses that seemingly require victims and survivors to forgive without justice. It remains an observation that religion and resilience have sustained women survivors, anchoring them to endure. A typical narrative concerned struggles that are born from abusive situations and are seen in the light of faith and God's grace and forgiveness. This alludes to the theological doctrines, particularly the glorification of suffering as a true measure of faith.

The following participant responses echo their differing experiences:

> *In my culture, a young woman when she gets married; her family buys her a wooden Kist (marriage chest). This signifies that marriage a single journey with no return. It represents the bride's coffin; which literally means that she will no longer be buried by her own kinsman; but she will be buried by her in-laws, her new family* **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

> *My mother was severely abused in her marriage. She was abused by my father and my aunt (her sister-in-law). When I told her she insisted that I must remain steadfast (bekezela) because this is what everyone did when it came to marriage* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

Although Zuzeni was not confident in disclosing the effects of her abuse, her narrative depicts how she reached a point where she accepted her abuse as her fate and how she felt that God was testing her faith:

> *I had faith that myself together with my children we will survive and be fine. Because of stress I started drinking alcohol and I realised that my life was now taking now a bad route. I told myself that I must be strong and face this situation that I have been bestowed. I told myself God know why he gave this difficult life* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

Other respondents had similar stories to tell:

I was taught to respect and pray. My husband had to treated as a king. I must cook best for him. I did all those things I was not appreciated **[Research Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

I came to the Anglican church in my adult years and the MU leader would advise women to bekezela (lit: 'be patient and resist') and stay in their marriage. She would only say refuse to be taken out of your home because you will be jealous when he takes another woman, and you will have regrets **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

At home I was told that no one has ever divorced from the entire family, so I must persevere even if it's difficult, and the MU women came on Thursday to pray for my marriage. They also told me that Divorce is no acceptable when you are a Christian. Perseverance is the way. I must always pray for whatever happens in my house, of which this is true **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

My granny told me that they would not allow me to come back home since I was a married woman. He said I must go back to my abusive marriage and build my marriage **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

It is considered taboo and shame that you have failed to keep your marriage in family circle and in the neighbourhood. There is that fear what will people say. Some people say you don't pay hard enough, and you are not faithful in reading the Bible and hence, you cannot face the marriage difficulties **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

5.3.5. Theme #5: How the ACSA handles DGBV

The last section of the narratives paid much attention on the ACSA in terms of how it has handled GBV at a parish level. This was to establish church capacity, knowledge, and insight in terms of its handling of survivors. As per Osmer's principle, herein the interview was more interested in establishing how the ACSA currently handles the issue of DGBV theologically. The participants blamed the church for failing women survivors. They reported that it was difficult to find someone to talk to about the abuse they had received, in fear of being shamed as a failure.

Table 5.5. Managing DGBV Challenges within faith communities

Managing DGBV Challenges within Faith Communities	Problematic Responses to DGBV
Faith and prayer	Emphasis on specific religious practices
Sermons and Bible reading Biblical interpretation	Patriarchy: Oppression and inequality
Confidentiality issues / Lack of confidentiality	Who to report to? Issues of trust and anonymity a concern

Two of the participants recounted how they thought the church teachings on patriarchy were responsible both for their abuse and despair:

> *When we got married, we say our vows and we say in good times and difficulties we will fight for our marriage. When I face difficulties, I would remember these teachings and when I think of leaving my marriage, I would feel like I am throwing away these teachings* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.
>
> *I would choose who I share my struggles with because I was afraid of the gossip that would circulate. I only shared with one person. We would meet, talk, and cry. That used to bring relief* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.
>
> *There is a strong teaching that a man is the head of the home, and a woman is the helper. When preachers teach on this, they put an emphasis on this inequality as declared by God. There is an emphasis that men are superior that women* **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

Women survivors shy away from reporting to the church structures, fearing being mocked and looked down upon. Hence, the pastoral care from within church structures remains meaningless, as women leaders see no point in supporting women who are going through such adversities.

Participant Zuzeni explained how one time she extended an invitation to the MU to come and pray at her house when she was going through severe challenges; however, the feedback was not positive:

> *In 1996, I asked the MU members to come and pray, but only one woman came. She was still a follower just like me at the time. I learnt that there is class distinction. If you are a nobody, then no one takes you seriously. From that day onwards, I learnt to*

keep quiet about my marriage struggles **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

I did not report it to church. It was not so bad that it warranted me to seek for church intervention. I think the fact that I was working though earning little, the intervention of the maintenance court brought a great relief. Even if it was so bad, I do not think that I would have had the confidence in disclosing my vulnerability to the type of Priests that we have nowadays, because (in my opinion) they lack compassion – they are more focused on being on the pulpit and preach than listening to our bread-and-butter issues **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

Women survivors often drown themselves in prayer as mentioned by (Gina, 2016b). The different stories shared by the survivors of violence in this study present a picture on how faith organisation have experienced challenges in showing empathy in handling sensitivity around survivor experiences. For example, one participant indicated the following:

It is so painful to suffer in marriage because when you get married you never think that you will endure abuse. But because of your faith in God, you accept your situation because you feel you can't change the situation. Where do you go when you have children, you then stay in that situation even when it is difficult? **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

The participants offered different reasons that made them stay in their marriage despite the DGBV situations in their own homes. One participant recounted the following:

I was so worried what will people say when I choose to leave my marriage. I also had hope that my husband will change and the whole situation will eventually change **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

Another participant feared that her church leaders could not be trusted with matters of confidentiality:

My greatest concern was the lack of confidentiality. I was always afraid that I would report to the priest or church leaders and my matter will become a topic for discussion at church **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Several nuances surfaced from the survivor narratives, which explicates how GBV continues to be shrouded by shame and how those in church leadership positions emphasise prayer as the key element that holds a marriage together. For example, Nomusa could report that:

> *You find that the MU leader would say resist and endure. She will say we must refuse to be taken out of our homes. He often mentioned we must stay so that we do not regret our decision of leaving our marriage. At church, there is empathetic teaching that stay and resist because there is no home where it does not smoke* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

Zuzeni shared a different perspective where she described how religion played a profound role as a source of help and support during difficult times. She further expanded on her own prayer life, sharing how she would connect with God during the difficult seasons of her marriage:

> *I would report to God and say here I am God; I place all my challenges on your shoulders because I cannot do it on my own. I am asking you to help me carry my yoke. Faith teaches us to be strong and to face all touch situations. God hears us but takes longer to respond* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

Accordingly, the narrative around the wooden kist (marriage chest) holds such a deep connotation. and Nomusa mentioned that

> *At first, I tolerated all the struggles in my marriage with the knowledge that marriage is a gift and only death must separate us. I knew the importance of forgiving and forget* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Another participant shared her story and said:

> *What gave me course to stay on is the us as Zulu women we have been programmed on the importance of resisting and surviving the pain (ukubekezela). It reflects badly when leaves her marriage. A woman must stay no matter the difficulties* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.
>
> *My husband bought me like a piece of newspaper. My father never wanted that to marry me off without the ilobola (Bride price) paid in full* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

So, when he started abusing me, I was relieved that he was not owing my family. He paid all the lobolo (Bride price) **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

The participants were asked to share their experiences on how the church responds/attends to women who are abused? Most of the participant's responses revealed that the church lacks tact and struggles to relate to such issues. One participant indicated the following:

You know the truth is that in our parishes there is no space to hold such discussions. As much as we are women, we still lack. We can't even talk to our leaders about our real struggles. We do host GBV campaigns, we talk about the survivors, and we don't unpack it and engage deeply. We have counselling, but we hold it on certain periods, but not regularly **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

I have not yet heard of any of such programmes. The MU has sound objectives that pertain to nurturing marriages; but the leadership has failed to rise to the occasion and deal with the matter positively as a result, marriages have become null and void in their full presence without any intervention **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

At church we are taught about a Proverbs woman. The teach us about the importance of submitting to your husband. The possibility of the divorce is not even considered as a possibility. It is expected that a woman must resist and endure marriage **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

The participants were asked if they reported to any structures in the church. These are some of their responses:

I did not tell or report to anyone. You know the parish is too judgemental. It is too holy. The church is just Jesus, Jesus! **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

I reported to the leaders, but the church never assisted her and instead they told me to pray harder and fast on certain days. This was difficult because nothing changed. I felt stuck in an abusive marriage. Without formal education, it was difficult, to go. I kept asking myself where do I go? Which men will accept me with four children? **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

Many of the women survivors reported that they had been shamed, ridiculed, and pressurised to stay with their abusive spouses all in the name of being good wives who were expected to show reverence to God for their marriage.

5.3.6. Theme #6: How faith communities support women in abusive marriages

Table 5.6. DGBV prevention and response strategies

Responses to DGBV within Faith Spaces	Pastoral Intervention Guidelines
Empowerment programmes	Counselling and Pastoral care services Pre-counselling Post-wedding counselling (on-going)
Advocacy programmes	Break the silence about violence against women
Empowerment resources	Self-help books
Teachings for couples	Equality: Roles and responsibilities
Building networks	An intersectoral approach with other local stakeholders

The research participants expressed their thoughts on how the church could create space for women survivors to be assisted. There suggestions centred mainly on the survivors of woman abuse.

Kholiwe and Nomusa shared similar views:

> *The youth, both males and females, need to be taught about marriage. Marriage was initiated by God. They must know marriage requires what type of people, for example being taught on how to resist temptations. Because most challenges begin when you are still in a relationship. Trust is important. Boys must be taught manners. And they must know how women are treated* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.
>
> *It is important the church hold classes for the youth where they are taught about marital roles and be made to understand that Gods purpose about marriage. Couples need to be advised of the importance of marrying someone who is your level to avoid conflicts. It is important that the Mothers Union identifies seasoned women of faith who can be trained to journey with the abused women. Women who will have tact and a manner of approach, compassion, empathy, love, confidentiality. We need women who can keep confidentiality so that women survivors can be free to offload. I also suggest that*

that the couple consults with the priests before and after umshado (marriage) and be free to engage on the challenges they experience and the struggles they are facing so that they may be fully supported as individuals and as a couple. It's important that counselling does not emphasise respect in a manner that is one sided to husband, that message must be made clear to him that he needs to respect himself and respect his wife and respect the institution of marriage. It is important that the counselling sessions unpack details of how life sometimes unfolds in marriage, but it must be stressed that being rooted in Christ helps navigate challenges, but if you have prayed and things do not improve. For those who are already married, if they start experiencing challenges even when they have prayed hard, there must be solid structures within the parish that can handle these marital issues. But women who are suffering in silence must also be brave enough to approach a priest (mfundisi) and not die in silence and shame. Mfundisi needs to show up and be available to hear couples' stories and then work with other women who can provide solutions. There must be youth programmes that teach them on the effects of alcohol, marriage, and the choice of friends. They need to be trained from a young age to be responsible and one day they will become husbands and play their part as growing men. These should be youth classes of 10 that are attended, engaging the youth on challenges. These groups should be the platform for tackling gender roles, marriage, and family life **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

I have not yet heard of any programmes. The MU has sound objectives that pertain to nurturing marriages; but the leadership has failed to rise to the occasion and deal with the matter positively; as a result, numerous marriages have become null and void in their full presence without any intervention **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

I would have appreciated if she may have looked at my matter and advised me differently, than praying only. For an example, give me books to read or advise me to meet other women with similar cases, because at that time I was blank, I just needed help **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Churches should have programmes to help GBV victims, invite people who are experienced on such issues. Because women are dying alone, not knowing who to turn to **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Another participant shared a different viewpoint:

> *I think the church must provide rounded teachings on what to expect about marriage, marriage roles and issues of equality. I worry if everyone divorces what kind of a society are we building. But also, when we say couples must stay in abusive marriages, until when?* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.
>
> *When we say they must not bekezela, what kind of a world are we creating, because there will be many divorces* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.
>
> *The church should not be silent about DGBV and just turn a blind eye as if all is well. Programmes to empower young men and women should be formed, communication and training of women, through symposia, small groups, dialogue conferences etc. a gender desk for women empowerment, involvement of other stakeholders i.e., social workers, psychologists, SAPS, lawyers viz., should be brought on board. Anyone who has specialized knowledge and skills, that could be of value to women empowerment would be appreciated* **[Research Participant Nomali, 05 July 2021]**.

5.3.7. Other emerging themes

During the interviews, some unexpected data emerged. For example, the interviews revealed that in some families, abuse manifests in a generational pattern.

Participant Celi could narrate:

> *My mother was abused by my father. My husband was very abusive. He controlled every move I made. He controlled my spending. My daughter fell into the same trap of dating an abusive man who was physically abusive. One fateful evening I received a call. My daughter's fiancé said my daughter had been rushed to hospital. He told me that him and my daughter had a terrible fight. He stabbed her and it was fatal. My daughter died* **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

Cebi reported that her complex background had created further vulnerabilities, making it difficult to escape abuse. This is where a socio-economic situation in the home created a recurring pattern of abuse. Cebi related it in this way:

> *In fact, my story is a unique story of pain. I grew up staying in the children's home, then years later I went back home and stayed with my grandmother. My mom was*

roaming down the streets. So, after my grandmothers passing, my mother came back and stayed with us up until I fell pregnant in grade 11 **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

Nolitha reported that she decided to stay in her marriage despite the abuse:

I stayed because I had another child. I realised that I can't afford my child not to be fatherless since my other relationship with my first child's father did not work out **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

Nomusa made the following suggestions for future programmes on how churches should handle GBV issues:

It is important that the church hosts youth classes where they teach them prior marriage about marriage roles and responsibility. The youth need to God's purpose about marriage. It is important that couples understand the importance of marrying someone of your class to avoid conflicts. The MU must identify knowledgeable elders to journey with the abused women. These women must be kind, compassionate, loving and must exercise confidentiality **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Women who have been abused tend to be forgiving and often feel sorry for the perpetuators of violence. This narrative of 'forgive and forget' owes its existence to biblical and theological teachings. However, this does not curb violence; instead, women continue to endure suffering fearing that their husbands will stop their financial support. Financial dependency has marked many marriages as abusive and oppressive sites.

One participant asserted that when she was abused:

He said he was feeling sorry and shame for what he did. I tried to open a case of abuse then I realised that if I open the case, he will have a problem at work. So, he apologised. However, that did not change him. He continued to be violent. He made my life a living hell up until I realised that this marriage was not working out. He moved out of the house ***[*Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

5.3.8. Prayer and intercession (the language of inequality)

This study never set itself to study the prayers of women survivor as part of text to be considered as data. However, the nuances and the language used in prayer emerged as a set of data worthy of reflection and engagement.

> *God have mercy on women and man who experienced GBV, give us strength to continue praising you. We know that you don't like divorce but at the same time you don't like your people to suffer. Amen* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.
>
> *Nkulunkulu **Baba**[1] siza Kuwe **singelutho**[2] siza kuwe sinenkinga ezahlukeneyo. Baba olungileyo ungumqalisi nomphelelisi. Konke baba olungileyo uye uthi imithwalo yethu asiyilethe kuwena uzosithwalela.*
>
> *God; the Father. We come to you. We are nothing. We bring different challenges. Dear God, our Father, you are the author and the finisher. You always say we must bring our burdens unto you so that you carry them [English translation]* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

5.4. Field diary entries (researcher's experiences)

In the process of co-constructing meaning for myself in this data collection process, I was confronted with my own emotions that were resurfacing, which I had to note and acknowledge:

> Whilst the love for research ignited me to continue with my data collection, I realised that I never anticipated to hear such depth of women suffering, where many have experienced in their abusive marriages. I never anticipated that this would invoke secondary trauma for me. I had to pause for days before I interviewed another participant. It was important to allow this process so that I do justice to each narrative. I was mindful not to contaminate any interview through the experiences of another **[Field Diary entry, 13 February 2021: Notes from my Field Diary following interviews]**.

[1] Language can communicate both exclusion and inclusion. In this instance, gender-exclusive language is problematic when it emerged that women refer to God in masculine terms.

[2] The bold font brings attention to detail where the bold word alludes to identity struggles where a survivor accepts her position of power and subservience.

Today I found myself wearing two caps, that of a researcher, and the other as a lay counsellor. The situation demanded that I create that balance and show empathy and compassion when the participant broke down in tears. I had to stop the interview and attend to the raw emotions of pain. This has taught me the value of humanity where the researcher must relate to the research process on a human level. Instead, I used this time to engage the participant of psychological resources that may help her cope better **[Field Diary entry, 08 February 2021: Notes following fieldwork]**.

After a couple of interviews, I went home and cried. My spirit felt heavy hearing stories many women have been silent about and when everybody expected them to hold their marriages a noble wife (*a makoti*). I feel even more sad to learn of how certain patterns of abuse are passed down generationally, when no one disrupts the pattern of toxicity and abuse **[Field Diary entry, 03 May 2021: Notes following interviews]**.

I realise that I as the researcher struggled to ask some questions on sexuality and sexual violence. I also noticed that women survivors never opened up much on this kind of abuse. I realise perhaps this speaks to such a topic as a taboo subject. Hence, my own cultural beliefs prevented me from digging deeper **[Field Diary entry, 21 June 2021: Notes following interviews]**.

I feel privileged to be trusted, trusted by all these women who have shared their narratives. I may not be able to give them much. It felt humbling to me when she said thank you for listening. This was healing! I have learnt that that life-affirming space where one listens to your story, that matters…!" **[Field Diary entry, 16 March 2021: Notes following fieldwork)**.

5.5. Chapter summary

This chapter focused on the data presentation. This data was centred on the lived experienced of Christian married women survivors of domestic violence, and speaks to seven dominant themes: the contextual socio-economic challenges, patriarchal structures, toxic theologies, and cultural beliefs and systems, women as enablers of patriarchy, shame, and self-silencing. This study uncovered the silence and the silencing of Christian women by the pervasive Christian language that glorifies suffering. Lastly, one theme that appeared in this data unexpectedly alluded to the presence of generational trauma of GBV in families. The above themes continue to subjugate Christian women survivors to trauma and suffering within marriage. The overarching theme that has strong undertones is that which recognises

the phenomenon of patient endurance (*ukubekezela)*. As a prevailing culture, this has been normalised and enforced as a taught/learned virtue, where religion and culture directly or indirectly shape women to patiently endure.

In the following chapter, these themes will be engaged, discussed, and analysed.

Chapter 6: Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Discussion of Findings – Based on the Survivor Narratives of Christian Women Who Shared Their Lived Experience of DGBV

"Storytelling has always been at the heart of being human because it serves some of our most basic needs: passing along our traditions, confessing failings, healing wounds, engendering hope, strengthening our sense of community" (Palmer, 2009: 122).

6.1. Introduction

In Chapter five, data presentation was based on the thick narratives of Christian married women who shared their lived experiences of DGBV in their Christian households. In this chapter, I intend to reflect on the women's narratives, which are fundamental to the healing of Christian women. I will engage and will provide a thematic analysis and a discussion from the empirical work which is presented from the previous chapter. Pertinent themes that situate violence in the Christian homes of survivors from this collated data are teased out. The latter part of the chapter teases out unexpected themes that emerged from the narratives. This is part of the interpretive task of the study as examines DGBV within the lived experiences of Christian married women within the ACSA.

In collating the empirical work in this study, clear intentions were set on asking the following questions:

i. How are Christian married women suffering at the helm of gender-based violence because of patriarchal beliefs, culture, and religion?
ii. How does the ACSA currently handle this pastoral challenge?

It is for this reason that in the previous chapter I presented an account of survivor narratives explicating their unique experiences of DGBV, which included emotional, psychological, and financial abuse that women have experienced. This highlighted amplified issues of patriarchy, culture and religion and other constellation factors that put women in a difficult position that subjects them to abusive marriages. The second part of the project aimed at establishing how the ACSA currently handles DBGV as a pastoral and a theological challenge. By using Osmer's pragmatic tools, I presented in chapter five and chapter six the descriptive-empirical task. Here in chapter six, I will provide a rich analysis of data based on the narratives of the Christian women survivors as part of the interpretive task of the study. Pertinent issues that emerged in the findings will also discussed.

6.2. Findings relating to the interviews

The following table presents the six major themes that emerged from the data. The results are based on the findings and analysis of the themes and sub-themes as discussed below.

Table 6.1. The anthropology of GBV within the CSA: Problematising GBV and mapping change

Themes	Sub-themes
Nature of abuse	Physical abuse Economic abuse Verbal and psychological abuse Sexual abuse
Exposure to violence	Early childhood exposure to abuse Exposed to GBV in marriage Abuse by in-laws
Impact/consequences of abuse	Mental effects of abuse Emotional effects of abuse Socio-economic effects of abuse
Culture and religion as co-conspirators of DBGV	Religion Life denying practices, doctrines Male headship Resist and survival Silence and secrecy Atonement consciousness Practice of the Zulu culture and rituals *Ilobolo* (bride price), polygamy and marriage
How the ACSA handles DGBV?	Faith and prayer Lack of confidentiality
What the church needs to do to support women in abusive marriages.	Empowerment and Advocacy programmes Build networks (professional specialist services) Social workers Psychologists/Counsellors Law enforcement

6.3. Marriage as a site of women's oppression

The ongoing reality of GBV warrants that we amplify the voices of women victim-survivors. While the themes and sub-themes presented in Table 6.1 paint a grim picture of painful suffering, the women survivors being the participants of this study, demonstrated bravery in the face of adverse circumstances during their toxic marriages. In this way they regained, power, voice, and healing in breaking the silence code. However, the predicament of GBV continues to ravage the church and this is obvious where silence is normalised. Table 6.1 presents themes and sub-themes that excavate below the contours of DGBV as the contextual challenge within faith spaces. In this research study I have opted to use DGBV as mentioned in chapter One, this was to give impetus to domestic abuse and gender-based abuse as I relate to family violence, marital abuse, and spousal abuse. Throughout the entire study, the focus was the centrality of intimate partner violence (IPV). All these terms have been used interchangeably. This is the reality where family violence continues to ravage Christian households. The narratives reflected that DGBV is a silent killer bringing all sorts of anxiety, stress, and depression. Women in abusive relationships particularly within the church space, struggle to open up. The most common revelation is that these women due to their strong Christian beliefs continue to suffer in silence *'bakhala bayazithulisa,'* afraid to hang their dirty linen out in public. Consequently, DGBV remains prevalent across all socio-economic spheres, societies, races, and different religions.

This study intentionally purposed to expose the truth that Christian women within the ACSA are not immune to gendered violence. Hence, in this research study, I first wanted to explore how these women understood what the concept of gender-based violence meant and how they personally connect to their understanding, meanings, and definition. The participants revealed that GBV is a type of violence where power is exerted over women. The interviews conducted highlighted DGBV as a phenomenon where there is a continued female subjugation through male dominance.

6.3.1. Theme #1: Types of woman abuse

The participants who partook in the individual interviews expressed their understanding of GBV, their common perception of the notion being that women subjugation is at its centre, manifesting as oppression, control, and abuse. Amenga-Etego (2006: 27) speaks of "the crosscutting 'triplets' of sexual, domestic and gender-based violence" which also emerged in this study. This data manages to establish how abused women measure the level, the gravity, and the severity of abuse. In some instances, they regard the abusive element of GBV when it is only physical. My argument is that GBV is elusive; hence, in the context of Christian households, women tend to be typical apologists as they are not confident enough to spell out abuse as an unwanted feature in their marriages.

