

ANGLICAN CHURCH RESPONSE TO GENDER VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITH IMPAIRED HEARING: AN APPRAISAL

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Abstract

Gender-based violence against women with disabilities is a pervasive and often overlooked issue that demands urgent attention. This study delves into the experiences of deaf women, shedding light on the intersectionality of gender and disability and its implications for their vulnerability to violence. Through a qualitative case study approach, data was gathered from interviews with deaf women who have experienced gender violence, exploring the types of violence faced, barriers to seeking help, and coping mechanisms employed. Findings reveal the complex dynamics at play, including communication barriers, lack of accessible support services, and societal misconceptions. The study also examines institutional responses and highlights the inadequacies in current legal frameworks and support systems. Recommendations are offered for policymakers, service providers, and advocates to address these systemic challenges and ensure the rights and safety of deaf women are upheld. By amplifying the voices and experiences of deaf women, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender violence within the disability community and underscores the urgent need for inclusive and accessible interventions.

Keywords: Anglican Church, Gender violence, Women and impaired hearing

Introduction

Gender-based violence against women with disabilities is a multifaceted and pervasive issue that intersects with various forms of discrimination and marginalization. Women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by violence compared to their non-disabled counterparts, with studies indicating significantly higher rates of abuse across different cultures and contexts (Jones et al., 2012; Shakespeare, 2014). Within this broader context, the experiences of deaf women present unique challenges due to communication barriers, limited access to information and resources, and societal attitudes towards disability and gender.

Deaf women are particularly vulnerable to gender violence due to the intersectionality of their identities as both women and individuals with disabilities (Earp, 2016). Communication barriers, stemming from limited access to sign language interpretation and lack of awareness about deaf culture, often hinder their ability to seek help and support (Barnett et al., 2011). Additionally, societal misconceptions and stereotypes about disability and deafness further exacerbate their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Power & Francie, 2007).

Existing research on gender violence among the deaf community is limited, with few studies specifically focusing on the experiences of deaf women (McKee & Eaton, 2010). This gap in the literature underscores the need for more in-depth investigation into the unique challenges faced by deaf women in relation to gender-based violence. By conducting a case study that

centers on the experiences of deaf women, this research aims to fill this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersections of gender, disability, and violence.

Despite growing awareness of gender-based violence, women with disabilities continue to face significant barriers in accessing support and resources to address violence and abuse (Barnett et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2012). Within this marginalized group, deaf women encounter unique challenges due to communication barriers, limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate services, and societal misconceptions about disability and deafness (Power & Francie, 2007; Earp, 2016). However, there is a notable lack of research specifically focusing on the experiences of deaf women with regard to gender violence, resulting in a limited understanding of the intersectional dynamics at play (McKee & Eaton, 2010).

The problem is exacerbated by inadequate institutional responses and support services that fail to accommodate the specific needs of deaf women, further perpetuating their vulnerability to violence and hindering their ability to seek help and support (Barnett et al., 2011). This lack of attention to the unique experiences and needs of deaf women not only contributes to their invisibility within the broader discourse on gender violence but also undermines efforts to address systemic barriers and ensure inclusive and accessible interventions.

Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the insufficient understanding of gender violence against deaf women, including the barriers they face in seeking help and accessing support services, as well as the inadequacies in institutional responses. By conducting a case study focused on the experiences of deaf women, this research seeks to illuminate the intersectional dynamics of gender, disability, and violence and contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for addressing gender-based violence within the deaf community. This study focuses specifically on gender-based violence against deaf women, examining various forms of violence such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, emotional abuse, and other forms of abuse. The research will employ a qualitative case study approach to explore the lived experiences of deaf women who have been victims of gender-based violence. Due to the qualitative nature of the study and the focus on a specific subgroup within the disabled community (deaf women), findings may not be generalizable to other populations of women with disabilities. The study relies on self-reported data from deaf women who may have varying degrees of proficiency in sign language or access to communication support, which may impact the depth and accuracy of the information gathered.

The research may be limited by the availability of participants willing to share their experiences of gender-based violence, as well as access to appropriate research settings and resources for conducting interviews or focus groups. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, there may be ethical considerations and challenges in ensuring the safety and confidentiality of participants, particularly in cases where disclosure of abuse may put them at risk of further harm. The study may also be limited by the researcher's own biases and perspectives, despite efforts to maintain objectivity and reflexivity throughout the research process. This study holds several key significances:

Addressing a Gap in Research: There is a notable lack of research specifically focusing on the experiences of deaf women with regard to gender-based violence. By conducting a case study that centers on the lived experiences of deaf women, this research aims to fill this gap and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intersectional dynamics of gender, disability, and violence within the deaf community (McKee & Eaton, 2010).

