

Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Women in the Tamale Metropolis: The Role of Religion



Sanatu Fusheini¹ , Victor Selorme Gedzi¹  & Ernest Owusu¹ 

¹ Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi Ghana.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the complex role religion plays in both promoting and ending sexual and gender-based violence against women in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana. While major religious traditions emphasize equality and non-violence, certain interpretations of religious texts and cultural traditions have enabled patriarchal norms that subjugate women. Qualitative data from interviews with 18 respondents across Christian, Muslim, and traditional African religious communities revealed ongoing oppressive practices like forced marriage and early marriage of young girls, divorce, physical abuse such as wife battering, sexual abuse, and victim-blaming. However, religious institutions are increasingly initiating efforts to combat this violence through advocacy, education, counselling services, and partnerships with civil society groups. While these initiatives exist, significant challenges remain in transforming deeply entrenched sociocultural norms that enable violence against women. These initiatives demonstrate how religious institutions can leverage their moral authority to transform sociocultural norms enabling violence against women. The study highlights the need for sustained engagement with religious communities, reinterpretation of doctrine promoting gender equality, and collaborative efforts across sectors to eliminate this pervasive human rights issue. Harnessing the influential role of religion through a progressive, rights-based approach is crucial for addressing sexual and gender-based violence in the Tamale Metropolis and similar contexts. By delving into this intricate dynamic within the context of the Tamale Metropolis in Ghana, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how religious beliefs, interpretations, and institutions can either perpetuate or combat this form of violence.

Correspondence

Ernest Owusu

Email:

Keowusu67@gmail.com

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INTRODUCTION

A global violation of human rights - sexual and gender-based violence, affects millions of women and girls worldwide, as well as certain men and boys in various contexts and cultures.¹ Physical, sexual, psychological, and financial abuse are all forms of sexual and gender-based violence that are committed because of power disparities and gender stereotypes. The health, well-being, and dignity of survivors as well as families and communities are severely and permanently impacted by this threat.² Global numbers

¹ United Nation's Women, "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women," 2010, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>.

² United Nation's Women, "Facts and Figures: Ending Violence against Women."

on sexual and gender-based violence are not just startling but concerning as one in three women reports having personally suffered physical, sexual, or gender-based violence.³ According to the United Nations (UN) estimates, about six hundred million (600, 000,000) women reside in countries where domestic abuse is not criminalized.⁴ Devries *et al*, remarked that the most frequent type of violence experienced by women comes from intimate partners.⁵ They furthermore asserted that this type of violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, or emotional.

According to Parsitau and Aura, there is a high prevalent rate of physical violence against women in Africa. The authors reported that women are experiencing physical violence at an unusually high rate, which is nearly half of the continents' countries record, a prevalence of more than 40%.⁶ In addition to causing physical harm, sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls often has long-term psychological, emotional, and physical repercussions. A key driver of violence against women is unequal power dynamics and unequal power to justice both in broader society and within personal relationships. Rigid gender roles enforced by culture and religion reinforce men's dominance and control over women, creating environments of permissible violence.⁷ Interpretations of scripture that position women as subordinate or obedient to male family members enable abuse and fail to affirm women's bodily autonomy.⁸

Diverse faith-based programmes are contributing to reductions in violence against women. For example, the Christian Initiative for the Abolition of Violence against Women in Congo trains religious leaders on preventing sexual violence and runs schools to empower girls.⁹ Islamic Relief is working with Imams in conflict zones to preach against gender-based violence through teachings rooted in principles of dignity, equality, and justice in Islam.¹⁰ Realizing the cultural significance of religion, the UN and WHO call for engagement with faith groups in comprehensive efforts to eliminate violence against women globally.¹¹ Understanding both positive and negative aspects of religious rhetoric and norms is therefore important to inform effective policy and activism going forward.