Gender-based violence exists according to various patterns. It is impossible however not to highlight the basis of GBV, being religio-cultural socialising factors, which males have been shaped and exposed to. This sets in place male privilege as their understanding of manhood and masculinity, whereby they think they are entitled to do as they please. My argument stems from what was highlighted in chapter two about patriarchal ideologies in patriarchal communities, where a man is the head of the house and does not need to be questioned about his whereabouts. The research participants identified abuse as physical abuse, economic abuse, verbal and psychological abuse and sexual abuse.

6.3.1.1. Women feel trapped in their marriages

In most narratives that emerged in chapter five, women who have found themselves in abusive marriages somehow concur with one another that when they met their then boyfriends who became their husbands, they thought they had hit the jackpot and had found their prince charming. There seems also, a general centrality of finances/economic resources that made them endure the suffering and tolerate the abuse. Prior to each interview, I asked each of the participants demographic questions, trying to ascertain who they were, their age, where they stayed, how long they had been married, what their spouse did for living, and the status of their marriage. During this initial conversation, I was able to ask about the early days of the couple's relationship and marriage. Most of the participants got married younger and most shared that the marriage seemed fine at first and things only changed when they were married as husband and wife. Only one participant, Nala, shared having spotted red flags prior to getting married, but chose to turn a blind eye. The discussion I had gave me a sense that women survivors were vulnerable at some point, and yet these experiences varied. Data collected revealed that, while some participants work, and enjoy a particular level of education, they all expressed certain stereotypes about marriage and about men in general, where a husband must be a protector and a breadwinner. Some came from families where their fathers were abusive and irresponsible, and others came from families where the male figures were upright men. These shaped how they filtered their understanding of abuse.

The first question aimed at establishing what each participant understood about GBV. Most of the participants cited physical, emotional, mental, and financial abuse as the basis of their suffering. The narratives predominantly shared includes those of Nomusa, Jane, Tholi, Kholiwe, Cebi and Nala. The stories they shared defines and give shape to the complex issue of abuse:

> *My understanding gender-based violence relates to the suffering, victimisation of women. You find that the wife is miserable in her marriage. Her husband uses vulgar language, swearing every time he is at home* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

GBV is the emotional violation without any use of physical power **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

My understanding of GBV, if I can mention what is obvious, it is violence based against another gender. It is a male abusing a female physically or it is female abusing a male **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

All the time a woman is always oppressed. No matter how the man may love his wife, but the wife must know her position and remain subservient **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

A person may die alive for the longest time when people don't even notice **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

While one participant did not say much, she nevertheless revealed that she had been abused sexually:

When my husband was home, there was limited joy and happiness. He would demand sex forcefully and he ended up infecting me HIV & AIDS **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

The only narrative that revealed spiritual abuse was an embodied experience shared by Ntombi. In her own words, she shared the following:

We would go together to church, once we are at church, he would act different, greeting and shaking fellow congregant's particularly oGogo (the elderly). He would charm them and call them mkhwekazi (mother-in-law) **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

6.3.2. Theme #2: Exposure to domestic gender-based violence

The participants were asked as to when they had their first exposure to a relationship of power with abusive traits. The narratives shared revealed that some of the participants were exposed to violence during their formative years as children, either by a parent or a primary caregiver who was abusive.

The following narratives spell out some of these childhood experiences:

> *My father would beat my mother into a pulp until my older brother was matured enough to see the abuse. On one fateful day, he beat my mother and my younger sister using a big stick called isagila (knobkerrie)* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

> *I observed GBV at home. When my parents died, I stayed with my uncle and aunt, they would fight when they are drunk. They would go outside naked, and neighbours would see this degrading behaviour* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

> *The suffering in my home started after my father's passing. His family took his belongings from my mother. My mother was denied inheritance* **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

When asked when the survivors became aware of the abuse, some of the participants shared being exposed to family/spousal violence and later surviving abuse in the own marital homes. What emerged from these stories is that the abuse manifested as coercive power and control where their lives were engulfed with fighting, control, and restrictions.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *He was beating me up like a boxer. I posted my photo on Facebook. I will look for the photo and show you. My eyes were big and swollen* **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

> *He would slap me on the face (ngempama). After those violent episodes he would say, he is whipping me just to show how much he loves me* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

> *When I would wear pants but when wearing a skirt, he would say it is short. He would ask angrily, "who do you think you are? He would go on and ask, are you a maiden or a married woman?* **[Research Participant Ntombi, 08 February 2021]**.

> *My husband stopped me from studying* **[Research Participant Cebi, 12 January 2021]**.

> *He was violent, he would almost hit with a bottle when he was drunk. He would spend time with friends, drink and that contributed to our family situation of abuse* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

> *My husband called me names; he would often say I am a whore. On another day, he took out his gun and punched me on the head. He even demanded conjugal rights* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

> *Another difficulty in my marriage was the issue of a son since I only have girls. When I confronted him about his infidelity, he would say he wants a woman to bear him one so that his surname lives on* **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

The research participants were also exposed to economic abuse when they became overburdened with financial responsibilities. Economic abuse results when the

> …perpetrator holds back necessary household money, preventing his or her spouse from earning money, confiscating the money that might have been earned, control all household spending or spending money only to his or her benefit (Mashiri, 2013: 97).

There is a prevailing theme of deprivation and control that threads through certain of the lived experiences articulated. For example, in Nomusa's account her husband resigned as a teacher and the entire responsibility of raising her children was placed on her shoulders. Likewise, in Zuzeni's narrative, her husband abandoned her, leaving her with four children to bring up. Her situation changed slightly when she had him served with maintenance papers.

6.3.2.1. *Abuse by in-laws*

> *My in-laws demanded that I must wear the doek (headscarf) even when I am going to work. That was embarrassing since not a single person wore a doek (headscarf) in my workplace. When they caught me not wearing one, my sister's in-law summoned me into a meeting, and I was accused of being a relationship* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

The data revealed that abuse also relates to how a woman is abused by her in-laws. The suffering women endure is crippling, where often they are cornered into a language of submission and victimisation. I equate this kind of treatment where a daughter-in law is treated as a child and often treated as an outsider with no capacity to think and make her own decisions. Jane's s narrative echoed

this sentiment that this kind of abuse and suffering disempowers. It left her in a position where she could not defend herself and consequently lacked the power and voice to speak and articulate her position.

In her narrative, Jane expanded on this type of abuse:

> *You know when you are married, there is this belief that when you are a makoti you have come to serve the in-laws. My sister's in-law would sit and watch the TV and I would iron heaps of laundry baskets alone. Even though I did not like it, I nevertheless wanted to show them I am a good person. I wanted to please them* **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

Women often feel trapped in marriages where they have no power, no voice, and no resources to make their lives manageable. I argue that this is a kind of dependency that sets the scene for abuse in settings where a wife gets subjected to abuse because she is relying on her spouse for family support. The narratives reveal that there is an ongoing control whereby spouses either deny women the opportunity of financial security by furthering their studies, or improving their financial position through employment. This is another reality in which men have been socialised to be providers. The control and economic deprivation they wield speaks to the role that says only a man can take real care of his own family, which extends to having his wife relying solely on him. However, both the act of control and accepting control, are products of socialisation linking to traditional social roles of femininity and masculinity permitted in various cultural contexts, which I call out as a hindrance and a determining factor of worthiness. In this instance, I argue that these traditional roles and societal expectations in terms of fulfilling these set roles have proved to be the fertile ground for abuse and women victimisation. While masculinity shapes how the society views a man's prowess, intellect, power, and position, the 'breadwinner phenomenon' turns out to be toxic, particularly when it is shifted into a tool of control. Certain narratives engaged in the previous chapter, fit this profile, and have shaped how Christian women experience their marriages, particularly when the woman does not work and becomes vulnerable to a life of indignity.

Three participants shared that their abuse was never physical. However, they each indicated that for major parts of their marriage, they were overburdened with financial responsibilities when their husbands did not want to take care of the families financially. For example:

> *I suffered in my marriage. He did not want to financially support and maintain his children when he was working* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

> *My abuse was different. It was financial abuse. He worked as an Engineer, and he would get paid overtime. I was never happy since we were together. He contributed 10% and I would contribute 90% for the upkeep of the family. I was overburdened with household responsibilities. He would not buy groceries, nor pay school fees* **[Research Participant Nolitha, 12 March 2021]**.

> *When he got paid, even when he had received a bonus, I did not see his money. Everything would fall on my shoulders, the house, school fees, and the children's needs* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

The women survivor narratives displayed how they had endured suffering in their Christian homes ranging from psychological to spiritual manipulation. Yet, most of the participants revealed that their own experiences of abuse were centred around infidelity:

> *He would spend all his money on his girlfriends* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

> *I heard via gossips that he was staying with his girlfriend, and I realised that there is no life since I don't even work* **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

Some narratives revealed that married women stay on in abusive marriages. One participant was able to connect with the abuse she experienced because of her husband's extramarital affairs. Her courage and patient endurance *(ukubekezela)* made her stronger, allowing her to stay in her marriage, even though it was no longer a conducive environment for nourishing herself or being able to flourish according to God's will as described in John 10:10.

Religious teachings make it difficult for women to leave a marriage since the Bible proclaims marriage indissoluble and remarriage is considered sin. For Christian families, religious beliefs and practices can be toxic, causing a woman who wants a divorce or has been divorced, to feel extreme guilt (Marks, 2006). Research conducted by Simister and Kowalewska has shown that conservative "Christian women stay in an abusive marriage because they consider divorce sinful" (2016: 1626). This spiritual entrapment I argue is problematic because these religious expectations can cause tremendous harm.

One participant expressed her fears about divorcing in this way:

> *At home I was told that no one has ever divorced from the entire family, so I must persevere even if it's difficult, and the Manyano women came on Thursday to pray for my marriage. They also told me that divorce is not acceptable when you are a*

Christian. Perseverance is the way. I must always pray for whatever happens in my house. Of which this is true **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

I was afraid of the word divorce. I used to associate it with failure. I was afraid people would say I have failed. As much I was afraid of going to church, when I did, I would hear, 'this battle is not yours, it's the Lords' and this would encourage me **[Research Participant Jane, 18 April 2021]**.

6.3.3. Theme #3: Impact and consequences of abuse

The participants were asked how DGBV had affected them and their children. Scholars state that being in an abusive relationship can affect a person in many ways. There are real struggles associated with mental health and self-confidence, which have a negative effect on a person's wellbeing. The trauma associated with GBV may produce health problems resulting in injurious physical and mental outcomes (Freyd et al., 2005). The participants indicated that the effects of domestic violence and gender-based violence have showed up negatively, affecting them both emotionally and psychologically.

The participants shared the following narratives regarding how they have been damaged by the reality of DGBV:

Abuse made me lose self-esteem; I don't trust my judgement **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Mentally I am forgetful, and my mind is crowded with many things which are unfinished. Emotionally, I give up easily if something doesn't go my way, because I'm always trying to prove myself **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

The suffering I went through destroyed my self-esteem. I lost my confidence. This affected me emotionally and mentally. The whole abuse destroyed the image I had about marriage **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Two participants indicated that their children were affected by the trauma they witnessed in an abusive marriage. One specifically noted that that her only son was so traumatised by what he saw as a child, that he has struggled psychologically as an adult and needs therapy.

The following narratives represent two of the responses received:

My children were affected negatively because they witnessed fights almost every weekend, they didn't reach their goals, but they are striving to get there **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

I always look at my only son and realise that exposure to abuse deeply affected him. I am advising him to get psychological help from the specialists **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

6.3.4. Theme #4: Culture and religion as co-conspirators of DGBV

Marriage is designated a Holy Sacrament according to the ACSA. Accordingly, Christian couples accept marriage as a gift from God as it demonstrates the highest calling bestowed upon them by grace. Religion and culture are said to present contours of oppression and a language of inequality. One factors in here those contours as the determinants of religion misuse and the misinterpretation of African culture to shape a climate for abuse. In this instance, one participant narrative indicated that women survivors still believe that they need to stay in their marriages until death do us part, and culturally victory in marriage is evident when women resist. The church has perpetuated patriarchal teachings and values that have sharpened our social context, both culturally and biblically. This speaks to the strong emphasis of male domination, where men are highly acclaimed as heads.

6.3.4.1. *Male domination and woman submission*

The research participants revealed that church teachings are centred around maleness and masculinity, as the theology taught and fortified through Bible texts. The patriarchal language of inequality is proclaimed.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

In church, the teachings indicate that it is the role of wife/woman to submit to a man **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

I was taught to respect and pray. My husband had to treated as a king. I must cook best for him. I did all those things I was not appreciated **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

It is common knowledge that a man is the head of the home, and a woman is a man's helper **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

6.3.4.2. *The doctrine of resist and survival*

The messages contained in religion are central to the discourse of resisting. A sense of pride is often associated with managing to endure trials and tribulations in marriage.

The following two narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *I came to the Anglican church in my adult years. The parish leader would encourage that I stay in my marriage and resist (bekezela)* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.
>
> *What kind of a society are we shaping if married women fail to resist (bekezela), do you mean they must opt for divorces just because they can't resist (bekezela)* **[Research Participant Kholiwe, 03 July 2021]**.

History maintains that resisting the difficulties of marriage has always been normalised. In one of the narratives, Kholiwe asked a rhetorical question: "What kind of a society are we building when married women fail to bekezela?" She expanded her response by referring to the global reality of street children, public violence, and public health issues, all of which she linked to the effects of GBV. Having been married for almost 45 years, it is evident that even woman leaders in the church are struggling to navigate ways and lessons to pass down to younger generations, where women need to be liberated and where peace and sanity are pillars of humanity.

6.3.4.3. *The glorification of suffering*

According to Nash and Hesterberg (2009: 3), "the valorisation of Christ's suffering" has been characterised as a language that causes women survivors to endure suffering. One may argue that a particular outlook on God and perspective on the spiritual value of suffering is accepted as a source of strength. Religion becomes the frame of reference as a means of making meaning. In confirming this assertion, one participant narrated her experience this way:

> *All I can say is that religion helps you to stay anchored. You go to your corner and weep. God hears you, but takes longer to respond* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

6.3.4.4. *Zulu cultural practices and rituals*

Culture has been studied as a contributory factor in the lives of married women. A different perspective was shared, describing how women in modern times show adoration for being the "chosen one" through the bride receiving the groom's surname.

In the context of the patriarchal system, "polygamy and *ilobolo* are deeply-rooted practices that still endure and are considered very important within African cultures" (Zondi, 2007: 21). Accordingly, Zondi claims that cultural practices and customs have caused much anguish for women because, "men tend to consider them 'paid for' or 'bought commodities' and to be used as they please" (2007: 21). In confirmation of this, the research participants narrated that the cultural practice of *ukulobola* created a climate for their abuse and oppression.

A further participant shared a different viewpoint about *ukulobola (bridewealth)*. From her perspective, *ukulobola* represented a sense of pride. In this instance, it emerged that the participant embraced this commodification of culture using the same language that signifies being 'bought' which explained the speediness of her *lobola* negotiations. She thus narrated:

> *Wangithengisa okwephepha ngoba ubaba wayengafuni umuntu ayoshada kukhona isikweletu (He purchased me like a newspaper because my father ensured that he does not owe and is never in debt when he marries me*) **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021].**

The literal meaning of this expression is that she was purchased. The implication is that she welcomes the connotation of being bought as a property. Secondly, there is a sense of admiration to be the luckiest maiden to get to this level in a relationship. Thirdly, it defines a layer of socioeconomic background, in most instances where one accepts to become a wife, it is because she does not work, and the groom holds power in the relationship. Hence, it is a state of patriarchal control that is bound to exist when one party is dependent on the other for survival.

This theme emerged in different survivor narratives, and is evidence that African culture controls the mindset, the general expectation being that they are worthy of being controlled. Marriage continues to be held in highest esteem; anyone's success is measured according to her/his marital status. Whether a person is enjoying or enduring their marriage, that is an irrelevant consideration. Interestingly, religious teachings and doctrines continue to perpetuate this myth, sanctioning it biblically. As discussed in chapter two, where *lobola* ('bride price') is admired for the significant role it plays, data demonstrated that it also holds a negative connotation in society. Obviously, this cultural practice continues to be respected; hence it is viewed as a "reward for their good conduct and as conferring dignity on their

position as a wife" (Rudwick & Posel, 2015: 290). While *ilobola* is known to reinforce gender inequalities, the participants still expressed taking pride in being asked for their hand in marriage and the *lobola* being paid to the bride's family. In acceding to this notion, data revealed the following about *ilobola:*

> *Wayefuna ukuthata isithembu. (He wanted to get married to a second wife and have isithembu (polygamy)* **[Research Participant Tholi, 05 February 2021]**.

In patriarchal settings, due to the deep association of culture and traditional beliefs, in the context of marriage some families hold on to the heteronormative teachings where culture means being in a polygamous marriage and have *'isithembu'* despite being a Christian.

In the context of human rights, women have argued against this cultural practice citing it as another element of abuse. Scholars argue that in contemporary times where many are against it, women feel abused when they are threatened by the idea of being in a polygamous marriage. Tholi revealed in her narration that her husband would create drama at home, and he would berate her, and make her feel small. In the African context, there is a symbolic representation of a coffin, which is pivotal in a traditional wedding, which has been introduced in chapter two and known as a kist (a wooden marriage box) which is used to carry gifts for the in-laws.

Women who emerge from marginal sectors of life either because of poverty or poor resources are held captive and still find themselves in abusive marriages, at the coal face of abuse. This alludes to male power, control, and manipulation. In situations where marriage is regarded as an achievement, women who aspire of being rescued from poverty have often found themselves vulnerable at the hands of their husbands and intimate partners. This is no way different from being reminded that you are not important, and you are not worthy. It is common connotation and narrative that exists in the context of a marriage, that African people argue that a woman's identity exists in being married. So, when a man marries, he is 'buying' his bride, and he is giving her his identity.

Something that may have a different meaning and suggests that prior to marriage, a woman is born in her home of origin, but her identity exists only after she is married. Hence, in Tholi's narrative, her husband flagged their marriage as a passport to being and doing great things. Derogatory statements as such in this study are a good reflection of abuse which exposes women to levels of inferiority and unhappiness.

6.3.5. Theme #5: How the ACSA handles DGBV

In responding to this question, participants were asked: "How, from their understanding and experience, does the ACSA handle DGBV?" The responses that emerged cited church practices, doctrines and language contained in the liturgy. The church continues to be steeped in conservative practice where religious faith and prayer sustains the congregants.

6.3.5.1. *Faith and prayer*

> *I was taught to respect and pray. My husband had to treated as a king. I must cook best for him. I did all those things I was not appreciated. ...I reported to the group leader (Umholi). She said she would pray for* ***me*** **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

Another participant reported that:

> *There is a scripture that says in sickness and health, in goodness and bad times, a man and a wife must stick together. When I encounter challenges, I always try to honour these teachings because when I reject them, it means I have gone astray to the church teachings* **[Research Participant Zuzeni, 16 March 2021]**.

6.3.5.2. *Silence and secrecy*

Scholars such as Nash (2006), highlight the institutional silence of wife abuse in Christian homes. It is thus argued that church, MU, and AWF leaders, through their sermons and counsel, could urge some religious women to tolerate and/or return to abusive relationships. This stance on hiding the abuse women endure deters options and pathways to create interventions by the church. The participants reported that religious leaders contend that women survive by keeping silent on the real challenges they face in their marriages. The guilds have demonstrated participation in their unawareness in perpetuating violence through lack of support and withholding prayer support to women survivors. It is evident that such acts of disservice have endorsed silence which renders the church in complicit partnership with the destructive forces of women abuse.

The silence of the church is deafening, resulting in some scholars suggesting that the church has taken sides with the perpetrators of injustice. This further reinforces the abuse of women survivors, who desperately need the 'Shepherd of the flock' to address the struggles they face. The spiritual entrapment of Christian wives is justified through the typical justification of biblical texts. The word 'divorce' is still frowned upon and thus women who are already broken and shattered are expected to pray harder,

as a way of saving their marriages. Women in church pews carry the burden of indignity and shame, but somehow, they have a way of concealing these vulnerable bodies and wounded souls in public. These are women that remain prayerful and resisting violence in the name of Jesus.

The interviews clearly revealed that most survivors choose to suffer silently in their marriages because of religio-cultural messages that are constantly impressed upon them even from a very young age. The participants provided different reasons why they stayed in abusive marriages. One participant could thus admit:

> *I stayed in my marriage for 26 years hoping my husband would change* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

6.3.6. Theme #6: How can faith communities support women in abusive marriages?

The participants were asked to share their thoughts about intervention strategies the church might employ to advocate for gender justice and gender equality as a collective fight against GBV. The responses that emerged highlighted that the church needs to host empowerment and advocacy programmes. Most importantly, the participants highlighted the incorporation of professional specialist services as key to building networks. In particular, the participants made mention of social workers, psychologists/counsellors, and the inclusion of law enforcement.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *The church should not be silent about DGBV and just turn a blind eye as if all is well. Programmes to empower young men and women should be formed, Communication and training of women, through symposia, small groups, dialogues, conferences etc. women empowerment groups, involvement of other stakeholders i.e., social workers, psychologists, saps, lawyers, should be brought on board. Anyone who has specialized knowledge and skills, that could be of value to women empowerment would be appreciated* **[Research Participant Phiwe, 30 June 2021]**.

> *There must be youth classes empowering the youth about marriage roles and responsibilities and understanding God's heart about marriage. The Mothers Union guild need to identify mature elders who can be trained to journey with the abused women. These women must have a manner of approach, empathy, love, and confidentiality. They must be able to maintain confidentiality and be able maintain secrecy. It is also important that the couple consults with the priests before and after umshado and be free to engage on the challenges they experience and the struggles*

they are facing so that they may be fully supported as individuals and as a couple. It's important that counselling should not explain respect in a one-sided manner but for a husband, that message must be made clear that he needs to respect himself and respect his wife and respect the institution of marriage **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

For those who are already married, if they start experiencing challenges even when they have prayed hard, there must be solid structures within the parish that can handle these marital issues. Women who are suffering must also be brave enough to approach the mfundisi (priest) and not die in silence and shame **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

There must be youth programmes that teach them on effects of alcohol, marriage, and the choice of friends. They need to be trained from a young age to be responsible and one day they will become husbands and play their part as growing men **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

Churches should have programmes to help GBV victims, invite people who are experienced on such issues. Because women are dying alone, not knowing who to turn to **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

6.3.7. Unanticipated themes

During the interviews with the Christian women, their stories contained examples of gender-based violence (GBV) that raised unanticipated themes.

6.3.7.1. *Theme #7: Generational cycle of abuse*

As indicated in the previous chapter, there is an aspect of gender-based violence that alludes to the generational cycle of abuse as a theme. Gender-based violence has been shown to exist as a family pathology that is recycled and consists of repetitive histories. These are strongholds where families remain captive and are struggling to escape the shackles of a fragile and broken past. Generations have carried the burden of abuse and hence they continue to pay the price. These experiences when not arrested, have the possibility of deterring transformation, freedom, and a flourishing future. The dysfunction of many families has been noted in this data, where some of the participants spoke of being exposed to abusive fathers, uncles, and fathers.