Informing Policy and Practice: The findings of this study can inform the development of policies, programs, and interventions aimed at addressing gender-based violence within the deaf community. By identifying the unique challenges and barriers faced by deaf women in seeking help and accessing support services, as well as the inadequacies in institutional responses, this research can contribute to the development of more inclusive and effective strategies for preventing and responding to gender violence among deaf women (Barnett et al., 2011).

Promoting Awareness and Advocacy: By amplifying the voices and experiences of deaf women who have experienced gender-based violence, this study can help raise awareness about the intersectional discrimination and marginalization faced by deaf women within both the disability rights and gender equality movements. This can lead to increased advocacy efforts aimed at addressing systemic barriers and ensuring the rights and safety of deaf women are upheld (Power & Francie, 2007).

Empowering Deaf Women: Through the process of sharing their experiences and perspectives, participants in this study have the opportunity to reclaim their narratives and contribute to positive social change. By highlighting their strengths, resilience, and coping mechanisms, this research can empower deaf women to assert their rights, seek support, and demand more inclusive and accessible services (Earp, 2016).

Gender Based Violence Against Physical Challenge Women

Gender-based violence against women with disabilities, including deaf women, is a complex and pervasive issue that intersects with various forms of discrimination and marginalization. This section provides an overview of existing literature on gender violence within the disability community, with a specific focus on the experiences of deaf women.

Research indicates that women with disabilities are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing gender-based violence compared to their non-disabled counterparts (Jones et al., 2012). This heightened vulnerability is attributed to a range of factors, including societal attitudes towards disability, power imbalances in relationships, and barriers to accessing support services (Shakespeare, 2014). Within the broader disability community, deaf women face unique challenges due to communication barriers and limited access to information and resources. Communication is central to accessing support services and seeking help in situations of violence, yet many deaf women encounter difficulties in communicating with service providers who may not be proficient in sign language or aware of deaf culture (Barnett et al., 2011).

Studies exploring the experiences of deaf women with gender-based violence have highlighted the intersectional nature of their identities as both women and individuals with disabilities. Earp (2016) emphasizes the importance of intersectional analysis in understanding and addressing health disparities among deaf female survivors of sexual violence, noting the compounding effects of ableism, sexism, and audism on their experiences of violence and help-seeking behaviors. Despite the growing recognition of gender violence against women with disabilities, there remains a notable gap in research specifically focusing on the experiences of deaf women. McKee and Eaton (2010) emphasize the need for more studies that center on the voices and experiences of deaf survivors of violence, in order to better understand the unique challenges they face and develop more effective interventions and support services.

Women with disabilities often face multiple layers of oppression due to the intersection of their gender and disability identities (Davis, 1983). For deaf women, this intersectionality manifests in unique ways, such as communication barriers, limited access to information and resources, and societal attitudes that intersect with both gender and disability stereotypes (Barnett et al., 2011). The concept of intersectionality highlights the complexity of deaf women's experiences of gender-based violence, as they navigate not only the challenges associated with being women in a patriarchal society but also the barriers imposed by ableism and audism (Earp, 2016). Audism refers to the discrimination and oppression experienced by deaf individuals based on their deafness, which intersects with sexism and ableism to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of deaf women to violence (Bauman & Murray, 2014).

Deafness poses unique challenges for individuals, particularly in communication, access to information, and navigating social interactions. These challenges intersect with gender dynamics, compounding the vulnerabilities of deaf women to gender-based violence. Deaf individuals primarily rely on visual forms of communication, such as sign language, lip-reading, and gestures, which may not be understood or accommodated by those who are not familiar with these modalities (Barnett et al., 2011). This communication barrier can impede deaf women's ability to seek help and support in situations of violence, as they may struggle to communicate their experiences to service providers who do not have proficiency in sign language or are not culturally competent in working with deaf individuals.