One form of gender-based violence, sexual violence, is so widespread and systematic that it is regularly reported in Ghanaian newspapers, radio stations, and television shows.¹² In the Northern Region of Ghana, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is still a major problem.¹³ According to a study by the Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED), 87.6% of married women in the Northern region had experienced some kind of sexual and gender-based violence, such as forced marriages, wife battering, assault, coercion, abusive language use, sexual harassment, and child trafficking. Unfortunately, much attention has not been given to sexual and gender-based violence against women in the area of research in these areas in the Tamale Metropolis. By using qualitative methodology focusing on religious leaders and community members across faith traditions, this study aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the current and potential roles of religion in addressing violence against women.¹⁴ It examined the role religion plays in promoting or ending sexual and gender-based violence against women in Lamanshegu, Kasalgu, and Changli in the Tamale Metropolis. This study provides

³ UN Women, "Violence against Women and Girls' Data Collection during COVID-19," 2020.

⁴ UN Women, "Progress of the World's Women 2011-2012: In Pursuit of Justice," 2020.

⁵ K. M. Devries et al., "The Global Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence Against Women," *Science* 340, no. 6140 (June 28, 2013): 1527-28, <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1240937>.

⁶ Damaris, S. Parsitau, and Ruth A. Aura. "The Role of Religion and Faith Actors in Violence Against Women and Girls in Africa: Challenges, Tensions, and Promise." In *The Palgrave Handbook of African Women's Studies*, pp. 2209-2232. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021.2

⁷ Simone Cusack, "Eliminating Judicial Stereotyping," *Equal Access to Justice for Women in Gender-Based Violence Cases. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, 2014, 16.

⁸ Talha Rehman, "Islamic Feminism: The Challenges and Choices of Reinterpreting Sexual Ethics in Islamic Tradition," *Society and Culture in South Asia* 6, no. 2 (2020): 214-37.

⁹ Berkley Center, "Christian Community Takes a Stand Against Sexual Violence in the Congo," 2018, <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/cchrrp/rlp/wrp/2018/05/christian-community-takes-a-stand-against-sexual-violence-in-the-congo>.

¹⁰ Islamic Relief Worldwide, "Islamic Relief Working with Imams and Women Against Gender-Based Violence," 2018, <https://www.islamic-relief.org/islamic-relief-working-with-imams-and-women-against-gender-based-violence/>.

¹¹ WHO, "Understanding and Addressing Violence against Women.," 2012, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/77432>.

¹² Nancy K Sugg et al., "Domestic Violence and Primary Care: Attitudes, Practices, and Beliefs," *Archives of Family Medicine* 8, no. 4 (1999): 301.

¹³ UNFPA, "Ghana Statistical Service: Addressing Gender-Based Violence in the Northern Region of Ghana ," 2022, <https://ghana.unfpa.org/en/news/addressing-gender-based-violence-northern-region-ghana>.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative & Mixed Methods Approach*.

crucial insights into the complex interplay between religion and sexual and gender-based violence against women, a pervasive human rights issue that continues to afflict societies worldwide. The research sheds light on the nuances within religious communities, revealing both the oppressive practices that stem from patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and the progressive efforts undertaken by various religious institutions to challenge these harmful norms. This nuanced perspective is crucial for informing effective advocacy strategies and fostering constructive engagement with religious leaders and communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of Religion in Promoting or Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Women

The significance and influence of religion on gender equality, which was rather overlooked in past research, have also recently come to light in studies and development initiatives.¹⁵ Researchers such as Boddy and Le Roux & Palm, have indicated that the engagement between religious and development actors is widely recognised as a critical first step in comprehending the role of religion in addressing harmful practices like child marriage and FGM/FGC.¹⁶ Several studies have found connections between certain religious beliefs and higher rates of violence against women at a societal level. For example, a 2015 study analyzed data from over 70 countries and found higher national levels of domestic violence among Christian, Muslim, and Hindu-majority countries compared to non-religious countries, with the strongest relationship in Muslim-majority texts, including those emphasizing female obedience and male authority over family matters.¹⁷

At the individual level, abusers may reference religion to justify abuse. For instance, in-depth interviews with domestic violence survivors in Bangladesh suggested that abusive partners would often cite religious doctrine to insist on the unconditional obedience of women.¹⁸ Belief systems can therefore enable intimate partner violence. However, the impact depends greatly on interpretation. Hindus holding more patriarchal gender role attitudes were more likely to justify domestic violence, but this was less common among those holding more egalitarian attitudes.¹⁹