One participant could thus disclose:

> *My mother suffered severely as my father was abusive. My husband was abusive in all sorts of manners. My daughter's abuse ended in fatality. She was stabbed to death by her fiancé* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

6.3.7.2. *Theme #8: Prayer and the language of inequality*

The participants revealed in their prayers that inequality is according to Gods will. In their prayers and supplications, inequality is ordained by God, and women must fully embrace and accept this positioning. Indeed, prayers reveal how survivors see themselves after suffering and how a sense of identity is shaped by conflict grief, disappointment and evil (Peterman & Schmutzer, 2016). The narrated prayers revealed how religious practices and beliefs can be toxic, to the extent that many women stay on in abusive marriages, opting instead to endure the suffering.

Two examples of the prayers offered by the participants were as follows:

> *Nkulunkulu Baba siza Kuwe singelutho. (Heavenly Father, we come to you we are nothing)* **[Research Participant Nomusa, 11 February 2021]**.

> *God have mercy on women and men who experienced GBV, give us strength to continue praising you. We know that you don't like divorce, but at the same time you don't like your people to suffer. Amen* **[Research Participant Nala, 12 March 2021]**.

6.4. Chapter summary

In this chapter I have presented the findings and interpretation of the thick experiences of Christian women of gender-based violence in marriage. The themes that emerged from the narratives of lived experiences were presented, discussed, and interpreted, providing a rich analysis of the research data. Pertinent issues that emerged in the findings were also discussed.

The next chapter will explore the focus group discussions and the visual maps which were used as appropriate methods of answering these questions.

Chapter 7: Data Presentation: Phase II – Focus Group Discussions and the Exploration of Visual Maps – ACSA Responding to DGBV

"Women-church is not for women only but for women and men, who, now, in restlessness and hope, hear the Word, receive the vision and speak together words of emancipatory transformation. Women-church is the questioning of new possibilities, the experimentation with new forms, the envisioning of new relations." (Chopp, 2002: 76)

7.1. Introduction

The data presented in this chapter was generated through the focus group discussions and the visual maps. The cited excerpts are taken directly from the narrated responses of the study participants. The main objective of this was to demonstrate the intervention strategy/guidelines the ACSA can employ in responding to GBV. The importance of narrative theology, coupled with the use of visual maps illustrates a survivor-centred approach in the shaping of a healing theology. It establishes the possible flow that can provide insight to the church as far as shaping pastoral care guidelines which church leaders, women's guild and other FBOs dealing with GBV can employ in creating space for awareness, healing, and pastoral care praxis. The visual maps can be used to journey with the women survivors who are at different stages and phases of their healing processes, helping them name their pain on paper.

As discussed in chapter two, the GBVF-NSP articulates clearly that pillar four emphasises a strategy of support: response, support, and healing which is central in this study. This means strengthening current structures (in faith spaces) to necessitate healing and recovery. It also means intentionally challenging life-denying theologies. More importantly, it means creating safer spaces for psycho-emotional decluttering enabling survivor healing.

This chapter engages comprehensively on aspects of healing/pastoral care that were collated from three (3) focus group discussions. Focus groups were specifically engaged in this study to develop interventions in terms of how the ACSA can respond to DGBV. The latter part of the chapter presents diverse visual maps, elaborating on what the ACSA can use as guidelines/principles to shape a pastoral care praxis for the healing of women who have endured suffering because of DGBV.

The second phase of empirical work undertaken in this study sought to answer the following two critical questions:

i. What insights drawn from African women's theology and praxis of narrative theology could assist Christian married women in the context of pervasive DGBV?

ii. What pastoral care resources/strategies could be put into action to assist the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal to engage the issue on DGBV?

7.2. Details of the focus group discussion participants

Having cited this as a point of departure, data presentation in this chapter was collected using focus group discussions which were open to the church congregation and not just the voices of women only. The composition of the focus group discussion is presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1. Personal details: Focus Group Discussion Group Session I

Respondent	Age	Position in Church / Guild	Profession	Gender	Context
Participant A	41	Lay minister	Educator	Female	Rural
Participant B	52	MU leader	Homemaker	Female	Rural
Participant C	20	Youth	Student - University level	Female	Rural
Participant D	21	St Agnes Member	Student - University level	Female	Rural

Table 7.1 shows that the ages of the participants ranged from 20 to 52, with one (1) participant being 20, one (1) participant 21, one (1) participant aged 41, and one (1) participant being 52 years-old respectively. Only one (1) participant was employed and married. She was also a leader in church, as a lay minister. One (1) participant in this group was also a leader, a MU leader, however she reported being a homemaker. The 20- and 21-year-old participants both reported being undergraduate university students.

Table 7.2. Personal details: Focus Group Discussion Session II

Respondent	Age	Position in Church / Guild	Profession	Gender	Context
Participant E	40	MU member	Nurse	Female	Urban (Township)
Participant F	35	MU member	Accounts	Female	Urban (Township)
Participant G	53	AWF	Educator	Female	Urban (Township)

Table 7.2 shows that the ages of the participants ranged from 35–53, with (1) participant being 35, another 40, and one (1), 53 years-old respectively. All the participants reported being employed. In terms of church participation, two (2) reported being MU members, and only one (1) reported being a member of the AWF. Two (2) reported being married, and one (1) reported being single.

Table 7.3. Personal details: Focus Group Discussion Session III

Respondent	Age	Position in Church / Guild	Profession	Gender	Context
Participant H	56	AWF member (Lay minister)	Government Officer	Female	Urban
Participant I	57	MU member (in a leadership role)	Nursing Sister	Female	Urban
Participant J	59	Men's Society (former Church Warden)	Advocate	Male	Urban

Table 7.3 shows that the ages of participants ranged from 56–59, with one (1) participant being 56, another 57, and one (1) being 59 years-old respectively. All the participants were employed. The male participant reported being married, while one (1) women participant reported being single and one (1) reported being divorced. All the participants in this group were church leaders, serving as lay ministers and active in senior leadership positions within the church.

7.3. Setting the tone for the focus group discussions

As a conversation starter in this phase of data collection, as the researcher, I employed an artefact of an African woman[1] to break the ice and thereby set the tone for the focus group discussions. Another objective was to ensure that all the participants were relaxed, and were all on board with the discussion. This was vital since the focus group discussions were done via the Zoom Conferencing cellular platform. I therefore relied on the power of visuality to enhance and stimulate the discussion. During the interviews, I made the discovery where I recognised nuggets of rich data embedded in the artefact itself. As Salmons has noted, "Visual elicitation refers to interviews that use visuals to elicit responses and stimulate discussion" (2014: 94). Influenced by the study of semiotics which unpacks signs and sign processes in culture, as the researcher I started off the conversation by asking what the image signifies. This meaning making engagement untangled the following themes.

7.4. The significance of using art-based artefacts

The research project employed an art-based medium to illuminate the enquiry. The inspiration behind this approach was to use art as a conversation starter and to give focus to the purpose of the interview. An artefact was used in this instance to engage participants to connect with the research, thereby making meaning of their own personal experiences as a frame of reference.

Table 7.4. An art-based enquiry

The Meaning Embodied in the Artefact	Enslavement under Religion
The image: A conversation starter	In deep pain, abused Hurting and exhausted A woman chained with her only hope found in the Bible

7.4.1. Using art-based artefacts in GBV: Mapping meaning

The research participants reported that the image depicted pain and the Bible as a symbol of hope. In all, three (3) FGD participants reported that the woman in the picture signifies pain. In their own words, these are some of the extracts:

> *When I inspect this image, the woman looks abused. She is clasped. I see her holding on to the Bible, but her hands are tied which may depict that she is hiding. Others may*

[1] See: Annexure E: Visual Prompt: Artefact of an African Woman

think she hides by going to church; but if you carefully look her inner side, you find that she is arrested **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD Group II].**

I see her holding the Bible as her only hope **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD Group II].**

It looks she is enslaved to a certain belief or enslaved under religion. You can also find that she is forced by her parents to follow a certain religion or belief she is not comfortable with **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 17h00. FGD I]**.

It looks she is enslaved to a certain belief or enslaved under religion. You can also find that she is forced by her parents to follow a certain religion or belief she is not comfortable with **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 14h00. FGD II]**.

She is forced to go to church, hence carrying the Bible **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 16h00. FGD I]**.

I see a woman who is in deep, deep pain, but at the time who is holding a Bible, where it says this is where my hope is **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

The following participants went on to suggest the following observations:

I think its bondage, it's a form of oppression, and if you look at it it's like this is a type of bondage that it looks like she is in pain, but she has accepted it. You can see that she is not struggling to disengage from this bondage **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

She is still hurting despite the Bible that is in her hands **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

Her hope is in the Bible; perhaps she tried talking about it, but no one listened instead they promised to pray for her. So, the Bible becomes her only hope. ...I think its bondage, it's a form of oppression, and if you look at it it's like this is a type of bondage that it looks like she is in pain, but she has accepted it. You can see that she is not struggling to disengage from this bondage **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

One participant explained further relating to her experience:

> *I remember I had a problem with I just got married, and I went to pastor, he asked how I vowed, and he told me I must live by my vows then. You just wonder because all you need is someone to help and come to your rescue, but it seems pastors are afraid of men* **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Another participant reported:

> *I can just say for me this signifies a sense of identity, for instance if you belong to a certain community, for us to identify that you are married, you must wear a certain accessory, and I think that then identifies who she is in in terms of her marital status and where she is in life. But at the same time, it looks like its heavy on her, but she is committed to it, she can't take it out, she may not have anything else, but this defines her identity* **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

This participant gave further clarity on the artefact, when she narrated:

> *in this context I would say its sweat because it is sweat that signifies the struggles that she is going through. Because for you to sweat you must shed some energy and go through something physically mentally and then you sweat. As we have said that this woman is going through much and the only way you can see that is through the sweat* **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

Another participant shared this viewpoint:

> *You can sort of deduce that the bible is not helping from what she is going through right now. She is just carrying it and reading, it doesn't show whether the bible is going to offer a certain measure of solace from what she is going through. She is just looking at the Bible* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III].**

7.5. Defining abundant life in the context of Christian marriage

With respect to the data collection themes and subthemes that emerged in the first two questions, the research question aimed at ascertaining the participant's understanding of the Bible verse found in John10:10. Table 7.5 presents the participant's contextual understanding of this text.

Table 7.5. The contextual meaning of an abundant life

Biblical Text	Contextual Understanding
Deconstructing John 10:10	God's goodness: love, peace, kindness, and provision
	Restoration
	A renewed identity in Christ
	Overflowing (abiding in God's Word and commandments)
	Openness and transparency in marriage

The text reads as follows:

> *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full* [John 10:10 New International Version].

The research participants reflected on this Bible text in relation to their observations, understanding, and translation in the context of their Christian marriages:

> *To me God comes with love and peace. He comes provision. He comes with joy. I don't want to mention materialistic things only because there will be confusion. What is emphasised mostly are things that nurtures one* personally **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *An abundant life does not only come with beautiful experiences only, but it only means even the ones that are hurtful. However, those hurtful ones should not diminish your livelihood. They should not become emotional abuse or physical abuse. They must have no power to define you. When it happens that one undergoes difficult times, but one should be able to say I am a strong woman. She should be able to heal and have her peace and joy restored. A woman with these experiences must not think of herself as emotionally wounded but she needs to see herself as peaceful, strong and continue to believe in herself. You need to identify yourself as God sees you. Understand that God wants to provide more life in your* life **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

In their response, one participant used the analogy of an overflowing bucket:

> *I will just make an example that if you could take a container or a bucket and pour water inside, and water overflows the bucket, we will then say the water is overflowing.*

So, I think that is the life God has made us to live in earth or I would say is the life we were meant to live in marriage by abiding into his words and commandments **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Other participants narrated the following reflections on the Bible text in the context of their Christian marriages:

I think abundant life in marriage means openness and transparency, that we should be open and communicate about everything and take decisions together so that they can reach their goals and abide my marriage vows **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

I think for married people to have that abundant life, they must go deeper in prayer, know God, and abide by his rules despite all obstacles faced at home in order to conquer the devil. If you are a woman, you should take religion seriously to enhance unity in marriage life. We all know that the devil does not want us to see us happy in marriage. For you to conquer the enemy, you must always go deeper in knowing God and inform him of everything **[Participant D, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

I think here in John 10:10 Jesus speaks what is in God's heart, and this is what he wants for us, and we need to take it and make it work for us. So, we are coming from homes, there is issues of socialisation that come into play before you become a member of the church. Now, before you get into marriage or be Mrs. so and so in church, you are Mrs. A. The family will always remind you that you are a wife in this family. What does that mean, it means you need to conform to rules and regulations of this family? So, we may want to shift it to church, but there is a part which says, outside of the church you belong to a family, and you belong to certain structures before you go to the church, and they will also tell you that don't you ever think that what they tell you in church you must practice it here at home. So then, that becomes complicated when you come across issues which says I have a problem and how do I deal with it. I am not saying the church is always right, but by now we should have structures in place which says if I am going through issues of drug abuse, where do I go, who do I talk to in church, when I go through issues in my marriage who do I go to in the church and feel comfortable my problems will be kept safe and never be shared in the pulpit. So, those are the things and there is a lot. So, what is silencing people in the church and holding us back from claiming this life in abundant is that there is something that needs

to happen to us as people, because when we go to church and we hold this Bible, and pick scriptures as Mr. X mentioned because we pick scriptures and we interpret them the way we want, and then we speak about them openly that this is what they mean, and the entire world believes this scripture says so and so means that because that's how everybody interprets it. Unfortunately, that thing goes back to the homes, at church and socialization more than anything becomes an issue here **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 17h00. FGD III]**.

God said in John 10:10 that it's very clear that God wanted us to live our lives abundantly, all of us and it doesn't say a woman, a man or what, but it says all of us. However, the problem comes when we men, us men when we interpret the scripture. I think to me that is where the problem we have heard. I have heard people interpreting Genesis 2 where the fall is a woman's fall, and then in Genesis 2, the woman is a helper. They misinterpret helper, and then you go to, I think its Matthew 5 where God talks about the divorce. You go to Mark 10, again where they talk about divorce, and then you go to Ephesians 5 where they say a woman must submit. You know all those things they are completely and deliberately misinterpreted to subdue women. I find it so strange that women never take this thing up **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 17h00. FGD III]**.

It's the problem of us interpreting the scripture. Why does that happen is because the church is still a very patriarchal, and you can understand that because in other denominations, women are not even allowed to be priests, they are not allowed on the altar. Now, if that is the attitude, can you believe how they would interpret the scriptures if they do not allow the women to preach. So, with me the most contributory factor to women oppression these days is the deliberate misinterpretation of the scriptures, for us men so that we can perpetuate the subjection of women, it is simple as that [**Participant J, 30 May 2021, 17h00. FGD III]**.

The following participant associated the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23) with abundant life when narrating their reflection during the FGD session:

Biblically and theologically, we are supposed to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit, joy, love, peace, self-respect, kindness, and all that **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 17h00. FGD III]**.

7.6. Defining healing in the context of GBV

In the follow-up questions, the responses of the FGD participants revealed that the word 'healing' meant different things to different people. However, in the context of GBV, the participants were asked to share their positions on the matter. Table 7.6 presents the themes that emerged in the FGDs.

Table 7.6. Healing and women GBV survivors

Defining Healing	Co-weaving Healing for Survivors
The meaning of healing (In the context of women survivors)	Being able to share one's story (without breaking down) A long journey Survivors in different stages of healing

The research participants reported that they understood that healing meant being able to share your stories without the shedding of tears. It was about overcoming the pain without shame. Some of the participant narratives that echoed this outlook were as follows:

> *The issue of healing in the eyes of a woman survivor I think it means being healed but it also means you still get triggered but not in a manner that makes you break out. Your healing enables you to share your story. You can testify. You can lift another woman. You will be able to relate with another women's story without projecting your pain even though yours may be unique. Upon reflecting you will say I am stronger, I am at peace, and I am able to laugh. I am feeling the peace in me. Being healed means you will be able to laugh and say despite it all, but life goes on* **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *The healing journey is a long process. As women we may be hurt by similar experiences, having abusive partners but one will heal quickly even though the extent of the abuse was not the same. But once healed one can talk about it, laugh it off and continue with your journey of your life that is when you are completely healed* **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

7.7. The ACSA and the provision of pastoral care

The research participants were asked to reflect on what was currently taking place in their parish and what the ACSA could provide by way of pastoral care and support towards healing and recovery for women survivors of GBV? The themes and subthemes are presented in Table 7.7.

Table 7.7. The provision of pastoral care

Gender Equality	Current Situational Analysis
Teaching on marriage and equality	No marriage seminars available Conservative approach towards pastoral visitation and prayer prior to the wedding ceremony The church is removed from the lived reality of the community Portrayal of the church as being an overtly holy space, thereby evoking denialism about the presence of violence in its midst

The study asked the participants in what ways could the church provide pastoral care support towards healing and recovery for women survivors.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *The problem I have is that MU ladies will just come prior to the wedding day for a prayer, which is like entertainment, and you will never get to see them ever after that. As a young girl, you grew up amongst them, but they have never taught you anything. As I have told you that I grew up eSheshi, I have been in all the stages from Sunday school, to youth, to adulthood. I did everything required of me, but they never taught us anything about marriage* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

> *No one has ever talked about marriage, even if you are about to enter the marriage life. I have noticed that church ladies are not honest, they will be just sharing fake testimonies. They will be sugar coating it, but that's not what it's all about. We need to be educated. So, it would be good if the church realises that the importance of preparing young women for marriage because you just engage yourself into something you are not aware of* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III].**

> *To think that in this time and age, in churches there is no desk for counselling people who are abused, females and kids who are abused. It is not a coordinated effort which means the church is not treating this as a priority* **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

7.8. Ongoing capacity building: The formation of parishes as safe spaces

The research study solicited information through the FDGs on how capacity building can be developed in churches, thereby aiding the church to handle issues of DGBV. This question was aimed at establishing who the first point of contact should be, and whether it should be an individual or a team/ministry/organisation? The participants were also asked if they would consider allowing themselves to become vulnerable before a priest? This question looked at whether ACSA churches act as safety nets for the abused and the afflicted. Moreover, the FGDs engaged further on how the parish can provide pastoral care. Issues of who should provide pastoral care, as well as what skills, qualities, experience, and qualities they must possess in providing pastoral care, were also discussed. The themes that emerged are presented in Table 7.8.

Table 7.8. The formation of parishes as safe spaces

Surveying Practitioner Pastoral Care Support	Integrated Proactive Pastoral Care in the Context of GBV
Who should provide pastoral care at the parish level?	An individual A priest Clergy partner (getting her/his hands dirty) The team (Gender ministry) Survivors and victims An inclusive structure (Open to all) Specialist: Psychologists, Counsellors, Social Workers Professional swap and exchange (To ensure confidentiality)
Provider Capacity = in terms of: experience qualities education level	Empowerment: Teach and expose parishes about GBV No religious titles/styles No education (mutuality)

In their responses, the research participants narrated that societies like the MU and the AWF were seen as key structures where regular empowerment workshops for women could be held. Additionally, emphasis was placed in their replies on having inclusive structures that deter hierarchies.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *Both educated and uneducated people should be trained. They must be treated equally and be sensitized on issues people go through and be taught how to help them* **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 17h00. FGD I]**.

> *They should select even those who are not educated nor have any title in church, train them to help others in church* **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

> *I think women should gather on Thursday session where they can open about the challenges, they face back at home so that they can get solutions and counselling from each other. They must be able to open towards each other* **[Participant C, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Reference was specifically made to whether it should be a female or a male priest who offers pastoral counsel. This was to ascertain if gender was considered key to health, healing, and wellbeing. Moreover, this was to establish whether the participants had sufficient confidence to approach a parish priest. Different viewpoints emerged from the participants on this aspect of safety. In addition, culture seemed to be the main filter determining the choice women make in such decisions. It was apparent that issues of confidentiality and anonymity were of great concern. The participants revealed that they had great reservations about approaching a parish priest. A distinct pattern of conflicted views on this aspect can be ascertained from the data. While some of the respondents favoured a priest as a first point of contact, others felt the priest's spouse should step into this portfolio. One of the participants expressed themselves in this way:

> *Personally, would I approach a priest. It will be based on the assessment whether the priest can be to assist me or not. In my previous parish, counselling sessions were not only conducted by the priest only. I mean in the pre-marital counselling sessions, the priest's wife and I believe it is easier to speak to a woman, especially issues concerning you being a woman, particularly of a sexual* nature **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

There were mixed sentiments expressed whether to approach a priest or not. However, based on the conversations, it emerged that for some of the participants, a priest – particularly a male priest – was still considered *ubaba* (a father) which is a patriarchal expectation. However, other participants felt they would first need to assess the situation, it being key is to establish his experience as a survivor.

It was important to deepen the conversation on the readiness and the position of the parish when it came providing pastoral care and counsel at the parish level. The question was thus asked whether this should be the sole responsibility of a priest, or could this role be handled by a community of believers such as from the guilds? The participants offered some differing viewpoints.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *We can ask psychologists to come and use their skills and expertise to do research and empower us with knowledge especially when it comes to abuse because there are women in church that are abused but suffering in silence since they are afraid of their status. So, this cannot be done by an organisation, but it should be done by all organisations* **[Participant F, 30 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *Organisations within the parish can assist the hurting parishioners, this done by empowering every single member with information of abuse to open everyone's mind, so that everyone knows how to respond and handle it decisively* **[Participant G, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

One ethical concern in handling the issue relating to DGBV was that of confidentiality. The participants expressed great concern over the fear of gossip mongering among church members, which could potentially become a serious barrier in positioning parishes as safe spaces of healing and recovery.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

> *I am thinking of the issue of confidentiality because as Christian believers we don't know what that is* **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *The church needs to come back now, back to the community…. In church we have holy in a way that we have branded ourselves that we are a holy place, and I don't doubt that, but in a holy place one would expect the truth, in a holy place one would expect compassion, in a holy place one would expect that our members' wellbeing is taken into priority. Right now, the church is a single community, and the other community is a community I don't know how to call it* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

> *Yes, the church is isolated and the reason for that is that the church has labelled itself as a holy and other people are not holy. So, even when you wish to speak to whosoever seem to listen to you, you will just think that this woman is always active in church,*

singing loudly in church, so she must be the holiest person. So, how do I go and say, my apologies for what I am about to say, but how do I go and tell her that my husband is addicted to pornography. How on earth will we ever say such to this woman because she might think I am a sinner too **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

There was a question that sought to determine what kind of experience, qualities, and capacities (i.e., education, etc) should the individual (priest/groups/guilds) need in accompanying the survivors in their journey towards healing and recovery. The responses received from the participants revealed that while the key players in the appointed structures should be skilled and capacitated, of prime importance was the need for them to possess the wisdom of victim-survivors. Accordingly, one participant suggested that there needed to be a process of cross-pollination (possibly at the archdeaconry level?), where parishes could exchange modes of professional support, thereby ensuring that survivors needs were not only fully met, but that they felt safe and protected.