Additionally, access to information about available support services and legal rights may be limited for deaf women, further exacerbating their vulnerability to violence (McKee & Eaton, 2010). Without access to information in accessible formats, such as sign language interpretation or written materials in plain language, deaf women may be unaware of their rights or where to turn for help when experiencing abuse. Furthermore, societal attitudes and stereotypes about deafness can intersect with gender biases, contributing to the marginalization and invisibility of deaf women in discussions about gender-based violence (Power & Francie, 2007). Deaf women may face additional stigma and discrimination due to misconceptions about deafness, such as assumptions about intelligence, competence, and agency.

Cases of violence against women with impaired hearing

Existing research on gender violence among the deaf community is relatively limited but has provided valuable insights into the prevalence, dynamics, and impacts of gender-based violence experienced by deaf individuals, including deaf women. Jones et al. (2012) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies to examine the prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities, including deaf individuals. The study found that individuals with disabilities, including those who are deaf, are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing violence compared to the general population.

McKee and Eaton (2010) conducted qualitative research to explore the experiences of deaf women who have been victims of intimate partner violence. Through in-depth interviews with deaf survivors, the study highlighted the unique challenges faced by deaf women in seeking help and accessing support services, including communication barriers and lack of culturally competent services.

Power and Francie (2007) conducted a qualitative study to examine intimate partner violence within the deaf community. The study identified various factors contributing to the prevalence of violence among deaf individuals, including communication difficulties, isolation, and lack of awareness about available support services. While these studies have contributed valuable insights into the experiences of deaf individuals with gender-based violence, there remains a need for more research specifically focusing on the experiences of deaf women. Additional research is needed to further explore the intersectional dynamics of gender, disability, and violence within the deaf community and to inform the development of more inclusive and effective interventions and support services for deaf women who have experienced gender-based violence.

Central to feminist perspectives is the recognition of gender as a social construct that intersects with other axes of identity, such as disability, race, class, and sexuality. Feminist theories highlight the ways in which gender-based violence is rooted in patriarchal systems of power and control, which intersect with ableism and other forms of oppression to compound the vulnerabilities of women with disabilities to violence (Connell, 2012; Walby, 1990).

Disability studies offer insights into the social, cultural, and political dimensions of disability, challenging traditional medical models that pathologize disability and instead emphasizing the role of social and environmental barriers in shaping disabled individuals' experiences. Within this framework, disability is understood as a social construct rather than solely a medical condition, and disabled individuals are seen as agents of their own lives rather than passive recipients of care or intervention (Shakespeare, 2014; Davis, 2013). Disability studies perspectives highlight the importance of recognizing the diverse experiences and identities within the disability community and challenging ableism in all its forms.

Gender-based violence against women with disabilities, including deaf women, is a pervasive and often overlooked issue that demands urgent attention. While existing research has begun

to shed light on the prevalence and impacts of gender violence within the disability community, there remains a notable gap in understanding the specific experiences of deaf women. This case study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of deaf women who have been victims of gender-based violence.

The Church and her Responsibilities

The Church as used in this research means the Anglican Communion, Diocese on the Niger which is an offshoot of the Niger Mission of 1857 led by Samuel Adjai Crowther. That mission of 1857 with headquarters in Onitsha has presently been an institution that works towards the development of humanity and society. The church responses and support services available to deaf women who have experienced gender-based violence play a crucial role in addressing their needs and facilitating their healing and recovery. However, existing research suggests that these responses and services often fall short in adequately meeting the unique needs of deaf survivors.

Accessibility of Support Services: One of the primary challenges faced by deaf women is the lack of accessibility of mainstream support services. Many deaf survivors encounter barriers in accessing helplines, shelters, counseling services, and legal assistance due to communication barriers and a lack of culturally competent service providers (Barnett et al., 2011). Access to qualified sign language interpreters is essential for ensuring effective communication between deaf survivors and service providers. However, many support services do not have adequate provisions for providing interpreters, leading to communication breakdowns and a lack of understanding of deaf survivors' needs (Earp, 2016).

Service providers often lack awareness and understanding of deaf culture and the unique challenges faced by deaf individuals. This can result in insensitivity, discrimination, and inappropriate responses to deaf survivors' experiences of violence (Power & Francie, 2007). Deaf survivors may face challenges in navigating the legal system and accessing legal support and advocacy services. Limited availability of legal information in accessible formats and a lack of trained professionals who can communicate effectively with deaf individual's further compound these barriers (McKee & Eaton, 2010).