Additionally, religious leaders and faith-based organizations have spearheaded efforts worldwide to promote women's rights and safety through public advocacy, education initiatives, counseling services, and pressure for legal reforms. For example, in 2009, Christian leaders supported legislation in Papua New Guinea enacting tougher penalties and services for family violence cases as the menace increased in cases which was attributed to the consumption of drugs and alcohol as the causal agent.²⁰ One may say that, while aspects of religion have enabled violence against women, religious communities have the power to promote positive norms and support survivors. This depends on interpretations emphasizing nonviolence and gender equality central to major faiths. With openness to continued reform and inclusivity, religion can contribute to reducing violence that has impacted women worldwide.

Religious Texts Regarding Gender Hierarchies, Sexual Regulations, Masculinity and Femininity Constructs

Judith Plaskow, a Jewish feminist theologian examined biblical texts with a critical lens in relation to gender issues in her 1991 book, *Standing Again at Sinai* and argues that the Hebrew Bible establishes hierarchical gender constructs that have negatively impacted women.²¹ Some of her main points include:

¹⁵ Emma Tomalin, "Gender, Development, and the 'De-Privatisation' of Religion: Reframing Feminism and Religion in Asia," *Religion and the Politics of Development*, 2015, 61–82.

¹⁶ Janice Boddy, "The Normal and the Aberrant in Female Genital Cutting: Shifting Paradigms," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 6, no. 2 (2016): 41–69; Elisabet Le Roux and Selina Palm, "What Lies beneath? Tackling the Roots of Religious Resistance to Ending Child Marriage," *Girls Not Brides, Stellenbosch University*, 2018.

¹⁷ Dena Hassouneh-Phillips, "POLYGAMY AND WIFE ABUSE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN AMERICA," *Health Care for Women International* 22, no. 8 (December 10, 2001): 735–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/073993301753339951>.

¹⁸ Sidney Ruth Schuler and Sohela Nazneen, "Does Intimate Partner Violence Decline as Women's Empowerment Becomes Normative? Perspectives of Bangladeshi Women," *World Development* 101 (January 2018): 284–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.09.005>.

¹⁹ Neely Mahapatra and Diana M. DiNitto, "Help-Seeking Behaviors of South Asian Women Experiencing Domestic Violence in the United States," *Partner Abuse* 4, no. 3 (2013): 295–313, <https://doi.org/10.1891/1946-6560.4.3.295>.

²⁰ A. Kelly-Hanku et al., "Transgressive Women Don't Deserve Protection: Young Men's Narratives of Sexual Violence against Women in Rural Papua New Guinea," *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 18, no. 11 (November 2, 2016): 1207–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2016.1182216>.

²¹ Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (HarperOne, 1991).

- The creation stories in Genesis establish a gender hierarchy by creating man first and depicting woman as created from man for man. This lays a foundation for viewing women as secondary and subordinate;
- Laws and narratives about sexuality focus almost exclusively on regulating women's behaviour and depicting women mainly in domestic roles, cementing a patriarchal gender structure;
- Ideals of masculinity are dominant while femininity is viewed as threatening to male spiritual leadership, as seen in depictions of many biblical women as temptresses and causes of male downfall; and
- Images of God are overwhelmingly male, conveying the message that the highest divine representation is masculine. The feminine is excluded from conceptions of the divine.

Plaskow argues these examples demonstrate the biblical canon has encoded androcentric biases that have been used historically to justify the oppression, subjugation, and restriction of women's roles and rights. She calls for re-examination and re-interpretation of these texts to promote more equitable and inclusive religious visions. Plaskow asserts that the Hebrew Bible establishes problematic patriarchal gender hierarchies, especially in its regulation of sexuality, conceptions of masculinity/femininity, and predominantly masculine imagery for God.²² According to Genesis 1:27, Adam and Eve were created equally in God's image.²³ This shows that both men and women should be accorded equal human dignity. However, in the same Bible, it is stated that Eve was created as a 'helper' for Adam.²⁴ This verse could be misinterpreted by many to put women at a disadvantageous position and for that matter, it is high time unbiased learned interpreters organize sermons to resolve the issues of misinterpretations of religious scriptures to promote the well-being of women in all faith societies.