The following narratives represent some of the responses received:

There must be a structure that is composed of external stakeholders. In adhering to confidentiality, let me make an example. In our parish there could be a parish psychologist, like other parishes. It is important that the structure also has professional people, victims, and survivors as well as priest to assists with pastoral duties like praying. A committee needs these three elements, i.e., prayer, women survivor experience and the psychological part **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

We will not succeed as a church when it comes to healing and base it only in counselling corner. I think healing at church should start at the pulpit, the way this gospel is preached. It should provide healing for those who are going through whatever that they are going through, and then have structure is place that provide an opportunity for one to open up and spell out what they are going through. But even those structure, you wouldn't have provided a healing space if you will provide a structure for people to say or speak out what they are going through and then don't do anything about it. So, you need to have a holistic approach that says, once I hear about so and so's predicament, what do I do, in that way maybe you are adding value. So, to just say I spoke it out and the priest just said I can hear **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

A question was asked to establish what the participants considered appropriate in terms of safety and confidentiality. For the participants, this question specifically raised issues about trust, and the advisability of approaching someone especially during times of difficulty when a survivor would feel their most vulnerable. In the responses received, one participant narrated about the need for the church to provide professional assistance, such as a social worker:

> *I think the church can help by having professionals that deals with women, perhaps a social worker and give numbers to contact and consult when one is faced with some problems because it is very difficult to trust anybody with your problems. It is also difficult to approach the priest because their wives do not trust us and the time you get close to the priest, they feel uncomfortable, and I do not blame them because it is a common feeling to us as women. Therefore, it is not easier to always run into the priest whenever you have a problem. Yes, we do have counsellors in church, but it is not always easy to run into them when you are having a problem. Most of them are women, even here at church, they are women, but I do not trust some of them, there is only one person that I trust. So, I think we could have professionals to consult with when we are having problems* **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Another participant raised the issue of mistrust making it impossible to have open and healthy conversations among the parishioners. Her position was clear, when she narrated:

> *I will not feel comfortable, and I do not see consulting to that social worker here at church, unless that social worker that works far from here because it is easy to open to that person because he is at home and is at work and far from me. Or else such professional could be swoped in churches and never work on their parish level they belong to* **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

The following narratives represent some of the other responses received:

> *I will never run to pastor no matter what I would be going through in life. Pastors have shown us another side we were not aware of about them. These people are just pastors because they are wearing that uniform and are sitting in those chairs, but once they are out of that they become something else. Things done by pastors traumatises us and it is not easy to approach a pastor because after telling him my problems, they get an opportunity to fulfil their wicked wishes* **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

In church there are people who relate better whether they are priests to lay or lay to priest and vice-versa but let me put myself in this and be the one who is going through staff. ...If I was going through to whatever I need now I need to offload, a priest for me would be the last person to go to. I'd look around and find someone, whether its male or female that I feel I can trust, and speak to them **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

Even if it's a female pastor, she can also take advantage, get close to my husband and destroy us even more because I have given her all the information. So, I choose not to approach either a female or male pastor. ...Well, I think the trust issues is still a problem. I think it also depends how much you have known that person in church **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD 1]**.

I think the idea of social workers could be very helpful because these people are educated therefore know better. We do have people who are knowledgeable, but we also have those who are educated and have been trained how to deal with certain situations. So, it could be better if its someone from afar nor belong in our parish level. So, someone who comes locally can spread rumours easily and can hurt more because it will affect you even back at home. Opening about something heals and I always feel better after telling someone my issues **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14:00. FGD II]**.

Another participant was of the view that it makes sense to have the organisations initiating these conversations; however, they need external participation from outside the church to handle this. The participant went on to suggest that specialist professionals consulted in the rendering of emotional and psychological support by the church to the survivors of women abuse:

I believe the parish can coordinate people specialist professionals who can assist in the emotional and psychological needs of survivors **[Participants G, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

In another focus group discussion, one female participant expressed her concern that more attention was given to women and little was focused on men. In her response, the participant narrated the following:

I think the church is more attentive to women, so it is time the church also hosts services for men, whether married or not so that they will be taught how to treat a woman

because some men bring their fathers' teachings in marriage. They should be taught how they should treat women since they are Christians too. They must be taught to understand their partner, be patient with them, and be supportive despite their personality. Religion should not oppress us; we are now forced to accept things we are not comfortable with because we call ourselves children of God. So, if we are open and transparent, and our men are told the truth, we will not experience that life of oppression in marriage. Men should be taught that women have rights too and are entitled to their own opinions, therefore must be treated equals hence married people are equals **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

We need to guide against reacting all the time when it comes to such matters. The church should be proactive **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

The participants revealed that the parish needs to create space for engaging on those issues relating to GBV where language should stimulate equality and empower and consider the rights of everyone without fear, shame, or judgement.

One participant who was a member of the MU could narrate the following:

For the past four years I have been requesting that within the MU that we have a unit that handles the younger members of the MU because if we are gathering with older members of the MU the only advise they give us is nothing but ukubekezela (resisting or patient endurance). This is the only language they speak of. So, when you speak of an ideal set up in the church, I agree with you. All the guilds including the youth need these empowering teachings and they must cover the aspect of marriage **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

The last conversation engaged in the FGDs was in response to the question how the church should make use of certain holistic tools/programmes to support married couples to prevent GBV and provide safe platforms for healing and recovery. This question aimed at exploring numerous family interventions that could be church based. In terms of the ensuing discussion, the participants expanded the scope of the question by debating how the church could challenge gender injustice, and further engage the subject of gender equality.

7.9. Shifting the narrative: Designing holistic programmes and conscientising the church on gender justice issues

Informed by data collection this research study envisioned a shift from traditional and conservative theologies of responding to violence against women and instead advocate for justice, informing, empowering, and transforming the theological/faith landscape. Table 7.9 elucidates and unpacks how the church can be proactive in creating safer, braver spaces that are non-patriarchal with a vision of justice being served and practiced for women survivors and all humanity.

Table 7.9. Towards conscientising the church on gender justice issues

Support for GBV Survivors in the Church	A Pastoral Care Support Matrix (Advocacy, Prevention, Empowerment, and Healing)
Proactive initiatives by the church	Family intervention Law enforcement Actions vs Consequences Church intervention Pulpit messages appropriated
Cultivating change within the church	Gender injustice (how) Teachings: Boys to men on marriage, masculinity, and equality Ongoing teachings for married men on roles and responsibilities in marriage Gender equality (how) Teachings on women's rights Religion used to affirm and not to oppress

In certain instances, it can be of good use to Christian women in the secular world. One participant could thus narrate:

> *It will be good to do away with the teaching that women and girls are prepared for marriage. Women should not be prepared for marriage, but the church needs to have platforms that empower men/boys on marriage and their role in marriage* **[Participant G, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

The subsequent conversation brought ideas on how the church needed to partner with other outside organisations and professionals who could play a role in the prevention of GBV.

One participant shared the following:

> *I guess it would be FAMSA, the Psychologist, who could be part of the educational/awareness programmes. Not everything requires shaming and a prayer, but we need practical and tangible* solutions [**Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

The participants also saw great opportunity in the holding of meetings that would exclusively target women's ministry and men's ministry separately, as well as the suggestion of holding regular awareness campaigns.

The following narratives represent some of the other suggestions made:

> *On some days men and women ministries where everyone can feel safer to share when spouses are not in the room. This can help with confidentiality too* **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *It is important to have institutions focusing on positive manhood because there are males that grow with anger and are unable to deal with it and handle relationships. They can also invite younger boys so that when they grow older, they have a fuller understanding how a woman needs to be treated humanely* **[Participant G, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

One other important question asked how the church could challenge gender injustice, through engaging the subject of gender equality, and thereby conscientising its youth, men, and women.

The following narratives represent some of responses received:

> *I think there is a need to teach youth about marriage, whether they are ready to know, but they must be told what to expect in marriage and what is expected of them too. The youth must be taught how to behave once they get married, what is right or wrong* **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

> *It is time the church also hosts services for men, whether married or not, so that they will be taught how to treat a woman because some men bring their fathers' teachings in marriage. They should be taught how they should treat women since they are Christians too. They must be taught to understand their partner, be patient with them and be supportive despite their personality. Religion should not oppress us; we are*

now forced to accept things we are not comfortable with because we call ourselves children of God. So, if we are open and transparent, and our men are told the truth, we will not experience that life of oppression in marriage. Men should be taught that women have rights too and are entitled to their own opinions, therefore must be treated equals hence married people are equals **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Young boys should be taught and trained how to behave around women, how to treat women. They should be trained while they are still young, that's the first training. The second training it should be of the people that are in power in the church, the leadership. They should also be trained, for instance if you are going to be a priest, there should be sort of a course, a small course for counselling. If we are taking gender-based violence seriously because we know that everybody in the leadership is trained and then we should also have a desk **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

I think that is another problem where the church sweeps gender-based violence and domestic violence under the carpet. That is another big problem that we have got. We have got to report these things, in fact in law, its mandatory, section 6 of children's' act, you must report, you are obliged to report abuse **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

We are so quick to judge others, especially our children in church, we fail to talk to them nicely, but judge them such that they become uncomfortable in church, and some decide to quit church. So, we fail to give them right directions, instead we judge them on how they dress and behave **[Participant D, 22 March 202, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Women to women abuse exist, especially in the church. ...As for women, there is a huge transformation that needs to take place to women, especially in the church for things to change. ...So, there are a lot of judges, and it starts with a simple thing, like a mini skirt. If you feel you want to correct that, yes correct it. Don't destroy a child while correcting her from wearing a mini skirt, because you can destroy more while thinking you are fixing things **[Participant H, 14 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

I have been engaging in a church for some time. You know, I have never heard even once where there was abuse of gender-based violence where the matter was reported

to the police. You know they just say look, we must pray for you, but they should be a difference between the two, if you confess you made something wrong, it's okay we will pray for you. However, there should be consequences for your action, but we don't do that in church, we go all the way with this thing of forgiveness, and we forget about justice. I think that is another problem where the church sweeps gender-based violence and domestic violence under the carpet. That is another big problem that we have got We have got to report these things, in fact in law, its mandatory, Section 6 of The Children's Act, you must report, you are obliged to report abuse. So, even if the person has agreed, confessed and everything, it must be reported and we don't do that because, I don't know why and maybe I am overreacting, because I am an advocate and I look at things from another perspective, I don't know why? I have prosecuted where people have been abused and I know how painful it is, I know how painful it is to prosecute a four-year-old kid who is raped by a thirty-year-old man. So, you will excuse my leaning towards justice that sometime there should be counselling, there should be everything, but there should be justice **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

7.10. Visual maps and participatory meaning-making exercises

The third part of data collection presented in this chapter emerged from a participatory activity. In the initial plan, the terms of executing this task were to be as follows:

i. The participants of the FGDs were invited to partake at this level of the study and hence they were scheduled to sit after the FGD had completed.
ii. The participants would be assigned an activity, or given a scenario to read and respond to it as a group.
iii. The output would have been conceptualised in the form of visual maps.

However, due to the fear and anxiety surrounding the COVID-19 global pandemic, and the requirement to adhere to the government-imposed COVID-19 regulations and recommendations, it was important that the safety of the research participants came first. Thus, all tasks and procedures in terms of the field work were approached in a manner that would encourage safety. Immediately after the FGDs, the women survivors who had participated in the discussions were asked if they would volunteer in the drawing up of visual maps. Hence, in the newly revised plan, the participation approach remained survivor centred. Five of the participants expressed an interest in being a part of this creative venture. The instruction given was that following the reading of the scenario exercise[2] the participants were

[2] See: Annexure: Visual Mapping Scenario Exercises.

expected to produce the visual maps individually. In drawing these, it was expected that they conceptualise and craft visual maps as an artwork useful in the development of pastoral care guidelines. They were given permission to use their own sketches and metaphors that speak of the church in the context of healing. The participants were given a variety of art materials to use in their work, including pencils, crayons, felt tip markers, coloured pens, and A3 size paper. Echoing Audre Lorde's famous saying that, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 2003: 27), this aspect of data collection offered a new set of tools for women to heal and lament their pain.

To make a change in the lives of the people, they need to take a lead in such a way that can emancipate them in their dire situation. As Lorde (2003: 26) explains, "for women, the need, and the desire to nurture each other is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power is rediscovered." Women survivors were each given a scenario exercise to respond to, with a typical narrative storyline being that of an abusive marriage. In this category, I envisaged theology as a solution, employing strategies that recognise DGBV as sinful, causing the church to be uncomfortable and cease being bystanders. In this section, I will thus present visual maps that give voice to women survivor expectations and perceptions of what platforms of healing and recovery the church needs to embody. These resultant visual maps are presented in this study, providing rich data for analysis.

In responding to the question, each response to a question had to be plotted visually on a piece of A3 paper. The participants in this exercise had to first sketch an outline of the church where changes in systems are needed to be applied and impacted to disrupt hierarchical systems that impose life-denying theologies to women and children. The participants had the liberty of using different metaphors demonstrating and depicting what the church ought to represent in the lives of Christian women. Hence, one visual map signified the church as 'the tree of life,' while another depicted the church as 'the river of life.' One further participant depicted the church as 'a mountain of prayer' or 'a mountain top experience.' So, over and above the focus group discussions, the study tackled the issue of intervention that is survivor-centred in its approach.

Of the eleven (11) women survivors that participated in the first phase of the interviews, five (5) women survivors were interested in using their narratives as a meaningful platform for drawing visual maps which could be used to shape a healing theology at the parish level. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the participants performed this task in their own time and in the comfort of their own space, and at a time convenient to them. Upon completing this task, each participant was expected to capture an image of the visual using a digital camera or smart phone. All these images were then forwarded to me via email and WhatsApp Messenger so that they could be captured in the study report. These visual maps are therefore a visual representation to be acknowledged as a shift towards shaping and anchoring how the ACSA can address DGBV. Below, these maps will be unpacked and discussed based on the

presentations shared by each women survivor. Five (5) visual maps in total were conceptualised. These will be deconstructed, expanded, unpacked, and given theological interpretation in chapter eight, with the intent of shaping guidelines for ACSA parishes, shifting the direction towards a pastoral care praxis in response to GBV.

7.10.1. Visual map #1

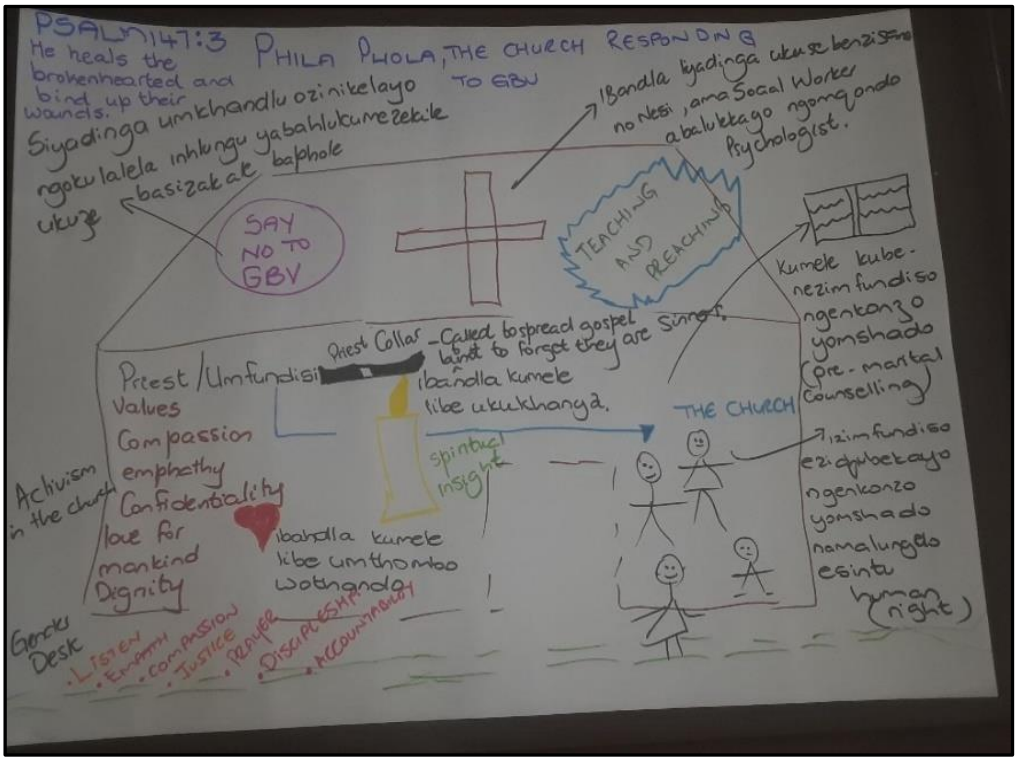

Figure 7.1. Visual map #1

Visual map 1# consists of a building which represents the church, with the cross shimmering boldly on the roof structure. On top, there is text in isiZulu which reads: "*Phila, Phola"* (lit: 'live and heal'), referring to the church responding to GBV. Encircled by the colour purple is a text in English which reads "Say no to GBV." A biblical text on the right-hand corner is given: Psalm 147: 3. Reflected on the middle part of the church structure are three images: a priest's clerical collar (signified in black and white), a red heart and a lit candle (signified by the colour yellow). Also, represented in this visual map are images of males and females. On the right is a book with scribbled text which signifies Bible texts. Outlining the church drawing are texts that relate to church activism, information on human rights (all written in a black felt tip). Texts written in black ink reads as follows:

"We need a church community that listens to the pains and suffering of the people so that they get help"

"The parish needs to become the lighthouse"

"The priest must have compassion, empathy, love, dignity, and confidentiality"

"The church needs to outsource and network professionals such as social workers and psychologists to help in the church"

7.10.2. Visual map #2

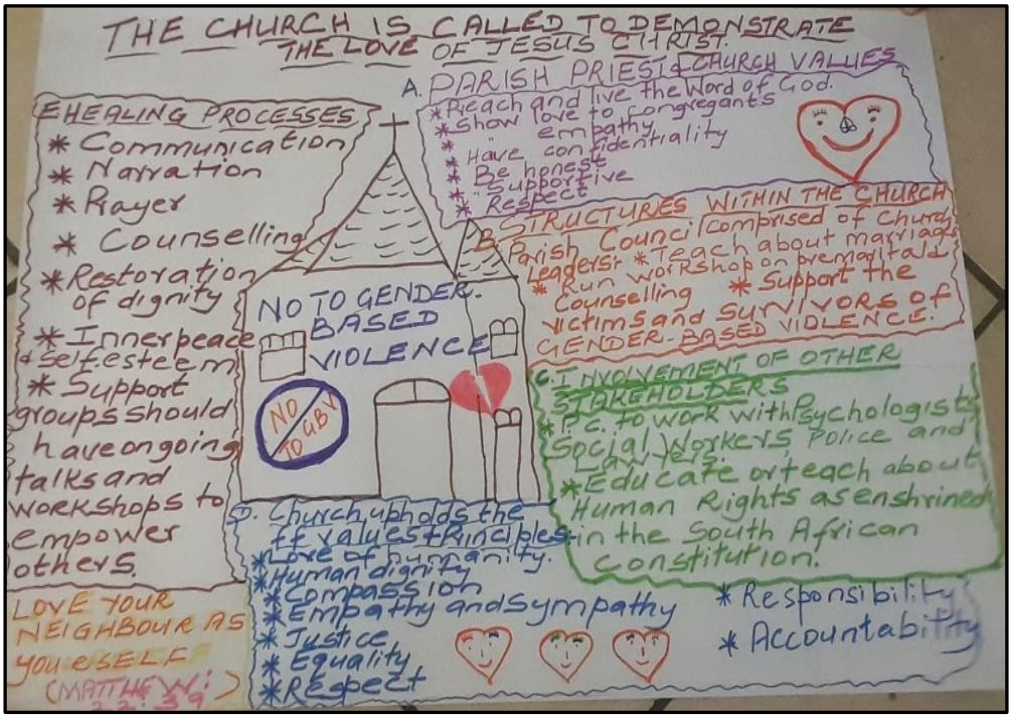

Figure 7.2. Visual map #2

Visual map #2 has the Bible text: Mathew 22:39 highlighted in the left-hand corner of the map, with the text: "Love your neighbour as yourself" in red/highlighted yellow crayon. The visual map is split into five distinct sections. The church is called to demonstrate the life of Christ. The map depicts red heart images and signs that read "No to gender-based violence." The breakdown of the five sections is as follows:

i. The parish priest and church values: The first component of the visual map defines the character and role of the clergyperson. He/she must preach and live the 'Word of God," show love to all congregants, provide empathy, exercise confidentiality, be honest, supportive and have respect for all.

ii. The structures within the church: These structures are invited to run workshops and teach about marriage, while also offering counselling to the victims and survivors of GBV.

iii. The involvement of other stakeholders: This presents the involvement of stakeholders such as social workers and psychologists. Moreover, it stresses the importance of educating the church about human rights, as enshrined in the South African Constitution.

iv. The church upholding its values and principles: The visual map depicts the values which the church needs to uphold and values such as: love for humanity, human dignity, compassion, justice, equality, and respect.

v. Church healing processes: This part of the visual map signifies the healing processes the church must engage in, including: communication, prayer, inner peace, empowerment workshops, and support groups.

7.10.3. Visual map #3

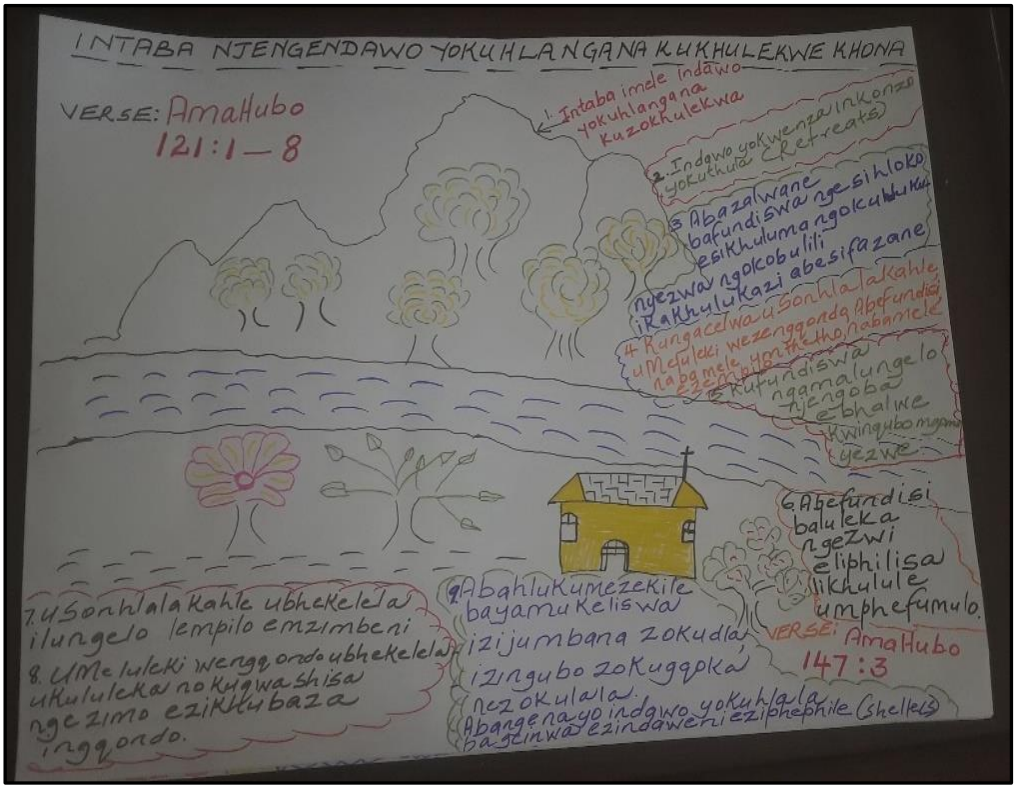

Figure 7.3. Visual map #3

Visual map #3 presents an exterior landscape with a garden layout with large trees and a miniature church structure in the colour yellow. The church has doors and windows and a cross on top. Also reflected in this visual map, is a pencil sketch outlining the hills and mountains. The title in isiZulu reads: *Intaba njenge ndawo yokuhlangana kukhulekwe khona (Lit: 'a mountain, as a meeting/gathering place to pray').* Two Bible verses are reflected: Proverbs/Amahubo 147:3 and 121: 1-8. Different colours signify six different texts which read as follows:

i. Intaba imele indawo yokuhlangana nokukhuleka

(The mountain represents a meeting place for prayer)

ii. Indawo yokwenza inkonzo yokuthula.