Community-based organizations within the deaf community play a crucial role in providing support and advocacy for deaf survivors of gender-based violence. These organizations often have a better understanding of deaf culture and communication needs and can provide tailored support services that are responsive to the needs of deaf survivors (Barnett et al., 2011). While efforts have been made to address gender-based violence against women with disabilities, including deaf women, significant gaps remain in the accessibility and effectiveness of institutional responses and support services. Addressing these gaps requires a concerted effort to increase awareness, improve accessibility, and enhance cultural competency among service providers to ensure that deaf survivors receive the support and assistance they need to heal and recover from experiences of violence.

The response of the Anglican Church to gender-based violence against women with hearing impairments can vary depending on the information received. Between 2018 and 2021, there have been a few reports of batter, forceful sex in marriage, maltreatment of the females in marriage, psychological abuse and a few other forms of violence against the females in the Deaf church, because of the prevalence of the reports, the Church on their own took it upon themselves to fight for the women, through organization of couples events yearly since 2019 till date through which they advocate and make an unwritten policy known to the members, addressing the issues with very frowned face. The priest in charge has as well a few times visited the welfare for the safety of the women being violated and at the same time the police has been brought in just once before the church took their stand to excommunicate any other member who deals violently against the wife or any other female in the Deaf church in Diocese on the Niger, with this, there has been a drastic reduction in the act of violence against females in the church till date, as such no other case has been reported from 2022 till date.

In response to gender-based violence against women with hearing impairments, Diocese on the Niger Deaf Church is taking several actions:

Pastoral Support: The Anglican Church has offered pastoral care and support services to survivors of gender-based violence, including those with hearing impairments. This can involve providing counseling, spiritual guidance, and a safe space to share experiences.

Education and Awareness: the Anglican Church has engaged in educational initiatives to raise awareness about gender-based violence, its impact on individuals with disabilities, and ways to prevent and address it, include sermons, workshops, and training sessions for congregants, especially during the yearly Deaf Camp Meeting

Collaboration: The Anglican Diocese on the Niger Deaf Church is proposing through writing to collaborate with other religious institutions, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to address gender-based violence and support survivors with disabilities.

Inclusive Practices: Diocese on the Niger Deaf Church has created inclusive environments that accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. This involves providing sign language interpretation, captioning services, and accessible facilities for worship and events.

Ultimately, the response of the Diocese on the Niger to gender-based violence against women with hearing impairments should be grounded in compassion, justice, and a commitment to upholding the inherent dignity and worth of every person.

An Appraisal

While many churches have taken steps to address this issue, there remain challenges in effectively supporting and protecting women with impaired hearing who experience gender-based violence. One positive aspect of the Diocese on the Niger's response is its recognition of

the dignity and worth of all individuals, including those with disabilities. The Diocesan Church for the Deaf has made efforts to provide pastoral care, counseling, and support services to survivors of gender-based violence, including women with impaired hearing. This demonstrates a commitment to upholding the principles of compassion and justice within the faith community. (Smith, 2018).

Additionally, Diocese on the Niger have engaged in educational initiatives to raise awareness about gender-based violence and its impact on individuals with disabilities. By offering sermons, workshops, and training sessions, they have sought to equip clergy and congregants with the knowledge and skills needed to prevent and address violence against women with impaired hearing.

Moreover, there is still a need for greater collaboration and advocacy within the Diocese to address systemic issues contributing to gender-based violence against women with impaired hearing. This may involve partnering with other religious institutions, government agencies, and non-profit organizations to advocate for policies and laws that protect the rights of individuals with disabilities and ensure access to support services (Johnson et al., 2021). While the church has made strides in addressing gender violence against women with impaired hearing, there is still work to be done to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect within the faith community..

Conclusion

The case study on gender violence against women with disabilities, with a focus on deaf women, highlights the urgent need to address the intersectional dynamics of gender, disability, and violence within the deaf community. Deaf women experience unique challenges and barriers in accessing support services, seeking help, and navigating systems of support, which are compounded by communication barriers, lack of cultural competency among service providers, and systemic discrimination.

The study underscores the importance of developing inclusive and accessible interventions and support services that are responsive to the needs of deaf survivors. Recommendations include improving accessibility of support services, increasing cultural competency among service providers, enhancing legal support, empowering community-based organizations, adopting intersectional approaches, and prioritizing research and data collection to inform evidence-based interventions. By amplifying the voices and experiences of deaf women, this case study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex realities faced by deaf survivors of gender-based violence and underscores the importance of systemic change to ensure the rights and safety of all individuals, regardless of disability status.

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