Religious scriptures have warned men to stop violence against women but some men dual much on the verses of religious scriptures that give them power over women due to misinterpretations. For instance, Judaist scriptures warn men against mistreating their wives: "A man given to anger harms his self".²⁵ Another verse states "Do not abuse a woman in any way."²⁶ The Judaist verses if properly interpreted would go a long way to support women against violence. However, religious scriptural verses that talk about men as the maintainers of women and men as the heads have been used to justify violence against women, relying heavily on misinterpretations. For instance, according to 1 Corinthians 11:3 – "But I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."²⁷ Also, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35... Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."²⁸

On the Islamic front, Qur'an 4:34 states "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard..."²⁹ According to Hadith narrated by Bukhari 304, The Prophet (PBUH) said, "If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her till morning."³⁰ The Quranic verse and hadith support and promote the submission or inferior status of women. However, many religious texts reflect outdated cultural norms, and our understanding of equality has evolved significantly. All human beings, regardless of gender, deserve to be treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. Relationships should be built on mutual love, understanding, and partnership between equals. Rather than judging or condemning, society would do better to have thoughtful dialogue seeking the truths that unite people in shared humanity. There is light and wisdom to

²² Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* .

²³ Genesis 1:27

²⁴ Genesis 2:18

²⁵ Talmud Bavli Gittin 6b

²⁶ Mishneh Torah, Book of Judges, Laws of Kings and Wars 9:14

²⁷ The Bible: New International Version. Zondervan, (2011)1151

²⁸ Ebid 1154

²⁹ The Qur'an

³⁰ Hadith Bukhari 304

be found by viewing even difficult verses in their historical context while uplifting the timeless values of justice, equity, and human rights.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized the case study research design which is a qualitative approach that involves an in-depth investigation of single or multiple cases over some time.³¹ This design is used by the researchers to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study in its real-world context and its ability to provide a comprehensive and detailed understanding of a particular situation or problem.³² Qualitative data was gathered on the role of religion in ending sexual and gender-based violence against women in three communities, namely; Lamashegu, Changli, and Kasalgu communities in the Tamale Metropolis through semi-structured interviews with six religious leaders, three victims/survivors, two opinion leaders (assemblymen of two communities), four relatives and friends of victims/survivors, and three eyewitnesses of incidents of gender-based violence. In all, eighteen respondents were used. The respondents were of diverse religious backgrounds such as Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. Interview subjects were selected using a purposive sampling technique.³³ The interview guide focused on examining subjects' perspectives on the current and potential role of religion in promoting or ending sexual and gender-based violence in Tamale. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using the thematic analysis technique to identify key themes related to the research topic across faith traditions.³⁴

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious Doctrines and Interpretations of Religious Texts on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The main objective of the study was to examine how religious doctrines and interpretations of religious texts regarding gender roles in Tamale metropolis contribute to either increase in prevalence rate of sexual and gender-based violence or its reduction. The findings revealed diverse interpretations of religious texts and doctrines regarding the general notion of how women and children should be treated in the Tamale Metropolis. Practically, the findings indicated that various religious texts seem to create a patriarchal system that projects and entrenches men's dominance over women and children. It is important to indicate that while these texts in themselves do not suggest abuse, instrumental interpretation of them tends to promote abuse of women and children. During the interview, one of the respondents who was a pastor remarked:

Religious texts when they are not well interpreted could be used as a catalyst for the abuse of women, girls and children as we see. Indeed, the literal interpretation of many religious texts seems to portray inequality between men and women. I can't deny the fact that many men have utilized misinterpreted texts to abuse women and children.

Islam for example, which is the predominant religion in the area where this study was conducted, showed that some interpretations of the Quran emphasize distinct but complementary roles for men and women, with men as protectors and maintainers of women based on Qur'anic verses like 4:34, which states: "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means." This verse has been interpreted by some Islamic scholars in the unit of analysis to mean that men have a degree of authority over women in family matters. Commenting on the varied interpretation of this text, one of the respondents who is an Imam also asserted:

The Quran has been subjected to several interpretations just like any other religious text. It is important to note that, the general understanding of the text, and how it is applied, largely depends on the interpretations given. Some people through this text, see women as weak and may use it as an opportunity to abuse them.