(A place to host retreats)

iii. Abazalwane kumele bafundiswe ngokuhlukumezeka.

(Congregants must be taught about abuse)

iv. Kungacelwa oSonhlalakahle, abezoMthetho, abaNgqondo naBefundisi ukuba basize.

(Social workers, psychologists, law enforcement officials and priest must help)

v. Abahlukumezekile banikezwa izijumbane zokudla, izingubo zokugqoka, abangana ndawo bagcinwe kumashelters.

(Survivors must be handed food parcels and clothing and those in need of shelters be accommodated)

vi. Abefundisi baluleka ngezwi eliphilisayo nelikhulula umphefumulo.

(The priest must counsel preaching the gospel that liberates the spirit)

7.10.4. Visual map #4

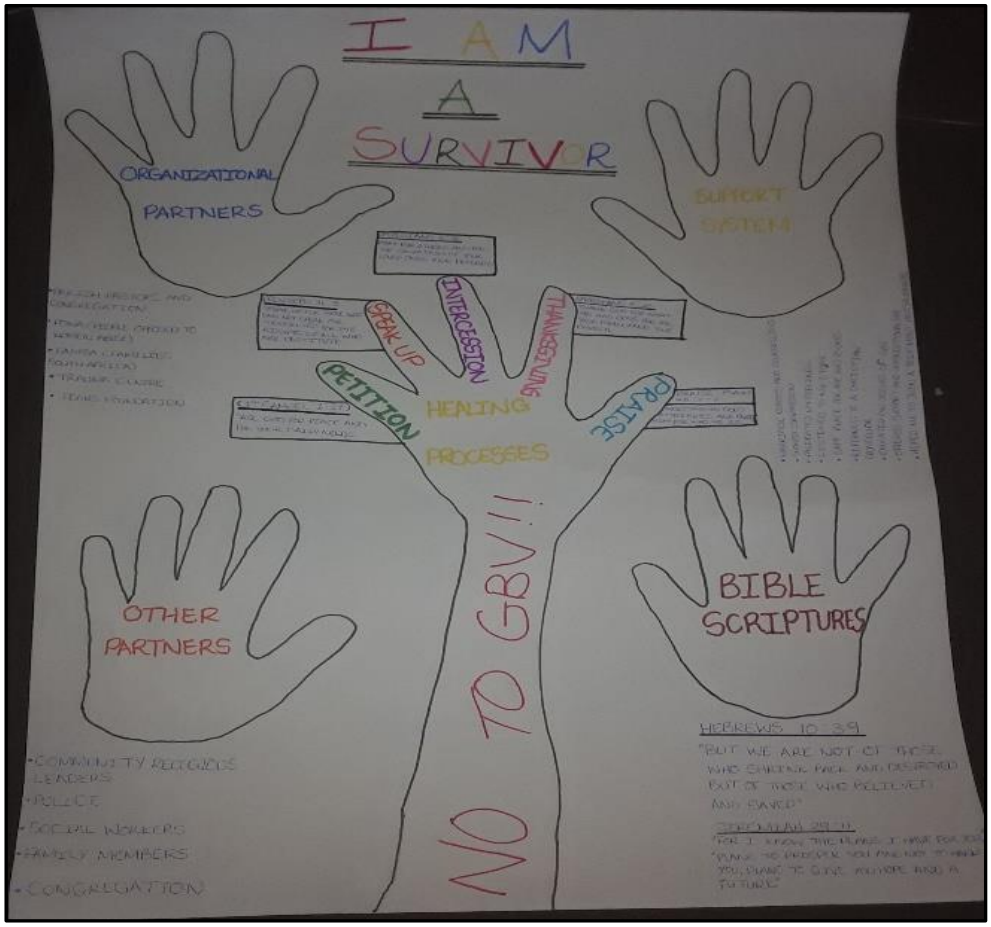

Figure 7.4. Visual map #4

Visual map #4 has the text "I am a survivor" as its title. The visual map depicts five hands strategically placed on each corner of the chart.

i. Hand 1: Organisational partners – This hand is associated with a text that reads: "parish pastors and congregation, organisations like People Opposed to Women Abuse (POWA), Family South Africa FAMSA), Trauma Centre and Tears Foundations."
ii. Hand 2: Support system – This hand presents support systems which include: marriage classes and counselling. A section of this segment presents survivor suggestions on healing and support, and are depicted as follows: showing compassion; validating feelings; listen to my story; education on issues of GBV; offered unconditional love; help me to join a treatment programme.
iii. Hand 3: Other partners: This hand presents other partners as pillars of support. These are as follows: community religious leaders; police; social workers; family members; congregation.
iv. Hand 4: Bible texts: This hand has the Bible text from Hebrews 10:39 "*But we are not of those who shrink back and destroyed but of those who believed and saved*" Another Bible text is from Jeremiah 29:11 *"For I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*
v. Hand 5: Healings processes: This is a right hand with a long arm, drawn in the middle of the map image. It has the texts: "Healing processes" "No to GBV!" In the first finger is the text: "Petition" and the Bible text from 1 Samuel 1:27 *"Ask God for peace and for your daily needs."* In the second finger is the text: "Speak Up" and the Bible text from Proverbs 31:8 *"Speak up for those who can't speak for themselves for the rights of all who are destitute.*" In the third finger is the text: "Intersession." In the fourth finger is the text "Thanksgiving," In the thumb is the text: "Praise."

7.10.5. Visual map #5

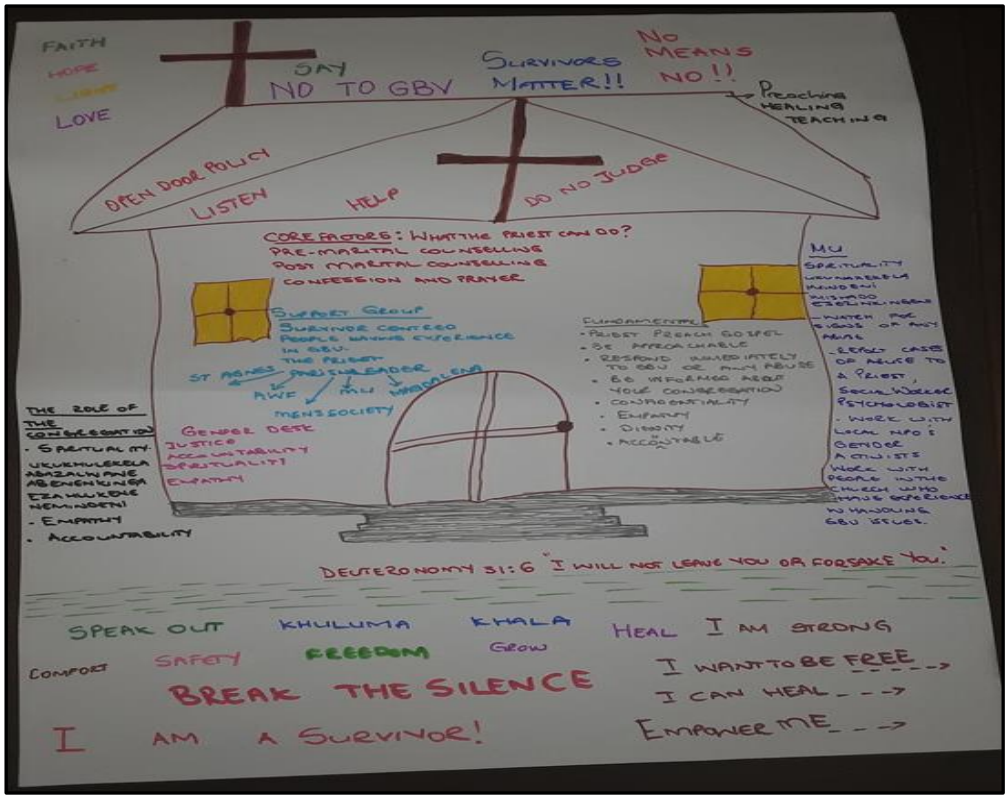

Figure 7.5. Visual map #5

Visual map #5 presents a drawing of church building and is titled: "Say No to GBV" "Survivors matters! No means No!" The Bible text that is used in this visual map is taken from Deuteronomy 31:6 *"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."* On the ground, are different texts: "speak out," "break the silence," "freedom," "grow," "cry," "safety," "I am strong," "I want to be free," "I can heal," "empower me," "I am a survivor!" On the roof of the church are the following texts: "open door policy," "listen," "help," "do not judge." Below the left window of the church is the text: "Support groups: A survivor-centred approach and recognising all guilds e.g., AWF, St Agnes, Bernard Mizeki (Men's Society) and MU. Gender desk: Justice, Accountability and Empathy." Below the right window of the church is the text: "Fundamentals." The texts linked to this category are as follows: Priests preach gospel; be approachable; respond to GBV; be informed about your congregation; Confidentiality' Empathy; Dignity and Accountability; MU: Report the GBV cases; work with local NPOs; work with survivors in the church and gender activists; The role of the congregation: Spirituality and a life of prayer; standing in the gap for the suffering and families going through tribulations; Empathy and accountability.

7.11. Chapter summary

This chapter presented the findings of the study, based on the data obtained from the focus group discussions and the visual maps. This data was presented to chart a way forward according to the men and women within the ACSA who collaborated their ideas on how the church can fight gender-based violence. The chapter highlighted how the visual maps sessions had to be approached differently because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The five visual maps that were conceptualised by the women survivors in their homes were each presented and described in detail.

The next chapter will speak thematically to the findings presented in this chapter, exploring the discourse and scholarship of GBV in the context of Christian marriages. Furthermore, I will unpack each of the visual maps as they contribute methodologically to shaping the pastoral care guidelines for the ACSA parish churches in the Diocese of Natal so that it can better assist women DGBV survivors.

Chapter 8: Data Analysis and Interpretation of Empirical Evidence Based on Focus Group Discussions and the Visual Maps

"Achieving gender equality is about disrupting the status quo - not negotiating it."

(Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka)

8.1. Introduction

The first half of this chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of the empirical evidence obtained from the FGD conversations conducted as phase two of the original fieldwork. The second half of this chapter presents the findings that are derived from the process of conceptualising visual maps, and are interpreted thematically. Visual maps use images and visual artefacts expressing meaning as a vehicle of communication. The thematic findings captured are simply a guide in charting the way forward as we look at how the ACSA can strengthen its prophetic voice against DGBV. This data adds knowledge to how the ACSA and other church leadership personnel can use the methodology of visual maps to engage women survivors in articulating their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with an intention of making a transformation of personal and institutional changes.

The chapter commences with the presentation of the findings from the FGDs, constituted of the different voices that coexist at the parish level. These findings reveal themes with insightful information that is paramount towards shaping a pastoral care theology and healing praxis for the ACSA. Hence, this is a contribution that is informed by gender inclusive structures that collectively engage to reshape a communal theology premised on mutuality and cooperation. As indicated in the previous chapter, this exercise seeks to answer the following sub questions:

i. What insights drawn from African woman's theology and praxis of narrative theology could assist Christian married women in the context of pervasive DGBV?
ii. What pastoral care resources/strategies could be put into action to assist the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal to engage the issue on DGBV?

The themes and findings that are presented and engaged in this chapter are graphically presented in Figure 8.1.

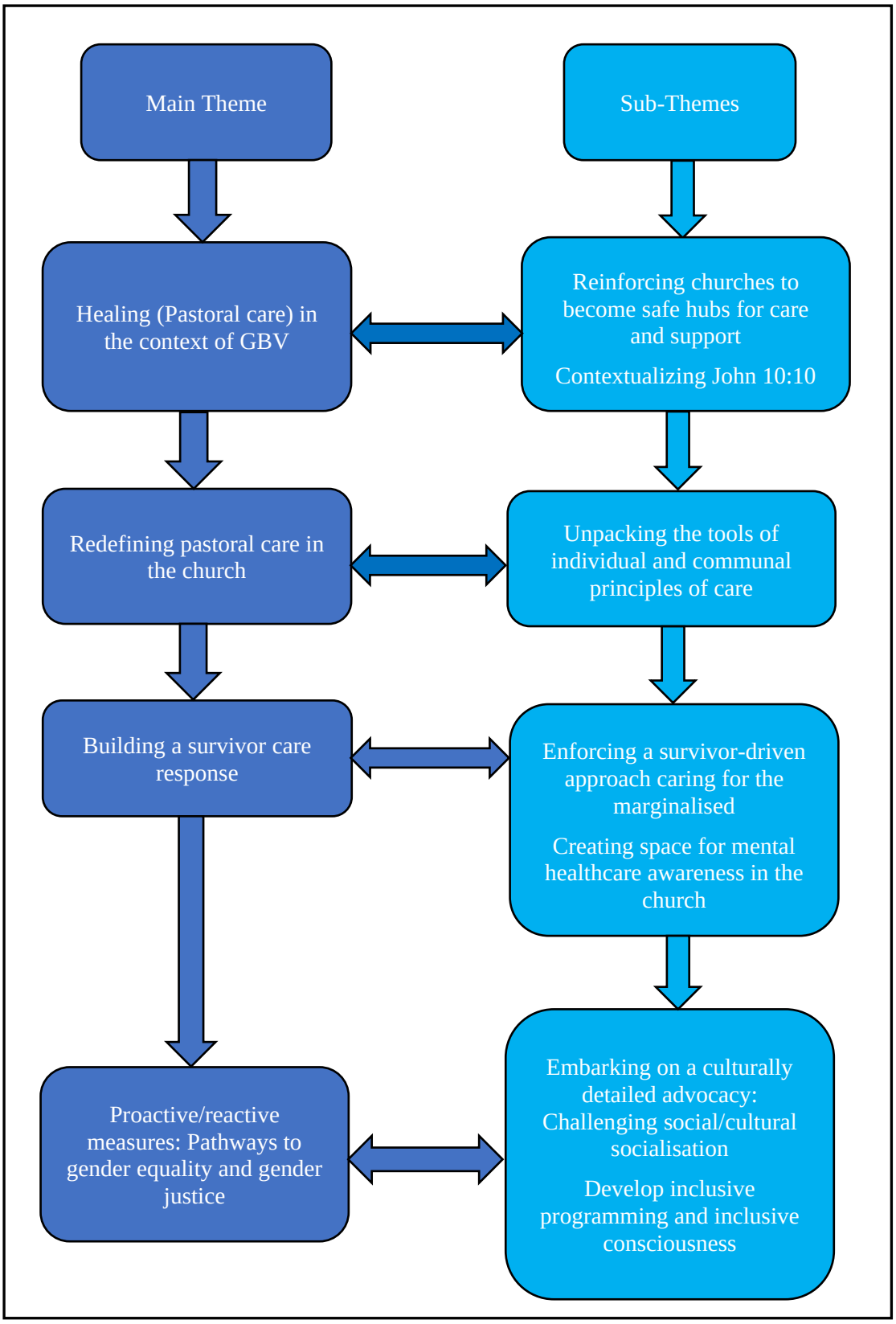

Figure 8.1. Graphical outline of the themes and findings

8.2. The focus group discussions: A theological appropriation

The themes presented in this chapter are not exhaustive, but are salient topics that emerged in the FDGs. The focus group discussions constituted of three different groups. Hence, data presented follows the pattern as FGD I, FGD II and FGD III. The composition of these focus groups is indicated in chapter seven.

Based on the data processes pursued in this study, the church has a role to play in the healing and pastoral care of GBV survivors. This is as role of reinforcing gender justice, disrupting the religious and cultural norms that are harmful. This provides a platform for the church to raise its prophetic voice by shattering hierarchies. That means enabling faith leaders to extend themselves by widening their roles in ministry, not only as priest, but as pastoral nurturers and healing practitioners. The church has a larger role to play, creating "spaces for conversation and have a conflict-sensitive approach to building consensus that seek to do no harm and avoid direct confrontation" (Palm et al., 2017: 8). In relation to GBV specifically, this shift places the church squarely in the centre of healing and pastoral care such that restoration becomes a soothing balm, healing and reconstructing the narratives of trauma. According to Magezi (2020: 62), the desire to make a difference, stems from a heart which influences "our disposition for transformation." It is the mandate of the church to become a witness in such times as it informs transformation, demonstrating "the ethos of love and care for the humanity" (Magezi, 2020: 62). Certainly, in the times of suffering, the church cannot be mute. All efforts ought to speak to changing the landscape, creating new cultures that are geared towards greater impact.

8.2.1. Healing and pastoral care in the context of DGBV

The participants were asked what their understanding of healing and pastoral care should entail in the context of gender-based violence? The following narratives represent some of responses received:

> *Pastoral care (healing)…I don't want to say you don't get hurt but you do find yourself without breaking out. Healing enables one such that you can share your story. You can testify. You can lift another woman because you have lived experience* **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

> *Healing in the church means the church leaders ensure the wellness and the wellbeing of congregants. It is ensuring that their spiritual needs, emotional needs are met and if the church can organise material resources, the church must look after its people* **[Participant A, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

A consensus among the participants was that healing is vital, that it is about connecting people back to self. Hence, pastoral care should empower women survivors to heal and recover such that they gain a better vision of their emotional, spiritual, and mental selves and wellbeing. The participants were asked to contextualise their understanding of John 10:10. Different interpretations were offered as to what Christian marriage should be like. One participant shared this analogy of abundant life:

> *I will just make an example that if you could take a container or a bucket and pour water inside, and water overflows the bucket, we will then say the water is overflowing. So, I think that is the life God has made us to live in earth or I would say is the life we were meant to live in marriage by abiding into his words and commandments* **[Participant B, 22 March 2021, 14h00. FGD I]**.

Another theme that created discussion was the aspect of redefining pastoral care in the church and this was geared towards establishing what the priest can do and what communal principles of care should involve. Hays and Shepard Payne (2020) concluded that mental health professionals can, and should, serve a role in improving the mental and emotional well-being of individuals in distress. This was an acknowledgement that therapy resources should be considered for emotional healing in the church. A response that illustrated this was as follows:

> *In our parishes we are short of resources and skilled people. So, my thinking is that there is a need of FAMSA, the psychologist* **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

Developing partnerships of care and support is so essential as it creates skilled members of the church to be of service. It is obvious that the church cannot work alone in its own bubble, and instead should enable a collaborative environment with others to in making social change a reality. Obviously, how this is to be executed requires much attention. The participants also raised concerns of confidentiality and trust which may hinder the ability of women survivor of DGBV to speak freely and openly to their priest, counsellor, or pastoral care practitioner until they gain their full assurance that they will not judge and that everything will be held in strictest confidence.

The church needs to recognize the importance of collaborating with other stakeholders as it cannot solve complex societal challenges on its own. Indeed, it cannot work alone as if it were in a vacuum cut off from the rest of the world.

For example, one participant indicated the following:

> *If I was going through to whatever I need now to offload, a priest for me would be the last person to go to. I'd look around and find someone, whether its male or female that I feel I can trust and speak to them* **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

The participant went on to add:

> *I cannot come to that holy leader with my dirty linen because I still want to be in this church for the longest time. How am I going to look my priest after I have offloaded my most stuff that defines me, the real me, my emptiness and what is going on with my life, and then how do I look at him the following day or the following Sunday* **[Participant F, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

Priests are still held in high esteem; perhaps one may argue that priests present themselves as holy and thus make themselves appear spotless and untouchable. From this one deduces that congregants want to connect and relate to the priest who can put himself in the shoes of those who are suffering. Trust is an important aspect in any relationship.

Another participant suggested a different viewpoint other than counselling:

> *I think we will not succeed as a church when it comes to healing and base it only in the counselling corner. I think healing at church should start at the pulpit, the way this gospel is preached* **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

While another participant raised serious concerns that counselling was an issue:

> *There is a problem in counselling. There is what we call biblical counselling and psychological counselling. So, now there is war going on between psychology and Christianity. There is an intellectual war between the two. Let me make an example; in psychology, one of their fundamentals is that you must love yourself, have this high self-esteem, love yourself and think about yourself, and then that's contrary to Matthew 22 which says the first person you love is God, with all your heart, your mind, and then you love others as you love yourself. So, we have got these two, the other is promoting Gods love and then the other one is promoting self-love. So, there is always this war between biblical counselling and psychological counselling* **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

While counselling is highly acclaimed for making a difference, the church has a responsibility of making this distinction, using language that is accessible to the congregants so that counselling becomes an accessible and affordable solution to many struggling with the realities of mental health.

The subject of counselling inspired a discussion that questioned the qualities and characteristics of those who are expected to handle counselling and other forms of pastoral care. While the participants referred to different attributes, one participant stated the following:

> *Biblical and theological we are supposed to have the fruits of the holy spirit, joy, love, peace, self-respect, kind ness and all that. We are supposed to have the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As I have said, we are supposed to have all of that. So, if you really want to have the attributes of a person who would want to do counselling in church, I will say she must have the fruit of the Holy Spirit, the person must have those* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

While healing can unfold in different ways, most scholars highlight the usefulness of narrative discourse in counselling. For example, one participant reported:

> *The church must provide an opportunity for one to open up and spell out what they are going through. But even those structure, you wouldn't have provided a healing space if you will provide a structure for people to say or speak out what they are going through and then don't do anything about it. So, you need to have a holistic approach that says, once I hear about so and so's predicament, what do I do, in that way maybe you are adding value* **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

It is important that the church create safe spaces where survivors cannot be shamed and silenced. Such spaces should be non-judgmental and non-threatening, allowing the survivors to speak freely and openly about their pain and share their experiences. Another critical aspect is that of challenging patriarchal theologies and church policies. One participant shared the following:

> *You see this this of encouraging women to resist (bekezela), this thing of saying sweep your marital problems under the carpet tis contributes to prolonged abuse and it must be stopped* **[Participant E, 14 May 2021, 17h00. FGD II]**.

8.2.2. Sacred texts: Rubbing salt into the wound

The issue of the sacred texts remains a thorn in the flesh as the church believes in the literal translation of the Bible. It is an area where the church rethinks how it provides lifegiving messages, sermons,

prayers, and liturgies that oppose gender-based violence. In the discussions held with survivors and participants of the FGDs, not much discussion was held on how the church needs to review the use and the misuse of biblical text, particularly its translation and interpretation. Different scholars have advocated for the re-reading of the Bible as key to changing the mindset, intentionally affirming the space where Bible stories and texts become tools that empower. There is the important concern of skewed Bible texts which the church leaders need to scrutinise.

One participant challenged the patriarchal and misogynist understanding and interpretation of Bible texts held by the church and its priests. His argument was as follows:

> *I have heard people interpreting Genesis 2 where the fall is a woman's fall, and then in Genesis 2, the woman is a helper. They misinterpret helper, and then you go to, I think its Matthew 5 where God talks about the divorce. You go to Mark 10, again where they talk about divorce, and then you go to Ephesians 5 where they say a woman must submit. You know all those things they are completely and deliberately misinterpreted to subdue women. I find it so strange that women never take this thing up, I've heard in conversations that women don't take this thing up, and it's all misinterpretation* **[Participant H, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

8.2.3. Creating space for mental health care in the church

One participant admonished the church for portraying an image that was 'too holy' making it difficult to approach anyone. The arguments the participant lodged were as follows:

> *The church is a synagogue of the devil because there are lot of things that are happening there unholy. However, the image that we portray is that this is the holiest of the holies. The problem is not that we live in that castle of holiness or that we portray that high castle of holiness, but the problem is we live there in that castle of holiness, we live there, and we portray this image and we become unapproachable* **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

8.2.4. Church women who share fake testimonies

Another theme that formed a central part of the FGDs alluded to creating proactive and reactive pathways for gender equality and gender justice in the church. This discussion was precipitated by the churches ambivalence on creating a healthy discussion of marriage and sexuality. One participant stated that:

I have noticed that church ladies are not honest, they will be just sharing fake testimonies. They will be sugar coating it, but that's not what it's all about…. We do go to church, attend Sunday school when we are still young, grow up in church, get into youth and be young adults, but my church has never prepared me for marriage. Whether we wanted to or not, but we don't get prepared for marriage in church as young women. We just get there as blank slates. So, it would be good if the church realizes that the importance of preparing young women for marriage because you just engage yourself into something you are not aware of. So, that it what I think we need the most in our churches. We were taught in Sunday school, but no one has ever sat me down perhaps sitting us down as a group of young adults. No one has ever talked about marriage, even if you are about to enter the marriage life **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

8.2.5. The lack of pre-marital counselling and preparation

This lack of preparation by the church for marriage became a contentious issue and what followed were suggestions on how the church can navigate issues relating to GBV. For example, one participant presented the following suggestions:

The church should be proactive. As a church we need to have sessions for couples, where we talk about marital problems openly and in a fun way not in an environment where you be like, eish if I say this, they will judge me. Talk about openly and have sessions regularly or at least twice a year **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

8.2.6. Equipping the youth

Another important issue raised was the realisation that the church needs to revise its teachings and programmes for equipping the youth. A participant made the following suggestion:

We must do it early and start at youth level and we need to have structured classes of marital levels, where people can be taught at early stage rather than focusing more after they have committed. We can still have programs for those who are married but let's get them before they even think about getting married. So, we will be empowering them prior committing to marriage, so that even when they commit to that, they will know what is expected of them **[Participant J, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

8.2.7. Storytelling: Voicing our pain and finding healing

Scholars highly acclaim the embodied experience of those who suffer; since the journey towards healing begins with storytelling. There has been a trend and an overreliance on spiritualising healing, something which several of the participants recognised. Hence, one of the participants narrated that the church always regarded prayer as the solution to DGBV:

> *The Bible is lovely, and it is helpful, but at times let's talk about the problem; let's sit down and that helps. It makes one feel important when you have a one-on-one talk instead of saying we will pray for you. You don't even know what a person is going through* **[Participant I, 30 May 2021, 16h00. FGD III]**.

Enforcing a survivor-driven approach caring for the marginalised means focusing on lived experiences. Women survivors yearn to be heard, loved, and understood. Hence the call for courage, where the church needs to be uncomfortable with being uncomfortable on the issue of GBV. It is a perfect time to 'walk like Jesus.' As 1 John 2:6 states, *"Whoever claims to live in him [sic] must live as Jesus did"* (New International Version). There is only one model, the one that emulates the ministry of Jesus, which seeks to amplify a divine space within the church. Walking like Jesus, whose ministry was known for embracing vulnerability in exchange for strength and abounding in grace for the wounded. Storytelling is a culturally appropriate catalyst for healing as it embodies indigenous principles of sharing, which in turn activates agency for mental wellness and emotional healing.

This data also revealed how women survivors depict courage and resilience once they have found healing. This reconstruction and healing of a broken narrative demonstrates the inexplicable power to recover from adversity. Data from this research study brought forth ideas for leadership and strategic guidelines which the church needs to review and reinforce within its borders. This data placed prime responsibility in multiple layers on the church where intervention intricacies enable the church to become a safe space for storytelling, shifting from spirituality to pragmatic steps. These steps empower the church as its healing heritage, promoting mutuality and restoring humanity.

Storytelling has been explicated as fundamental in creating healing support in the lives of GBV survivors. Interestingly, storytelling in this research study proved to be a useful methodology for survivors regardless of when last they were subjected to abuse.

8.2.8. Where are the men? The collective amnesia of the male church

Males form the principal leadership of the church, where the Christian church tradition still undergirds the 'sanctity' of the patriarchal tradition, of which the ACSA is no exception. What was apparent in

this study, was my scepticism that men would show up for this study was to be well-founded. They were recruited in the second part of data, to be part of the FGD conversations. However, in all the groups, there was zero participation. The only male support acquired was from parish rectors who played a pivotal role in the recruitment of suitable participants. This is indicative that church systems ofttimes recuse themselves on challenges pertaining to women. In this study, this is an elusive but profound exposé that social and cultural conditions continue to be reconstructed in churches that acknowledge female subordination. Hence, the manifestation of domestic violence and gender-based violence is still painstakingly 'her problem' and 'her struggle.' Despite this lack of participation from their male counterparts, women still envision an egalitarian society, where men have an influential role to play in socialising positive masculinities – shaping young men for marriage where equality underscores a healthy marriage. Generous insights from the women participants revealed that women have a high regard for humanity and mutuality, both male and female reconstructing change in the church space. The gospel of gender equality still needs to be preached, such that it reaches the entire church community, enabling it to become a public discourse.

While assumptions about the existence of GBV in the church may be met with denialism, since the church space is considered 'a holy place,' this research exposed that the ACSA, like other faith organisations and stakeholders is not immune to DGBV. This is an ongoing struggle against gender inequality and oppression that church women have faced since the early church. It continues to be a struggle as the enemy steals and destroys not just women's lives, but the legacies of many Christian families. It is a narrative where GBV remains a stronghold where patriarchy is a life-denying phenomenon in the lives of many Christian women. Women survivors, in revealing their narratives of pain, humiliation and suffering revealed that African women remain in bondage. However, this study created a safe space for the survivors to vent and cry, to deconstruct their pain, and to reflect on the gravity of pain endured in their abusive marriages. It has also allowed women survivors to recognise their resilience and agency as a vital product that has emerged in each participant's narrative.

8.2.9. Listening to women's forgotten voices

The essence of this research has uncovered how Christian women survivors of GBV have buried their emotional wounds and how they are desperate for a theology that honours their presence in the church. They yearn for a church that empowers them to claim their voice anew, and to show their vulnerability in their quest to be whole and be healed as they adventure as recreated whole vessels of God. Womanist theology advocates for lived experiences, and this what this study has unleashed. As a lay preacher, I have often questioned and critiqued how the church seems incapable of meeting women at their point of brokenness. This study has the objective of allowing women to have space where they could validate their own lived experiences, shattering the shame of DGBV.

Research enables societies to gain insight into subjugated knowledges and feminist qualitative research specifically offers an opportunity to listen to the forgotten voices of women. Listening to women's voices challenges dominant discourses, such as masculinity, men's and fathers' rights, and heteronormativity that suppresses women's experiences. Realising that many women are subjected to primarily psychological forms of violence in intimate relationships, generated my interest in this area of gendered violence as I came to understand the lack of adequate language and social exposure within my own socio-cultural environment. This led me to question how other women's current or past experiences of psychological violence were rendered invisible, leaving women unable to give meaning to their experiences, make sense of their victimisation, and describe its effects. The participants expressed a common understanding that there must be safer spaces and protocols for reporting and referral. The formulation of church as a safe space was recognised with ambivalence. While some participants were open to this viewpoint, others expressed their concern about ethical issues, fearing shame, lack of confidentiality, and anonymity in handling women issues.

8.2.10. External stakeholder partnerships and participation

The church needs to recognise the importance of collaborating with other stakeholders as it cannot solve complex societal challenges on its own. Indeed, it cannot work alone as if it were in a vacuum cut off from the rest of the world. The data has shown that the church needs to partner with relevant stakeholders, deploying the expertise of psychologists, social workers, counsellors, and other skilled priests, as they work in unison to bring healing to the survivors of GBV.

8.2.11. Awareness programmes teaching about patriarchy and toxic masculinity

If the current generation of adult males have been socialised in settings that are pro-patriarchal as those that endorse the inferiority of women and girls, who shall be entrusted with this fundamental role of changing mindsets? The church should therefore invest in ongoing programmes that are geared towards conscientising its congregants. Much deliberation within the FGBs was spent on the importance of focusing on early intervention strategies and programmes.

8.2.12. Appointing an inclusive gender team

While GBV affects women because of being women, parishes should have inclusive gender desks or gender ministries that works on combating DGBV. It is important to also include conscientised men and boys as central to the church gender ministry programme to intentionally break traditional stereotypes and gender norms.

8.2.13. Counselling and debriefing for couples

Data from the FDGs speaks to the importance of organising, coordinating, and hosting pastoral care sessions for pre-counselling and post-counselling sessions with couples. Moreover, the church needs to invest in empowerment workshops, healing retreats dialogues for married couples. These could also be safe spaces and safe platforms for women to disburden themselves of their trauma and self-empty their pain. While it is pivotal to prepare couples for marriage, this should not be done a few weeks prior to the wedding because if done in that fashion, it may defeat the purpose of creating awareness. Instead, the church is advised to be proactive and organise workshops and seminars such as, "Before I say I do" and similar programmes like the marriage encounter programme organised by the Roman Catholic Church.

8.2.14. The recognition of care skills within the church

The ACSA is advised to recognise the skills and expertise it has within the church. Data from the FGDs referred to specific discussions to how the church should not only premise the identification of care skills on graduates, or professionals sitting in its pews. Instead, the church needs to recognise the innate abilities and counselling skills found among many of its ordinary members, as well those who are retired, yet still active.

8.2.15. GBV and activism: Food parcels and care packages

Ordinarily, the church has in the past held acts of activism as a way of standing in solidarity with the survivors. These were highlighted in chapter two. Now, suggestions highlight 'doable' and practical programmes which the church needs to employ. This relates to handing out food parcels and care packages, including clothing items, toiletries, feminine hygiene products. Suggestions also speak to hosting job readiness sessions where survivors are assisted with successfully finding jobs and employment to financially sustain them.

8.2.16. Disrupting the *status quo* by doing theology differently

Based on a previous scoping review on the role of faith leaders and faith players, previous studies commended the mobilising of faith organisations as including the formal training at seminaries as well as through informal mentoring involving workshops (Le Roux & Bowers-Du Toit, 2017). However minimal research has explored the importance of challenging patriarchal systems within churches and challenging topics considered taboo. Moreover, this research set itself as a platform for 'self-emptying pain' women endure in their marriages due to gender-based violence.

This study revealed that DGBV is an uncomfortable subject within the church. Upon approaching church leaders soliciting their participation, priests expressed their ambivalence and concern on the subject, the words they used being this is so 'private and uncomfortable.' Such a topic has been swept under the carpet and priests have opted to take the spiritual route without ensuring that the congregants are emotionally and mentally sound. I think what remains disturbing is that the women guilds have been stuck on this issue of redefining their role in terms of expanding their capacity to programme development. What has been noted for years is the outward looking phenomenon as the church fails to recognise capacity within the church and to recognise the possibilities of the church in creating partnerships thus strengthening systems and powers that disrupt the *status quo*. This study therefore endeavoured to create a platform for women to express their pain and raise their voices. It also sought to shift the conversation towards intervention guidelines that seek to make a change in ACSA churches with respect to GBV.

Storytelling in this instance was hailed for its gift in being a pillar of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS), meant to honour stories at the grassroots level with regards to women who have been affected and inflicted by the scourge of GBV. Using both methodologies, I as the research wanted to establish if both methods could co-exist as they reform an inclusive theology where the church can embrace the western way of collating data, while acknowledging an indigenous way of sharing stories which is argued to be useful in the healing process.

The church has for decades focused on the spirituality of it people creating a narrative that all answers are embedded upon "worshipping and praying," basically doing 'Godly things' without stating practical steps towards pastoral care of the marginalised groups within the church. The study took it upon itself to demonstrate how the church can be an agency for change, healing, and wellbeing. Hence, the praxis altered systematic changes, that put women at the forefront. Hence, this study encapsulates succinctly alternative strategies of reaching out to women survivors of GBV, to the afflicted, wounded and the marginalised, who have been pushed to the margins of society. Linked to this, is a call to change, acknowledging that the church is still relevant, but it needs to step up and do theology differently.

8.2.17. #HonouringHerNarrative

As I have argued in chapter two, church dogma, structures and traditions have long justified gender violence as the norm. Indeed, stories abound of the church leaving women survivors of GBV at the margins. However, in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic, where restrictions and lockdowns have seen a significant spike in reported cases of domestic violence, rape, and femicide, the church needs to regain its prophetic voice, doing theology in a manner that amplifies women's voices against this scourge, bringing about societal change. Such change is possible, so much so, that structures and

systems that previously justified violence against women can be changed and challenged. The significance of Christ in today's COVID-19 world, affirms that, "*The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit"* (Psalm 34:18 New International Version). It is essential therefore that the church can bear witness to the Triune God who is the healer, giver of grace, the nurturer, justice restorer and the one who *"heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds"* (Psalm 147:3 New International Version). Through this study the revitalised the fundamental contextual principle of honouring women's survival stories within the church, centring on women's healing, flourishing, restoration, and wellbeing, as opposed to a top-down time-honoured, androcentric approaches prescribed by researchers.

The time has arrived for this revolution, creating a new consciousness, and re-awakening. The church is a prime space where women can lament and voice out their pain, restoring the imperfect injustices that have been serenaded theologically, endorsing longer lasting legacies of patriarchy. The church can restore confidence to many women by ensuring that it opens its doors, creates safe spaces where women survivors can tell their stories without fear or shame, gaslighting, or judgement, for the purposes of their emotional and psychological healing as endorsed in this study.

8.2.18. The church: Optimism for gender justice and transformation

There is great potential if the church steps up to the challenge of gender justice and transformation. I suggest that the church needs to raise its prophetic voice and show empathy towards women survivors of GBV. The church should cease acting as if it is in a vacuum, and instead consider joining in new partnerships with other stakeholders that can enable married women who are in toxic relationships the space to lament and cry out for justice, to reconstruct meaning out of their tortured narratives. The church is rich with capacity as it consists of professionals such as psychologists, nurses, and social workers, who could be its new foot envoys, presenting their gifts of humanity to those women who have been affected by GBV.

8.2.19. Gender justice dialogues

Gender-based violence has for centuries remained something that has been a taboo subject, both in the church and general society. In the context of the church space, in the past, it would have been considered an unholy conversation, contaminating the wells of salvation. This study has re-uncovered the truth that the church should stand for justice. The church can stand still like a stone monolith of the past, and be underutilised, only to be used for comforting the comfortable each Sunday morning through its liturgies and sermons. Now is the time that belief systems are shattered, where the church can render its divine calling towards the community, journeying with the weak and wounded on the road of salvation and fulness.

8.3. The visual maps: A theological reflection

The latter part of this chapter unpacks and presents a theological reflection of the visual maps presented in chapter seven. The visual maps were conceptualised by five of the participants who shared generous viewpoints on how the church must respond to DGBV.

Figure 8.2. Unpacking the visual maps

Figure 8.2 depicts the themes that emerged from the visual maps. These themes can educate the church how it can shape pastoral care guidelines for women GBV survivors. In some instances, the findings presented in the visual maps integrate with the findings that emerged from the focus group discussions.

In analysing the visual maps as they engage on the pastoral care praxis guidelines for the church, this study situated the question of praxis by utilising Osmer's adapted *see-judge-act-evaluate* methodological approach in responding to social issues, promoting a method of movement from observation to action. Since this research has situated itself with Christian women survivors of GBV, the aim was to honour the lived experiences of Christian women who have first-hand experience of GBV.

8.3.1. See

Richard Osmer's adapted *see-judge-act-evaluate* methodological approach will guide and empower the church to put our hands back on the pulse of survivors, exploring their situation in their lived contexts, through their own understanding and language of being wronged. It enables us to look at the systematic challenges that need to be challenged in soliciting changes that are restoring humanity and dignity. In this instance, during the interviews as indicated in chapter five, safe space for engaging on the survivor narrative was created for women who are victimised and dehumanised. My position was to facilitate the engagement of the survivor narratives that form the basis of this study with the intent of initiating a rich conversation of analysing Christian women survivors of GBV in their own context. Lessons learned in this task, sparked the realisation that the church as an ecclesial system can shift its practices and theologies, and going beyond sermons by creating such safe spaces, demonstrating a collective solidarity with the many who been afflicted in the sanctuary of their homes. If churches and church leaders are 'walking like Jesus,' pragmatically they should exude compassion for others, particularly those who are wounded, hurt, living in poverty, subdued in unequal relations and those subjected to various levels of injustice. They should cultivate agape love for the parishioners and demonstrate humility, restore dignity for the people, demonstrating inclusive love and support. These values need to shine through and be seen, felt, and experienced, enfleshing the "Word of God" through biblical texts which are alive and contextually relevant, and not from a well-worn ancient book riddled with poetic verses to be memorised. However, it needs to speak to people's situation, minister in their context so that it liberates and transform lives.

8.3.2. Judge

This is another level of reflection, allowing us in the context of the church, to study the systemic inequalities that continue to exist. This speaks to issue of toxic theologies, that have a long history of silence about GBV. It is the heritage of the biblical texts that have made Christian women vulnerable to abuse and submission. The drawing of visual maps has uncovered this, critiquing the old systems, and promoting a survivor-centred approach, thereby presenting the ways and means of advocating for the pastoral care of women survivors of GBV. In this study, data has effectively critiqued the dehumanising structures present within the church, which the FGD conversations well-articulated. In the focus group discussions, explorations brought deep insight into how the church can redefine its pastoral praxis, changing the church into a healing hub for those women under the scourge of GBV.

8.3.3. Act

Acting to promote justice and improve the situations of those women affected by GBV has been a central element of the overall study and in conceptualising and collating the visual maps, which signify

the visual representation of metaphors and language for transforming churches into transformed healing spaces. These visual maps have therefore demonstrated that the church can change, and all it needs is to be open to new teachings and learnings and place less emphasis on the pulpit each Sunday morning. Each day in small gatherings, church leaders should open their hearts and minds to those in need of comfort and consolation to women survivors of GBV, by creating space for conscientising congregants and dismantling the patriarchal legacies of the past. In this study, the outputs focus on a pastoral care praxis which the ACSA could explore in responding to GBV. The visual maps therefore demonstrate what practical steps the ACSA parishes need to take against the scourge of GBV.

8.3.4. Evaluate

The church needs to evaluate its actions and critically examine its methods, by acknowledging that the church is not a showroom for fake smiles, but a place where women survivors of GBV can, as with the Samaritan woman whom Jesus met by Jacob's well, be invited to drink from the living waters of eternal life. As Jesus can state:

> *"…Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life"* (John 4:13–14 New International Version).

Jesus's ministry was focused on healing the sick, walking with the vulnerable, and uplifting the brokenhearted, thereby positively impacting the lives of the marginalised and downtrodden of society. The visual maps replicated this ministry, by responding to GBV. The participants who drew up these visual maps, wanted to express their visualisation of the church and how it needs to minister to women survivors of GBV.

8.3.5. The church as a community healing hub or healthcare clinic

Visual map #1 and Visual map #2 exude similar concepts of defining the church as a healing hub or healthcare clinic. In using the metaphor of a clinic, one imagines spaces of rehabilitation, group counselling sessions, and specialist treatment. Both maps validate the incorporation of spirituality and religion. In this instance, the two participants opted to sketch the church structure, signifying the church as a centre of healing (See: Visual map #1; Visual map #2); a well of healing where broken souls and shattered hearts are mended into a whole (John 4:4–26). Jesus is acknowledged as the Great Physician, and hence the church is represented as a space that can bring peace, harmony, and wholeness. This healing can be two-fold, it is the healing for the sinner and healing for the survivor who seeks God's forgiveness and grace to have their heart mended such that they can look forward to a new future. The church is represented as a place and space where believers gather to connect with God, to fellowship,

but most importantly, a space where there is an expectation of restoration. It is a space where those who have been healed take a stand and testify about their healing journey. The church needs to be a space where those who are weeping, can have a front seat so that they can, with the woman with the issue of blood for twelve years, come to Jesus and "*touch the edge of his cloak"* and receive healing, hearing the words of Jesus, "your faith has healed you" (Matthew 9:20, 22 New International Version). Women survivors come from all walks of life where life has been cruel and dehumanising, but the church must reach them at their point of need. No-one needs to be ashamed, and no-one needs to feel they do not belong in this space. This speaks to the values of love, warmth, and unconditional acceptance. Biblical texts depict healing, where Jesus demonstrated healing of the sick. Hence, in this study the church should be a healing hub and a safe space where silence is shattered and diminished, giving voice to narratives such that victim/survivors can share and deconstruct their pain, obtaining meaning and reassemble the pieces of their life-giving narratives towards shaping new meanings. It is the new meaning that should speak to thriving, blooming, and flourishing in the image of Christ. It is the church where sermons that teach on marriage and responsibility, provide an option for women to divorce or to leave an abusive marriage. The church should spend generous amounts of time in teaching and restoring the self-esteem and self-worth of women who have suffered GBV in their marriages. The church has a role of restoring people's distorted viewpoints of life. This can be achieved through ongoing teaching empowering men and women that they are each made in the *Imago Dei*:

> *"So God created humankind in his [sic] image, in the image of God he [sic] created them; male and female he [sic] created them"* (Genesis 1:27 New Revised Standard Version).

The church needs to preach this gospel and doctrine of equality, conscientising its young growing men and women, providing them with a solid understanding when it comes to their identity in Christ. Furthermore, the church should handle past trauma with care and exercise compassion and understanding when dealing with bitterness and brokenness that exists in the church.

8.3.6. The church as a river of life

Another participant used the metaphor of a river in their Visual map (See Visual map #2). The metaphor of a river is used in the Bible several times to depict different symbolic meanings. Chief amongst these is the metaphor of the "river of life," which nourishes, purifies, and cleanses, with Jesus as centre and its source:

> *"For the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes"* (Revelation 7:17 New International Version).

The theo-biblical significance of a river holds further significance as it marked the first of the ten plagues to be unleashed upon the Egyptians when Moses struck the river Nile with his staff, that its waters turned into blood (Exodus 7:20), thereby convincing Pharaoh to free the Israelite slaves from the bondage and oppression they had endured in Egypt for 400 years. In the context of GBV, the participants mentioned that the church should be the river of life, where they are empowered to leave the old as they ascend into the sphere of newness of life.