³¹ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003).

³² J.W. Creswell, *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative & Mixed Methods Approach*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Ltd, 2014).

³³ Natasha Mack et al., "Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collectors Field Guide.," 2005, <https://api.semanticscholar.org/CorpusID:227200384>.

³⁴ Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3,no.2 (2006):77–101.

In contrast to the assertion made by the Imam, another respondent was of the view that other interpretations of the same texts promote a more egalitarian understanding, highlighting principles of mutual respect and consultation.

The text does not in any way suggest men are better than women and therefore should abuse or exploit them. One can see the principle of mutual respect, love and solidarity in this text. Thus, religious text cannot be used as the basis for the abuse of women and children and even other men.

Within Christianity, certain denominations interpret biblical verses like Ephesians 5:22-24 (which details husband and wife's relationship) as instruction to wives to submit to their husbands and the husband as the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 11:3 outlines a hierarchy that the head of every man is Christ just as the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Thus, these scriptural texts are interpreted as establishing a hierarchical structure with the husband as the head of the household; and the wife as being subservient to the husband. These texts, according to one of the respondents, are used as foundational texts to regulate husband-wife relationship. He remarked:

Many Christian men without good morals and proper character formations have resorted to these texts to bully and abuse their wives and children. Many are misguided by the simplicity and literal interpretation of this text and abuse their women. This text for me, talks about men providing leadership, mentorship, and coaching for their families. But not to lord over them and make them feel inferior.

Another Christian respondent was of the view that other Christian perspectives emphasize mutual submission and equality of men and women in Christ. For example, Galatians 3:28 states: in Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female suggesting equality among the sexes and all believers in Christ.

The study also found out that even though the African Traditional Religion (ATR), does not have a sacred text, it has numerous oral traditions, norms and values that seem to promote gender discrimination. Several negative gender norms such as women are not allowed to go to streams or cook during their menstruation; child marriages, harmful widowhood practices, forced marriage, early marriage, discrimination and denial of opportunity, among others. This finding aligns with the results obtained by Ubaka and Uchime who identified similar abuses influenced by African Traditional Religion.³⁵

In most of the communities, roles are intimately linked to the community's spiritual and ancestral beliefs. Even though women are the carriers of life and keepers of customs and knowledge, some men do not accord them much respect because they think women are weak and dependent on men socio-economically. Gedzi, in relation to this argues that this "negative social image of women appears to be the cause of women's social and economic subordination to men in kinship or family structures ..." and that, "the negative social construction of women as socio-economic dependants seems to extend into the arena of law where women stay in the background and men make legal decisions for them".³⁶ Despite the fact that some religious values emphasize dignity and respect for women, the study found the persistence of harmful practices in some communities in Tamale. These include forced and early marriages of young girls, physical abuse in the form of wife battering linked to poverty, loss of sports bets and club matches; and again, women's economic dependency on men; and sexual and gender-based violence are justified by traditional beliefs that sometimes lead to divorce and exile. Additionally, instances of women facing violence for perceived disrespect towards their husbands and cases of sexual abuse and exploitation formed parts of the field report. Thus, one can plausibly argue that women and children's subordination to men in the field location is attributable to patriarchal conceptions, practices and the interpretations of religious texts.³⁷

³⁵ Ubaka Cosmas Molokwu and Victoria Ozioma Uchime, "Traditional Religion, Christianity and Gender-Based Violence among Igbo Women of Southeastern Nigeria, 1980-2015," *Preorc Journal Of Gender And Sexuality Studies* 1 (2023).

³⁶ V.S. Gedzi, *Principles and Practices of Dispute Resolution in Ghana: Ewe and Akan Procedures on Females' Inheritance and Property Rights*. Shaker Publishing Bv (2009)p. 217

³⁷ Hassouneh-Phillips, "Polygamy And Wife Abuse: A Qualitative Study Of Muslim Women In America."

Religious Approaches to Addressing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The study revealed various approaches by religious institutions to address sexual and gender-based violence in the Tamale Metropolis. From the study, it was observed that Islamic leaders use their platforms to raise awareness about women's rights and the consequences of violence within the Islamic framework. The study also found out that, through collaborations with some Non-Profit Organizations (NPOs), most of the Muslim leaders have embarked on sensitization and education. One of the respondents remarked:

Through the European Union Enough project, we collaborated with many NPOs and government agencies such as DOVVSU, Social Welfare, Department of Children to educate our men and women on the dangers of SGBV. Over the years, we have rescued over five (5) girls from early marriages and helped them to go back to school. As a Muslim community, we have also been providing support services for the abused persons.

The study also found out that the Muslim community has been introducing human rights education in their schools. For most of the leaders who were interviewed, the Muslim community is making an effort to correct the negative stereotypes that support the abuse of women. This according to them, is part of the teachings of the Quran which creates a context for the role and relationship that should exist between a man and a woman.

The results from the Christian leaders on the role of Christian religious values and text in curtailing SGBV showed that they too have been embarking on educational campaigns to educate their church members on their human rights, and referral pathways among others. The study also showed that most of the churches have been offering counselling services for the abused, and promoting biblical values of love, respect, and gender equality. One of the respondents who is a pastor stated;

As a church, we take issues of SGBV very seriously and we do our best to prevent all forms of SGBV among our members. We have well-structured counselling services to provide counselling support for the victims and even perpetrators of the abuses. We are intentional about pre-marital and post-marital counselling services for our members. We have also provided a safe space for many of the abused women and children.

Several religious institutions in the Tamale Metropolis have established dedicated initiatives to combat sexual and gender-based violence against women. These include the Women's Empowerment and Gender Justice (WEGJ) programme by the Catholic Archdiocese of Tamale which focuses on addressing this menace through community outreach, counselling services, and advocacy. The programme works closely with local parishes to sensitize communities on issues of gender-based violence and promote the rights and dignity of women. The archdiocese also operates a shelter, providing temporary refuge and support services for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. The "Empowering Women and Girls to Overcome Gender-Based Violence" project by the Northern Presbytery. The project involves training religious leaders, community members, and women's groups on recognizing and responding to sexual and gender-based violence, as well as providing counselling and referral services for survivors.

The Tamale Central Mosque's programme is on protecting women's rights from an Islamic perspective. The programme focuses on educating the Muslim community about the religious and moral obligations to protect women's rights and prevent violence against them. The mosque also provides a safe space for women to seek guidance and support. It collaborates with local authorities to ensure effective handling of sexual and gender-based violence cases; and with the Gender Desk established by the Northern Regional Office of the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) to address issues of sexual and gender-based violence within the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the Tamale Metropolis. The Gender Desk provides training, counselling, and referral services for survivors of this menace, and also works to sensitize church members on the importance of preventing and responding to gender-based violence.

RECOMMENDATION

1. There is need for a sustained engagement with religious Communities to initiate long-term, collaborative efforts with religious leaders and institutions across different faiths to promote gender equality and address harmful interpretations of religious texts that enable violence against

women. This engagement can involve open dialogues, capacity-building workshops, and the development of contextualized, faith-based resources to challenge patriarchal norms.

2. Religious scholars and leaders are encouraged to critically re-examine and reinterpret religious doctrines and traditions through a progressive, rights-based lens. This process should aim at promoting gender equity, bodily autonomy, and women's empowerment, drawing upon the fundamental teachings of compassion, justice, and human dignity inherent in all major faiths.
3. There is also the need to strengthen and expand existing initiatives by religious institutions that provide support services, such as counselling, shelters, and legal aid, for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence. Additionally, the religious institutions need to amplify their advocacy efforts within their religious communities to raise awareness, challenge stereotypes, societal stigma so as to promote zero tolerance for violence against women.
4. Also there must be fostering of collaborative partnerships between religious institutions, civil society organizations, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders. This multisectoral approach can leverage diverse expertise, resources, and networks to develop comprehensive strategies and implement holistic interventions to combat sexual and gender-based violence.
5. Last but not least, religious institutions also need to invest in empowering women within religious communities by providing leadership training, educational opportunities, and platforms for their voices to be heard. Encouraging women's active participation and decision-making roles within religious institutions can contribute to transforming harmful gender norms, and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