8.3.7. The church as a mountain top of prayer

In both the Old and New Testament, the metaphor of a mountain top appears in different texts. A mountain is one of God's creations which demonstrates Gods love to humanity, beautiful and spectacular. A mountain is also a metaphor for prayer and supplication (See: Visual map #3), it being the place we find Jesus alone at night with his heavenly father, deep in prayer:

> *"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God"* (Luke 6:12).
>
> *After he had dismissed them* [the disciples], *he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone"* [Matthew 14:23 New International Version].

The same metaphor holds true for believers go to the mountain to cry out to the Lord, to pray, to give thanks to the Lord for the blessings.

> *"Lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth"* (Psalm 121:1–2 New International Version).

This Psalm encourages congregants to trust God as the giver of life and in the context of the survivor narratives, it could mean going to the mountain for restoration or for seeking the Lord's face on how to ascertain a solid perspective on how detach from a toxic and abusive relationship. It should be a space where one gains hope and clarity. Mountains remain relevant in the faith journey of Christian believers, and are associated with change and transformation:

> *"After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James, and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light"* (Matthew 17:1–2 New International Version).

This is the Bible story of the Transfiguration of Jesus which is a pivotal moment in the life of Jesus, where he gained his spiritual authority from God his father. The setting on the mountain top is presented as the point where the temporal and the eternal meet; Jesus, being both fully human and fully divine, acting as a bridge between heaven and earth. In the context of women survivors of GBV, the mountain represents the church as a space of healing, recovery, and transformation. In Christian teaching, the Mount of Transfiguration depicts an encounter with God, where every person is transformed and healed, where lives are lives are altered, where life-denying perspectives are changed to give life, to restore dignity and to serve justice.

8.3.8. The church as healing hands: Serving life, harmony, and justice

Visual map #4 signifies healing hands. As part of worship, the lifting of hands signifies a way of surrendering, demonstrating that as human beings we cannot do it all alone, but we need divine intervention. The lifting of hands is about a prayer, praise, worship, and deliverance. Different texts in the Bible demonstrate in unique ways how the lifting of hands speak of praise, e.g., Psalm 63:4; 88:9; 119:48; 143:6. Hands are also central to healing and prayer. In the context of the ministry of Jesus and the church, hands are expressed in the laying on of hands, anointing the sick with oil, an expression of prayer, healing, and blessing. In reference to this visual map, hands are used to signify that the church is accountable for the wellbeing of women survivors of GBV and other congregants who share different struggles in their emotional and spiritual journeys. Specifically, this visual incorporates a prayer model as it guides believers on how to pray. Conducting a prayer is attributed by five elements which include confession, petition, intercession, thanksgiving, and praise.

8.3.9. The church as a wellness facility

Visual map #5 incorporates the metaphor of the church as a wellness facility, or healthcare clinic. This entails that the church partners with organisations and healthcare professionals in the community to create the environment to end GBV. In Zimbabwe, according to Manzanga and Magezi (2019: 7), there have been efforts at altering and transforming, "traditional and theological views that entrench the practices." The visual maps made similar suggestions of making systemic changes. Also, they suggest that ministry should premise itself on the understanding that God created male and female as articulated in Genesis 1:26–27. What is paramount is that the church needs to take a bold stand in doing away with messaging where women are depicted as inferior beings or less human. Instead, the church should advocate for church as a space that recognises male and females as co-equals before God, thereby enforcing equality. According to Manzanga and Magezi (2019: 7), the church needs to be survivor-centred in its approach, this being achieved by including, "pastors and leadership of the denomination(s), with women taking the lead in coordinating the discussions." They further posit that

these spaces must be safe and "encourage women to speak and share their experiences" (2019: 7). In other words, the church must create safe spaces where women survivors of GBV can lament about the injustices of GBV, cry out their pain, give voice to their healing stories. For this to take place, the ground must be levelled through liberating teachings.

8.4. Chapter summary

The chapter engaged the findings that emerged from the FGD and visual maps data. The themes unpacked highlight how the ACSA can create safer spaces of equality, engaging its youth and other guilds against toxic teachings particularly in the context of marriage which can be a seedbed for women abuse. The findings also revealed how the ACSA churches can be proactive in responding to GBV, and the need for transformation and redefining the role of churches against the GBV pandemic.

In the final chapter, I will present an overview of the key questions and objectives of the study, as well as a summary of the findings, recommendations for further research, and a brief conclusion.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

"Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights, beside the way, at the crossroads she takes her stand;

beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries out:

To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live"

(Proverbs 8:1–4 New Revised Standard Version)

9.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the entire research project and the steps undertaken, including a survey of the landscape. The chapter discloses my positionality as far as undertaking a work of this nature, more so amid the COVID-19 global pandemic. This concluding chapter will present some theological reflections on what the role of the ACSA as an advocate for gender justice and healing should be. It succinctly appreciates the work on the theology of vulnerability and recognition, shedding light particularly on those women who experience suffering because of patriarchy and oppression. The memoirs explicated in this study based on survivor narratives, revealed the complex layers of inequality, injustice, and human rights violation. These narratives have been "potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims" (Schaffer & Smith, 2004: 1). Also, they have been a fundamental trace in the journey of healing by giving the women survivors of GBV a voice to echo their lamentations. I also highlight the journey of healing as a complex venture, which is often not linear, and which of itself requires an intricate approach. Finally, the chapter will include recommendations for further research, guiding future researchers who may want to focus on expanding this enquiry into the pastoral challenges of married Christian women in the context of pervasive GBV. The study will close with a final conclusion.

9.2. The research questions

This research study was centred on the key research question:

> **How should the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal respond to the life-denying reality of GBV drawing on the insights of African women's theology and praxis of narrative theology assist Christian married women?**

This study was given further guidance by five research sub-questions that provided it with clear precision and directionality. These were as follows:

i. How are black Christian married women suffering at the helm of GBV because of tradition, culture, and religion?
ii. How does the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handle this pastoral challenge?
iii. What insights are drawn from African women's theology and praxis of narrative theology that could assist married Christian women in the context of pervasive GBV?
iv. What pastoral care resources could be developed to assist the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal to engage the issue of GBV?

9.3. The objectives of the study

In line with the key research question and sub-questions, the study had four clear research objectives. These were as follows:

i. **Research Objective #1:** To understand Christian married women's knowledge and perceptions of GBV, including patriarchy, toxic masculinity, church, and marriage, within the ACSA.
ii. **Research Objective #2:** To explore how the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal handles GBV as a pastoral challenge.
iii. **Research Objective #3:** To critique current theological practices and pastoral case interventions which the ACSA uses for the advocacy and healing of its women members, to establish how they engage the afflicted and wounded.
iv. **Research Objective #4:** To propose and develop a feminist strategy, drawing insights from African women's theology and the praxis of narrative theology that could assist Christian married women in the context of pervasive GBV.

9.4. Summary of the study's core processes and approach

The study undertook three methodological processes to give insight into the research questions posed:

i. To gain depth into the embodied lived experiences of women survivors of GBV, the study employed semi-structured interviews. These interviews answered Question #1 and #2.
ii. In answering Question #3, the study opted to employ three focus group discussion (FGD) groups. Two of the groups were exclusively female, and one included both women and men.
iii. To answer Question #4, visual mapping was used as a methodology. Five visual maps were conceptualised by five women survivors of GBV, to identify a kind of theology that breaks the protocols of dominance and oppression.

Interviews were utilised to understand the deeper meaningful experiences of women survivors who have experienced GBV. I noticed the importance of an opening ice breaking exercise to set the tone of

each interview. The semi-structured questions were useful in probing each survivor's experience, encouraging each to narrate her unique story.

To begin each focus group discussion, I used what scholars refer to as the visual elicitation method to "elicit participants accounts in an interview" (King et al., 2018: 147). Here, a selected visual art was used to stimulate the discussion. This was a precise move, acknowledging that visuals embody multiple meanings. The visual material was significant in tapping into the interviews, allowing each survivor to give a personal account of her lived experience of GBV.

Data from the interviews revealed that Christian women within the ACSA hold onto Christ as their hope and redeemer in the plight against gendered abuse. This intimation of premising healing through faith and spiritual resources has been deliberated in this study as a space that requires disruption. Accordingly, this study has explored an alternative theological and spiritual resource of non-patriarchal platforms that are non-hierarchical and safe spaced that should be open to women survivors to lament their wounds and the suffering endured in abusive marriages without being subjected to power dynamics.

The study wanted to reveal that African Christian women suffer abuse at the helm of religion and culture as engines for abuse. The focus of the study was to reveal how the ACSA as a faith organisation struggles with the results of GBV upon its members, and the wider society. This was engaged in great depth unpacking the toxicity of religion and its under pinning theologies that have been passed on from a colonialist and patriarchal heritage. Also, the study aimed at revealing how the African culture embodies traditional teachings, practices and belief systems that continue to dehumanise women in a manner that renders them second class citizens in the privacy of their own homes. Most importantly, the institution of marriage was discovered to be a breeder of violence, oppression, and inequality.

Undertaking a nature of this project was important in a sense that by paying attention to the root course of abuse, the data collated can be useful particularly for faith and gender practitioners to create policies and develop gender sensitive theological and spiritual resources that are inclusive and speak lives to those groups who have been poorly represented or othered in the eyes of males. Other benefits of this study are aligned with the appropriation of African traditions that are toxic and harmful to women and girl children. This study set itself as a project that envisions the restoration of humanity and creating braver and safer spaces for women to 'self-empty' their pain, amidst the psycho-emotional trauma they sustain in their marriages.

One critical stance in this research concerned viewing the realities of African women through the intersectional lens. This perspective illuminated how economic dependence makes it difficult for women to escape GBV. However, this did not mean that women who demonstrated being able to

contribute to the upkeep and support of their families were immune to abuse. Instead, it became pertinently obvious that patriarchy at plays a significant role, with women bear the brunt of the impact. In terms of its rationale, the study explored the opportunity of non-patriarchal spaces or resources where GBV women survivors can be rid of dominance and powers that prescribe how women must heal. Using focus group discussions and the visual mapping, this study created a space where women survivors have a voice in the pastoral care praxis. Using their own understanding of pastoral care images and language, the visual maps enabled the women survivors of GBV to shape the context, the route, and the networks critical for meaningful pastoral care. Apart from the comprehensive narratives that gave an understanding of GBV within the ACSA, the visual maps provided an analysis and an intersectional perspective as a means of honouring the stories of survivors of violence in the context of a religious organisation. Lastly, visual maps are a creative tool that can be used in community projects when language (words) cannot articulate the empowerment vision. The visual maps thrived on the use of images to create, shape, and share meanings in a language that resonated well with the survivors of GBV. Hence, in this study they were a significant contribution in mapping change and transformation.

9.5. Navigating the research

By employing the use of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in the study, this meant having different categories of data collection. Due to the nature of the study, the interviews were an excellent tool in delving into the authentic narratives of women survivors where they shared their embodied lived experiences of GBV. As a researcher, I had to navigate different challenges prior to data collection and during data collation. Understanding the sensitivity of the study, the participants were initially not eager to participate in this study. Those who did participate only accepted upon being told that confidentiality and anonymity would be guaranteed, and that only pseudonyms would be used in the final study report. The interviewees allowed me as the researcher to enter the lives of Christian married within the ACSA whose marriages had been abusive, demeaning, and toxic. Data collation, especially in the first category of data collection proved not an easy and straightforward process, as it entailed memory where participants recalled segments of their painful abuse that they had overcome. It was clear that most narratives indicated that healing had for some survivors taken place over many years. Indeed, for some of the participants, the cries that compelled further referral for emotional support revealed that healing was often a long and difficult journey. It is not a once off, and it requires time and patience to process. The interviews revealed how the church has in the past created more harm by silencing and shaming abuse. The implications of this study were thus threefold in my own capacity as an ACSA member and lay minister:

i. It was empowering to 'stand' outside the church and critique its ecclesial dogmas, cultures, and practices, and to understand that longstanding patriarchy continues to yield serious gender disparities within the ACSA.
ii. As a survivor of GBV myself, I found the research to be a healing balm for my own wounds. The study opened my eyes to the realities of toxic masculinities that continue to aggravate gender inequality, and the levels of entitlement that I have observed and experienced in my closest family ties. I now better understand the manifestations of GBV, both in the home and in the wider society.
iii. The study provoked my own pain having been exposed to GBV in my formative years. This proved in so many ways that abuse has long lasting legacies that constantly require incessant interruption. Nevertheless, facing my own traumatic past has given me the opportunity to learn, unlearn, and understand the GBV discourse.

The interviewees mostly shared narratives that highlighted physical abuse and economic abuse. I noticed that women survivors rarely shared about sexual abuse. They would use isiZulu expressions denoting sexual violence, such as: *afune ucansi ngesihluku* (lit: "the husband would demand sex aggressively"). This perhaps speaks to the issue that sexual abuse is still a taboo subject, not only in the church, but within the wider society.

The second category of data collation was conducted using focus group discussions. An expectation was that these groups were composed of lay ministers, a priest in charge of one of the participating parish churches, women leaders, and women from the ACSA guilds. This space was to shatter the myth that GBV is solely a women's issue, and therefore being inclusive was a critical move. However, only one focus group discussion group included a male who is a lay minister in his parish, and currently exploring a vocation in ministry. It is pivotal to explicate that his career within the justice sector heightens his awareness of gender justice as a critical human rights issue. Also, what is worth noting is that priests in charge were helpful in as far as recruiting suitable participants for the study, appointing a liaison person to assist in this regard. For me as a researcher, they were excellent in delegating extra hands to assist in coordinating the project to ensure that everything went smoothly. However, my observation was that they missed one important ingredient in the mix, that is, the importance of their presence and their critical voice in this segment of data collection, since it was central to patriarchal theologies that have been misinterpreted and poorly understood in the past.

It is important that I share the struggles that I encountered in recruiting the participants. Even more so, embarking on this project during the COVID-19 pandemic. This impacted attendance, where in some instances I would go to the parish for data collection as previously agreed and arranged with the concerned participants, and no one would show up. The meetings for the MU guild would however go

on as scheduled with their planned programmes to 'tick off' their action plans and activities achieved. In some instances, they would inform me they were rushing to the house prayer meetings where they travel in groups (which they fondly refer to as *ukuyobona ukuyokhuleka*) where they go to pay their last respects, if a fellow congregant has passed or when they do a home visit with a solid intention of strengthening a family in prayer. This gave me an indication that the women guilds themselves need to be instructed on gender issues and be conscientised differently in the role their can ministry play towards women who are facing the plight of GBV in their marriages.

9.6. The landscape of recognition

In seeking to make a theological contribution to the dialogue, I find inspiration in the work of Kelly Oliver and Robert Vosloo, whose work is central to the landscape of recognition. I therefore bring to attention the theology of recognition as critical in the act of care and support for GBV women survivors. The key learning of this theology is the unique realisation of power dynamics where the church due its hierarchical and patriarchal nature 'miss' recognising the wounded and the suffering. The church as a body, as a system 'miss' observing the pain and by silencing and shaming masks the voices of the marginalised. By so doing, it is blind to the ripple effects of GBV and its devastating consequences to women in the church and in the community at large. Most of all, because of strict adherence to its doctrines and practices, the church diminishes and minimises the tragic experiences of GBV.

Figure 9.1 summarises a model for a reconstructive theology that alters the church's trajectory moving it towards creating enabling and empowering mechanisms of care and support in respect to GBV realities. In my attempt to justify change, I present in Figure 9.1, an archetype for a life-affirming theology for the vulnerable in church spaces. Located on the margins of society, it bears witness to the cries of women, hence the name: sacred circle of sisterhood (humanity), where everyone matters, and are seen and heard, and not shamed nor silenced. Beyond the scope of gender as a theory axis, this is about God's people in all forms of humanity, seeking justice.

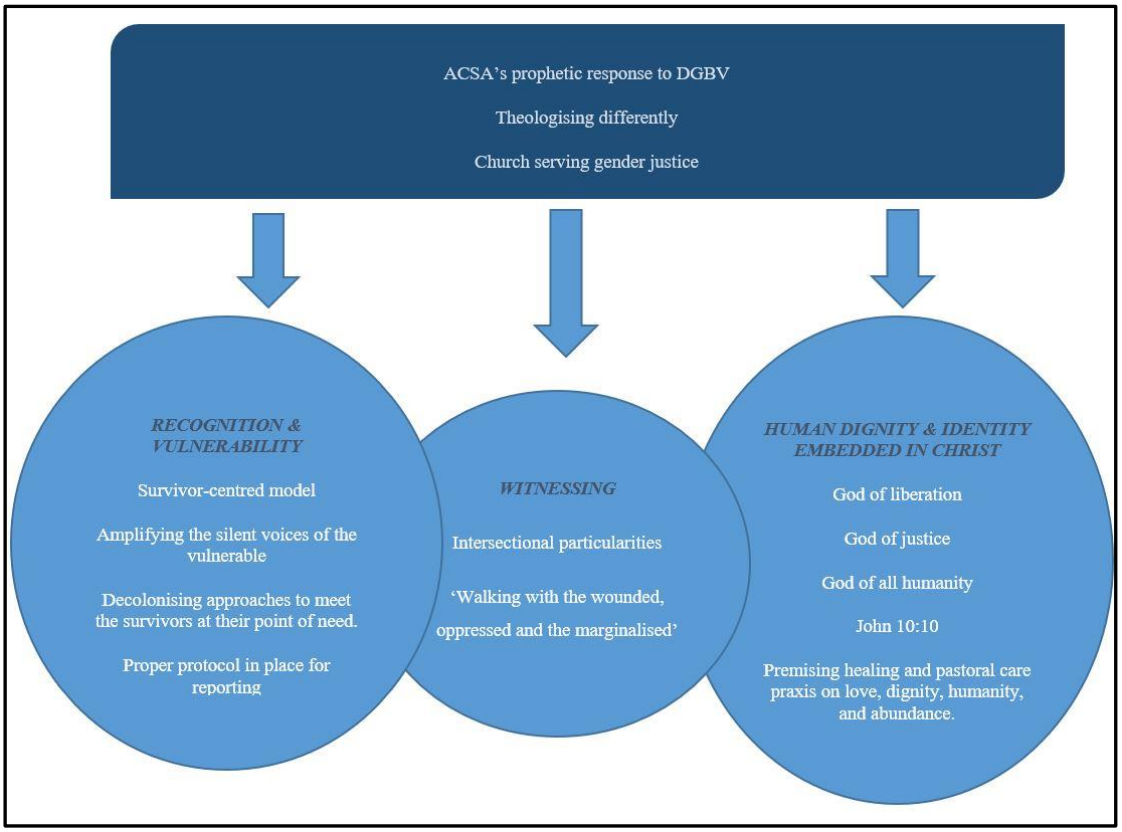

Figure 9.1. Sacred circles of sisterhood (humanity)

Source: Author

This study recognises the colonial ACSA legacy that continues to undermine the rights of women and human personhood, dynamics rendering them susceptible to severe bodily and emotional harm. In the pursuit for justice and transformation, this study critiques the ACSA churches as one of the main culprits of dominance and oppression. Moreover, it recognises the irrelevance and inaccuracy of traditional theology premised on prayer, praise, and worship to numb the pain, paying attention to the symptoms, and not the actual systemic challenges that perpetuate the injustices done to women. Towards making amends, this study invites the church to enter a different conversation. In this, the church must be self-critical in examining its own pathologies where it has been a catalyst in breeding gendered violence which further pushes women survivors to the margins of the church and society. Instead, it invites the church to appropriate new theologies through which gender equality and gender justice can empower women and men regardless of whether they seek to partake in the institution of marriage or not. Apart from preaching, the church needs to employ its teaching function as a core service of ministry aimed at educating, equipping, and empowering the members of the church in this complex COVID-19 era, where human rights, social justice, and transformation are under threat.

The church in terms of its first and primary task, must publicly declare that gender-based abuse is a sin against humanity. It otherwise stands vulnerable and culpable. Its vulnerability is due to its ignorance,

lack of capacity, and failure to respond to GBV. The church has displaced its lack of awareness in handling this plight against humanity, and in so doing has endorsed its power to haemorrhage and disempower. On the grounds of humanity and ethics, this research study endeavours to contribute to the recognition of the survivors of violence as pillars of a redeeming humanity. It becomes critical to observe mutual vulnerability where the church can "both wound and be wounded by the other" (Oliver, 2015: 477). This is an astounding confession where church organisations such as the ACSA, due to their patriarchal and hierarchical traditions, dogmas, and dispositions, secrete "dominance and marginality." This is what is referred to as the "pathology of colonial or oppressive cultures" (Oliver, 2001: 22). There must be a deep recognition that churches like the ACSA are trapped within their toxic cultures and vulnerabilities. The word 'vulnerable' comes from the Latin word: *vulnerabilis* and means 'wounding.' Vulnerability refers to "both the power to wound and the capacity to receive wounds" (Oliver, 2015: 479). Oliver further postulates that there needs to be a recognition of our "own vulnerability and that of others." (2015: 479). It is the recognition of imperfection, where "we are acknowledging that we can both wound and be wounded and that others can both wound and be wounded" (Oliver, 2015: 479). I argue that the churches must recognise the extent of this pathological disease, founded upon traditional and conservative approaches and that have been useful in enabling their ambivalence towards gender justice and transformation. I echo the words of Palm, where she reminds us that the church is "entangled in the sociologies of gendered power" (2019b: 3) This is of great concern where the replication of power will continually embed itself in a blame game, shaming, silencing, and erasing the real struggles which must be accounted for and be placed at the altar of truth and grace. By its own volition, the ACSA needs to confess its sin and seek absolution from those it has sinned. This calls for the ACSA to reconfigure its self-consciousness, and look deep within its systems, doctrines, and structures. In means embarking on a new journey to depatriarchalize church spaces to become braver and safer spaces for healing. According to (Oliver, 2015: 478), "the recognition of vulnerability is the recognition of humanity and vice versa." The landscape of recognition is about ensuring the ACSA becomes a space for the missing to be found, for the muted to be heard, and for the hidden to be seen.

9.7. Witnessing for Christ

There is power in witnessing and being witnesses of Christ's love, healing, and redemption. This has been pivotal in this study, where women survivor narratives have accentuated a space for healing, central to which is the criticality embedded to the shattering of dominating structures. This concept of witnessing enables the GBV survivors' autonomy to witness their experiences according to their own word, deconstructing their experiences in a manner which makes sense to an individual. It is about the radical witnessing of the self where survivors are given ample time to deeply reflect and engage with

themselves outside of the threatening structures of oppression and domination. Sacred circles of sisterhood (humanity) have a potential of being spaces where the 'other' can be treated with utmost care, dignity, and respect, as divine human beings. These spaces call for open interactions where GBV survivors can connect with self and others. These are spaces that can allow survivors to be vulnerable in a different social context where they share a common identity with those who share similar experiences. This is a colossal challenge to the ACSA as it redefines its framework in response to GBV, where it has a mandate of being responsible, taking a stance not to erase and misrecognise the ongoing suffering of women survivors. Instead, the church must acknowledge those who are suffering and vulnerable and be self-critical in examining themselves, by acknowledging their inadequacies and being open to newer realities, which is about the creation of sacred circles of sisterhood where all are recognised, seen, and heard.