It is crucial to acknowledge that transforming deep-rooted sociocultural norms and beliefs is a long-term endeavour that requires sustained commitment, patience, and a human-centered approach. By actively involving religious communities as partners in this process, leveraging their moral authority and influence, and promoting a culture of respect, compassion, and accountability, we can create a safer and more equitable environment for women and girls in the Tamale Metropolis and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This research conducted in the Tamale Metropolis, has shed light on the intricate and multidimensional role religion plays concerning sexual and gender-based violence against women. While the fundamental teachings of major faiths underscore values of equality, dignity, and non-violence, patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and traditions have unfortunately empowered perpetuation of oppressive practices that discriminate against and subjugate women. However, it is encouraging to note that some religious institutions and leaders within the Tamale Metropolis are making concerted efforts to challenge these harmful norms, provide essential support services for survivors, and advocate for women's rights and safety through a faith-based lens. This represents a pivotal step in the right direction. Moving forward, it is evident that sustained engagement with diverse religious communities is of paramount importance. Equally crucial is a critical examination of how religious doctrine and tradition can be reinterpreted and reimagined to actively promote gender equity and women's empowerment. Only through such a progressive, rights-based approach can we hope to dismantle the deep-rooted social norms and power structures that enable violence against women. The journey towards eliminating this pervasive human rights issue is a complex and arduous one, requiring a collaborative approach. Religious institutions have an indispensable role to play as partners in this vital endeavor, by harnessing their moral authority and influence to drive positive change within their communities. Ultimately, it is through a shared commitment to upholding the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, regardless of gender, that we can create a society where violence against women is universally condemned and actively eradicated. By fostering an environment of mutual respect, compassion, and accountability, it can pave the way for a more just and equitable world for all.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Sanatu Fusheini is currently a doctoral candidate at the Department of Religion and Human Development at the Department of Religious Studies, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana. She holds a Diploma in Education (University of Education Winneba); an MPhil in Religious Studies (KNUST), and a B.A. Religious Studies (KNUST). She is a multi-disciplinary trained researcher whose works cut across other disciplines. Her research interests include religion and Gender, Islam and Gender, and Islamic studies. Her current PhD. study seeks to examine Muslim women and aspirations for higher education in Dagbon: Gender Politics and Socioeconomic Influences.

Prof. dr. Victor Selorme Gedzi is a Professor (Associate) of Religion and Development in the Department of Religious Studies, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana. He holds a PhD in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies, the Hague, of Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Internationally, Prof. Gedzi is a Nuffic Fellow; member of African Association for the Study of Religions; a Cambridge Publishing Editorial Advisory Board Member; a member of the European Centre for Research Training and Development, UK, among others. His publications include: 1) Emotions, Transcendence, Differentiated Voices and Resistances at Cape Coast Castle in Ghana: Poetic Analysis; 2) Environmental Reviews and Case Studies: Religious Resources and Environmental Management in Ghana; 3) Pentecostalism, the Media, and the State: Politicization of Indigenous Customary Systems in Ghana; 4) Death Rituals as a Livelihood Strategy among the Asante in Ghana; 5) Christian Faith and Economic Development: A Case Study of some Christian Workers in Ghana's Public Sector in Kumasi. 6) The Role of Religion in Solid Waste Management in Congested Inner-cities: A Case Study of Aboabo.

Ernest Owusu is currently a doctoral candidate at the Department of Religious Studies, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana. He holds an MA in Ministry (Ghana Baptist University College); MPhil in Religious Studies (Central University) and BA. Geography and Rural Development (KNUST). He is a multi-disciplinary trained researcher whose work cuts across other disciplines. His research focuses on Philosophy of Religion, African Traditional Religion, Ethics, Eco-theology and Religion and Ecology. His current PhD work seeks to examine the role of religion in climate change and poverty discourse.