9.8. Recognition and vulnerability: Virtues driving change

The church is invited to recognise the 'adverse aches and pains in the raging fires' within the context of Christian marriages. Along these dynamics is the passion to restore hope where women can envision theology as empowering and life-giving, in accordance with Gods will for humankind. There is a greater need to ask God how theology can be done differently, thereby befitting the struggles that entail intersectional particularities. This has become even more urgent in the COVID-19 era, where church and space have become contested terrains. Three questions guide this enquiry:

i. What options are available to the ACSA that can assist it to work prayerfully and practically?
ii. How can the ACSA leverage social media to teach and educate on the destructive nature of inequality and associated harmful practices?
iii. How can the ACSA stop perpetuating division, and instead see every congregant member in terms of the *Imago Dei*, people worthy of restoration, healing, and flourishing, irrespective of age, ability, race, educational background, social and, economic status?

As I conclude this chapter, data from the research warrants that the ACSA reflects on certain questions in their quest for disrupting the *status quo* about DGBV. The church constantly needs to consider practical activities that seek to empower survivors of GBV. There is a great need to have a conversation as to how the ACSA can be an effective witness to humanity for gender justice to prevail. Women guilds such as the MU and AWF are called to pause and reflect on how they need to reform, doing away with becoming an extension of a traditional church that sabotages progress, and instead revises its foundational beliefs and practical engagements to speak to the contemporary struggles in life that women face. The guilds possess a great potential of being sacred circles of sisterhood, where healing and wholeness become their constant refrain. This non-patriarchal space must serve a vital role towards

healing, which is to enable both "the expression of individual suffering and communal lament" (Claassens, 2010: 68).

The use of visual art in this study reveals that there are numerous opportunities where this participatory methodology can be used for expressing emotions, creating space for reimagining and storytelling using pastoral images that tells a story and validates an experience. In echoing the words of Ruether, they should discuss "the meaning of their action, theologically, ecclesially, and setting goals together" (2001: 122). The participatory engagement in this study has created a positive climate for dismantling patriarchy in the church, thereby using the church space for sharing life stories, becoming a support structure for women survivors of GBV without inflicting shame. It is important to utilise church space not just for worship or fundraising, but for creating an ethos for liberation where all rites and liturgies are life-giving. The parishes of the ACSA in the Diocese of Natal have the potential of being hubs of healing, collaborating with specialist healthcare services and professionals who have the resources that can inform change. A growing church should never tire of examining and questioning its theology towards the marginalised, particularly those who have no financial resources. It needs to be bold in terms of how it represents God the liberator, who opposes injustice, and brings healing. It therefore requires that the ACSA cultivates a culture of hosting retreats, not only for enhancing spirituality, but for consciousness raising, for healing, counsel, and direction.

This chapter inspires the church never to grow weary in championing change and uprooting systems that devalue justice. This research has purposed to revise the androcentric nature of pastoral care that continues to be maintained in traditional theology. This study unearthed and honoured the silent voices of women survivors of GBV who have dared to call for non-patriarchal spaces they see as pivotal in shaping a pastoral care praxis that prioritises feminist perspectives. The ministry of Jesus is about bringing salvation and opposes domination, coercion, shaming, and dehumanising anyone.

9.9. What it means to be church in this context

This study invites the church to step into new terrain, where it needs to revise its traditional script and reconfigure its ministerial priorities. It is about stepping beyond hierarchies and instead creating networks that are purposeful and impactful. As Watson has stated:

> Women cannot be considered as spiritual bodies; participation has to be expressed in the very structures that in which the church as the embodiment of the Triune God manifests itself and now (2002: 7).

As its main objective, this study mandates the ACSA to be a space where women survivors GBV are recognised as the *Imago Dei*, who can serve as a dynamic resource for a rehabilitated theology of divine

intervention and recognition (*cf.* Vosloo, 2019: 3). The ACSA should be resolute in its vision and mission of creating change, re-establishing relationships, by restoring humankind unto Christ, and humankind unto humankind, and fostering mutuality. The study was about shattering any cultures that were aimed at perpetuating inequalities. The church is called to extract every contending issue of power and control, thus allowing women to become agencies of their own transformation. This is the liberation the church is called to do. I maintain that the ACSA can acquire a new authority and new prophetic voice in advocating for women suffering under the scourge of GBV, and there is no better time to challenge the *status quo*, advocating for women's wellbeing, healing, and flourishing in all respects. The church's ongoing advocacy should be to critically investigate and explore how it consciously shapes the church space as a liberatory space, shedding kyriarchal modes of oppression, domination, and alienation. Secondly, it should engage in the ongoing antithesis of ensuring that men and women are conscientised on issues of equality. GBV is not a women issue. It must be seen as a human rights issue. There is room for making amends as men and women recognise their collective engagement and participation, thus shaping the mindset of the growing youth. The ACSA needs to commit itself to empowering the young to become an energetic witness against GBV.

Consciousness raising must eradicate the thought of viewing men as the only perpetrators, Women should also look at how they contribute to their own demise. Churches need to be spaces where women also conscientised on how they could dissociate themselves from identities that potentially cripple progress. However, all should pull towards a common direction, where they collectively work for a space for women to alter the structure of patriarchy and instead define how the church becomes a community that mechanically shapes rites of healing and growth. Efforts in this adventure relate to church systems that are eager to deconstruct and unlearn to reconstruct change. Another threat to women's liberation and flourishing is the underlying reality where women are a danger to process and a danger to themselves. These are women who are in desperate need of rebirth and a new collective consciousness as they have been deeply affected by religious and social cultures that oppress. Hence, their internalisation of male subjugation, oppression, and coercion, causing them see no need for change, seemingly being comfortable with male domination and women knowing their place, as if it were the divine order. I underscore that the ACSA must cultivate "a theology of relations hierarchies with mutuality" (Oduyoye, 2001a: 17). It is important that through correct messaging and contextual Bible studies, teachings and sermons that embrace women's brokenness in a way that is empowering, recognising that all women are made in the *Imago Dei*.

9.10. Recommendations for future research

Future studies should explore how the church challenge the religious and spiritual beliefs that permeate women programmes. And it must promote creative ways of enhancing conversations that cultivate

mechanisms of shaping and nurturing gender roles and an inclination to interdependence. Future studies also need to take into consideration how participatory research can be engaged so that women survivors of GBV can express their emotional clutter on paper, a similar approach to the use of visual maps embodying pastoral images where they can deconstruct and give meaning to their lived experiences. Such art may be useful in telling their stories, expressing their pain, helping them to make sense of this clutter. This calls for pastoral counsellors and researchers who can interpret these experiences, and who can speak to the ever-changing role of pastoral care. Further robust research on the subject is also needed to assist the church recover from the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Further questions that pastoral care needs to answer is the church can go beyond physical spaces. This hinges a lot on numerous injustices that are already at play, yet the church is still called to be a witness of Christ as it enacts justice. Forthcoming research also needs to explore ways of tackling the issue of mental health beyond the four walls of the church, shifting to online cultures. In pursuit of wholeness and flourishing, a new embodied consciousness needs to be established: where there is gender-based violence, hope and healing will be the lifeline!

9.11. Final conclusion

The church cannot be silent on the issue of GBV. There needs to be a bold declaration from every ACSA pulpit that GBV is acknowledged and admonished as a sin. Approaching this silent pandemic, the church must play its critical role in scheduling capacity training where all congregants are conscientised on gender equality and gender-based violence. These sessions should not only be limited to pre-counselling for engaged couples. The church should constantly open its doors for engaging men on their inner struggles where men can be conscientised on issues such as power, control, and toxic masculinities. Suggestions were made by the research participants on how socio-cultural constructs can be disrupted, for example shattering hierarchies that normalise the side-lining of women's issues. Consequently, this study encourages equality where the church needs to continuously solicit interventions and resources on behalf of its congregants that are gender inclusive.

The contribution of feminist theology to this study is one of wholeness, liberation, redemption, and restoration. It is an energy that is powerful and dynamic, ever seeking justice for all to belong and become the best versions of themselves as God intended.

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1. Interviews and personal communications

1.	Cebi	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	12 January 2020
2.	Tholi	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	05 February 2021
3.	Ntombi	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	08 February 2021
4.	Nomusa	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	11 February 2021
5.	Nolitha	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	12 March 2021
6.	Nala	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	Personal Interview	12 March 2021
7.	Zuzeni	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	Personal Interview	16 March 2021
8.	Jane	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	Personal Interview	18 April 2021
9.	Phiwe	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	30 June 2021
10.	Kholiwe	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	Personal Interview	03 July 2021
11.	Nomali	Interviewed by Zama Dlamini	via WhatsApp	05 July 2021

2. Focus group discussion participants

Participant	Age	Position in Church / Guild	Profession	Gender	Context	Date
Focus Group Discussion Session I						
Participant A	41	Lay minister	Educator	Female	Rural	22 March 2021
Participant B	52	MU leader	Homemaker	Female	Rural	22 March 2021
Participant C	20	Youth member	University Student	Female	Rural	22 March 2021
Participant D	21	St Agnes member	University Student	Female	Rural	22 March 2021
Focus Group Discussion Session II						
Participant E	40	MU member	Nurse	Female	Urban (Township)	14 May 2021
Participant F	35	MU member	Accounts	Female	Urban (Township)	14 May 2021
Participant G	53	AWF member	Educator	Female	Urban (Township)	14 May 2021
Focus Group Discussion Session III						
Participant H	56	AWF member (Lay minister)	Government Officer	Female	Urban	30 May 2021
Participant I	57	MU member (in a leadership role)	Nursing Sister	Female	Urban	30 May 2021
Participant J	59	Men's Society (former Church Warden)	Advocate	Male	Urban	30 May 2021

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Annexures

Annexure A

Invitation to Participate and Informed Consent Form

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL
For research with human participants

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date:

Dear Ms/Mrs/Miss/Mr/Rev

My name is Zama Dlamini intending to conduct a research project that is undertaken as a requirement for PhD degree with the University of KwaZulu-Natal under the supervision of Prof. Charlene van der Walt from the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. My personal details are: +27 67 769 1804 (mobile line), nzp.dlamini@gmail.com or 952059380@ukzn.zn.ac.

You are being invited to consider participating in a study titled: ***"(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence. Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for women survivors in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA).***

The study is inviting women survivors within the church to share their lived experiences on gender-based violence.

The aim and purpose of this research is to interview women survivors in view of their lived experiences on gender-based violence and the role of the church in response to GBV from their perspective, as well as redefining and constructing a pastoral care praxis suitable for women within ACSA.

The study is expected to enrol 72 participants in total, 3 women survivors from a participating parish for phase one. For phase two of data gathering, 4 focus groups with at least 10- 15 participants will seat for the healing workshop/retreat. There are 4 identified research sites (parishes) from the Diocese of Natal e.g., Parish of the Valley (Molweni), St Mathews in Umlazi, St Etheldreda and St Martins in Pmburg.

▫ DAY ONE - The study will engage Christian women through in-depth interviews regarding their insight and experiences on domestic abuse and gender-based violence and its repercussions. a) 12 personal narratives based on interviews from married women (ages between 21 and 68 years old) who have experienced GBV in their Christian homes.

▫ DAY TWO - will take place in a form of a healing workshop/retreat whereby visual maps will be designed, making a shift towards a healing theology. This session is open to BOTH

women and men, church leaders and clergy to brainstorm, map, and construct an intervention model that maps out a healing theology through constructs of VISUAL mapping.

The duration of your participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be 2 days. Interviews will be held at convenient time and place. The Healing retreat (workshop) will also be held on a convenient day for all participants. The study is self-funded.

The study may involve the following risks and/or discomforts such as sharing your personal life experience with regards to your individual story on gender-based violence experienced in your home. We hope that the study will create the following benefits; allowing you to heal as you share your story whilst it allows you to collaborate with others in shaping a healing theology that may restore justice and the dignity of women.

The study intends proposing a pastoral care praxis for faith organisations where women may have a safe space for sharing their stories which is bound to heal the pain endured in suffering.
In the event this project stirs up any potential latent trauma as a risk factor, a Social Worker or a registered Counsellor will be available onsite. Over and above, a list of resources for the local psychosocial interventions in the area will be made available to you.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number_____).

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at 067 769 1804 or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this study is voluntary. As a participant, you may withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences.

In general, responses will be treated in a confidential manner. Confidential information will not be used without your permission. If you agree to be part of the focus group, we will request that you choose a pseudonym for the purposes of this research, so your real identity will not be revealed in the final reports. As a participant, you will be treated with respect and dignity. In addition, you will not be deceived or tricked into providing information unwillingly. I request the use of an audio-recorder. In the final (dissertation) report your name will not be divulged to ensure anonymity. You are also assured that efforts will be taken to ensure that all ethical obligations and consideration will be adhered to.

The data will be kept securely for five years for purposes of verification by my supervisor Professor Charlene Van der Walt at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Should you request, an electronic copy of the final projects will be sent to you on completion. Lunch will be provided.

Thank you for your time.

Your willingness to participate in this study will greatly be appreciated

---

CONSENT (Edit as required)

I ……. have been informed about the study entitled *"(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence: Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for women survivors in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA*) by Zama Dlamini.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study which is to interview women survivors in view of their lived experiences on gender based-violence and the role of the church in response to gender-based violence from their perspective, as well as redefining and constructing a pastoral care praxis suitable for women within ACSA.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher:
Zama Dlamini on 0677691804 or nzp.dlamini@gmail.com
or the following persons
Professor Charlene Van Der Walt 0836938686 or VanDerWaltC@ukzn.ac.za
Mrs Snyman (031) 260 8350 or Snymanm@ukzn.ac.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION
Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview / focus group discussion YES / NO

_____ _____
Signature of Participant **Date**

_____ _____
Signature of Witness **Date**
(Where applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Translator **Date**
(Where applicable)

Annexure B

Digital Poster

Annexure C

Interview Schedule

DATA COLLECTION: PART ONE

NARRATIVE INTERVIEWS

"(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence. Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for women survivors in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa (ACSA)

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Biographical information	Participant's responses
Name (not required)	Participant
Age	
Highest Education qualification	
Occupation:	
Main source of family income	
Employment of spouse/partner	
Present place of residence	
Current marital status	
Years in marriage	
How many children?	
Religious Affiliation:	
How long have you been part of ACSA?	

Guided Research questions

As much as you are comfortable with, please share your experience.

History of Abuse:

1. What is your understanding of Gender-Based Violence (GBV)?
2. When did you come to be aware of gender-based violence in your own personal life (in your childhood or marriage life)?
3. Tell me about your personal experience about domestic violence and gender- based violence as a married woman?
4. How has it affected your mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being?
5. How has it affected your feelings about yourself?
6. What were the effects on your children and in your career life? How has the situation created difficulties for you to meet friends or relatives?

What is your understanding of Christianity and church teachings on gender inequality in marriage?

7. Which teachings applied to you specifically?
8. What aspects made you leave or stay in your marriage despite the DGBV situations in your own home?

9. What if any cultural beliefs and teachings do you think have permitted the kind of abuse you have experienced in your marriage? If, identify those?

ACSAs response to DGBV

10. According to your understanding, how does the church respond / attend to women who are abused? In your case, did you report to any structures in the church?

Profiling Programmes

11. Are there any programmes that you are aware of conducted by ACSA in response to DGBV? If so identify them
12. What has your experience been of the ACSAs engagement with regards healing support programmes/theologies against the plight of DGBV?

13. What would be your suggestions for future programmes on how churches should handle GBV issues? Conclusionary remarks:

14. Reflecting on your experience of trauma and pain, if you were put together words in prayer what will it sound like to shift your pain, anger against GBV. Write it down and send me.

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Annexure D

Focus Group Discussion / Visual Mapping Questions

"(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence. Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for women survivors.

RESEARCHER REMARKS: *[From a faith perspective- How do we become a voice as the church in the GBV conversation?]*

Introduction

Let's have a look at this image - what does it signify?

1. Looking at John 10 :10 what do you think is God's idea of an abundant life in the lives of Christian married women?
   Ngowakho ukucabanga nokuqonda uJohn 10:10 usho ukuthini ngempilo echichimayo mayelana nemishado yamaKrestu

2. Abusive marriage experiences inhibit a good life. Women need help, where do you think abused women can get help and support?
   Imishado ehlukumezayo iba yisithiyo kwimpilo enhle nemnandi nenokuthula. Omama abahlukumezekile nabahlukumezekayo emzini yabo badinga usizo. Ngokwakho ukucabanga bangasizakala kuphi kanjani?

3. In what way can the church provide pastoral care support towards healing and recovery for women survivors? Give examples.
   Ibandla lethu lama Sheshi yikuphi elingakwenza ukulapha ngokomoya ubuhlungu bokuhlukumezeka Cacisa ngezibonelo.

4. In your situations of vulnerability, do feel like you can approach the priest (whether male or female? Explain your answer.
   Uma uzifaka ezicathulweni zomama abaningi abahlukumezekile, uma bekunguwe ubhekene nale si simo ubungambikela yini umfundisi? (Owesilisa ikambe owesifazane)? Support your response

5. Who should provide pastoral care at a parish level? A priest (an individual) or a community of believers – (Groups/guilds?) Support your response with an explanation.
   Umbono wakho uthini ngukusizakala kwabesifazane abahlukumezekile ebandleni. Ngokwakho kumele kube ngubani owenza lomsebenzi- umfundisi okambe imothers union ne AWF? Chaza kabazi wenanisele impendulo yakho.

6. What kind of experience, qualities, and capacity (education) do these (priest /groups/guilds) need in 'holding' the survivors in their journey towards healing and recovery? Give examples.
   Hlobo luni lomuntu, isipiliyoni, amaqualities uhlobo lwemfundo ocabanga ukuti iyadingakala ekulapheni izilonda zomoya nomqondo komama abazithola behlukumezekile?
7. What holistic tools / programmes can be used to support married couples to prevent GBV and to provide safe platform for healing and recovery?
   Iziphi izinhlelo, amathuluzi amaprogrammes angasetshenziswa ebandleni ukuvimba ukuhlukumeza kanye nokulekelela ekuphileni nasekupholeni okubangelwe ukuhlukumezeka?
8. How can the church challenge gender injustice, engaging the subject of gender equality (conscientizing) its youth, men, and women (all age groups)?

Qhaza lini ibandla elingalibamba emkhankasweni wokufundisa nokuqwashisa intsha, abesilisa kanye nabesifazane ngokuhlukumeza nangokuhlukumeza kanye nangamalungelo abesifazane nokulingana kobulili.

A CHURCHES' RESPONSE TO GBV

*****Zimbili's story**

Zimbili, 35 years old, and Sihle 40 years old met when they were younger. Sihle was a charmer.

He said all the right things and made Zimbili feel so loved, desired, and cherished, but that dream didn't last for long. Sihle secretly struggled with alcohol and extramarital affairs. He would often deny, when confronted, his anger became explosive. He would yell, curse, and scream for hours.

When they had disagreements, Zimbili stayed awake and afraid all night long.

And he attacked her faith with everything that he could.

He would mock her whenever he saw her reading my Bible and combatively try to stir up arguments about her faith. This abuse affected Zimbili to a point where she is forgetful, struggles with self-esteem and this has affected her progress at work. No matter how hard Zimbili prayed and fasted but the abuse has never stopped.

<u>A participatory activity:</u>

Draw a visual map showing how the church can support many other women like Zimbili who have suffered from GBV such that they shift from trauma to healing and from crisis to confidence.

[***As you tackle this task be guided by the following questions***]

A. How do you envision the church for healing, wholeness, and wellness against GBV? [*For example, as a house of healing and wellness, as a tree of life, as a fountain of life and as wheel of life*] Outline/Sketch the image as the main feature for your visual map.
B. What qualities do you think priests who serve wounded believers must possess, particularly when they handle GBV complex matters?
C. What qualities and values should gender desk/women guild have and demonstrate as they handle the sensitive / confidential stories of women survivors?
D. The church must demonstrate love, light, and hope to God's people who need to heal from suffering. Which symbols can you think of, that must display the church as a safe and caring space for healing and wellness?
E. What biblical scripture / verse can be suitable in encouraging women survivors for their healing and wellness?
F. Give examples of healing and educational support programmes that must exist in the church, to equip and educate Christian married couples to prevent GBV.
G. Show steps and processes how women who are abused can be assisted within the structures of the church.
H. Which stakeholders can the church partner with the inside and outside the church?
I. Where can women survivors be assisted and where can they be referred to for emotional and psychological healing?

******Items required to do the task:***

An A2 blank page, pencils, felt tip and colouring pens

Annexure E

Visual Prompt: Artefact of an African Woman

Annexure F

Permission to Conduct Study: Gatekeeper's Letter

THE BISHOP OF NATAL

The Right Revd Dino Gabriel

P. O. Box 47439
Greyville, Durban
4023

Tel: +27 31 308 9300
Fax: +27 31 308 9316
bishopsec@dionatal.org.za
bishopdino@dionatal.org.za

24th June 2019

Mrs Zamantshali Dlamini
9 North Road
Cowies Hill
Pinetown,
3610

Dear Mrs Zama

I am delighted to give you permission to conduct your research in the Diocese of Natal. I pray for a successful outcome and wish you well.

One in Christ

[redacted]

Bishop Dino Gabriel

"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (Luke 5:4b)
Diocese of Natal □ Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Annexure G

Ethics Protocol

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

18 November 2020

Ms Nokulunga Zamantshali Portia Dlamini (952059380)
School Of Rel Phil & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Dlamini,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001504/2020
Project title: "(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence: Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for married women in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa
Degree: PhD

Approval Notification – Full Committee Reviewed Protocol

This letter serves to notify you that your response received on 10 November 2020 to our letter of 09 September 2020 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year until 18 November 2021
To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

.....
Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/

Founding Campuses: **Edgewood** **Howard College** **Medical School** **Pietermaritzburg** **Westville**

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Annexure H

Approval Notification for Change of Title

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI YAKWAZULU-NATALI

05 August 2022

Nokulunga Zamantshali Portia Dlamini (952059380)
School Of Rel Phil & Classics
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear NZP Dlamini,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00001504/2020
Project title: "(Self) - emptying our pain" against gender-based violence: Towards a feminist pastoral care praxis for married women in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa
Amended title: Unmasking Christian women survivor voices against gender-based violence - A pursuit for a feminist liberative pastoral care praxis for married women in the Anglican Church of Southern Africa

Approval Notification – Amendment Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application and request for an amendment received on 05 August 2022 has now been approved as follows:

- Change in title

Any alterations to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form; Title of the Project, Location of the Study must be reviewed and approved through an amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

Best wishes for the successful completion of your research protocol.

Yours faithfully

[redacted]

Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

/dd

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587
Website: http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/
Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Annexure I

Language Editing Certification

We the undersigned, do solemnly declare that we have abided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's policy on language editing. The dissertation was professionally edited for proper English language, grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall academic style. All original electronic forms of the text have been retained should they be required.

[redacted]

GARY STUART DAVID LEONARD

UKZN Higher Degrees Certified Language Editor

Commissioner of Oaths V3358

12 August 2022

[redacted]

NOKULUNGA ZAMANTSHALI PORTIA DLAMINI

Student No. 952059380

12 August 2022