



FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION, DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A THEOLOGICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL EXAMINATION

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Abstract

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), domestic violence, and sexual violence remain significant challenges affecting the dignity, health, and well-being of women and girls in many African societies. Although these practices are sometimes defended on the basis of culture, tradition, marriage, sexuality or social acceptance, they have serious physical, psychological, social and human-rights implications. Female Genital Mutilation involves the removal or injury of healthy female genital tissue and has no established health benefit. Rather, it may result in pain, infection, sexual difficulties, complications during childbirth, and other long-term consequences. Similarly, domestic and sexual violence against women manifests through physical abuse, sexual abuse, rape, coercion, intimidation and other forms of gender-based violence. This paper examines FGM/C and domestic and sexual violence against women, paying particular attention to the cultural and social factors that sustain these practices. It also considers the biblical and theological responsibility of the Church in confronting practices that undermine the dignity and wellbeing of women. The experiences presented in the study demonstrate that women and girls may suffer not only from the original violence but also from silence, victim-blaming, inadequate institutional response and cultural pressure. The paper argues that the Church, government, families, communities and law-enforcement agencies must work together to protect women and girls, educate communities, support victims and challenge harmful practices. It concludes that cultural traditions should not be allowed to justify practices that violate human dignity, bodily integrity and the fundamental rights of women and girls.

Keywords: Female Genital Mutilation, domestic violence, sexual violence, women, culture, Church, human rights, Nigeria.

Introduction: Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting (FGM/C) is a harmful traditional practice with severe health complications, deeply rooted in many Sub-Saharan African countries, according to Kaplan.¹ Female Genital Mutilation is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women due to severe health consequences and the pain and risks involved. It is typically found in traditional groups or community, culture with patriarchal social structures. Female Genital Mutilation can be the partial or total removal of the clitoral glands and the labia minora (the minor fold of the vulva).



The practice of FGM has come of age in the world and has been embraced by different cultures. In recent times, people do it secretly, and it is underreported. Culture and religion go hand in glove. Women should be liberated from this horrible act of cutting and mutilation of healthy tissues. This practice is mainly carried out by uneducated and uncivilized people. It was surprising to me to hear an educated pastor encourage Female Genital Mutilation when I was in the Seminary. He boasted that he circumcised his daughter because it is right in his culture. He claimed that such a practice will curtail promiscuity.

FGM is a violation of human rights. It violates the principles of equality and the right to freedom from torture and cruelty. It is inhuman and degrading. It violates the right to physical integrity, the human rights of a child and the right to life. In February, 2023, I saw a video trending on social media of a Kenyan girl who was taken to a place where FGM is carried out and she managed to run away. Two men, who are assumed to be related to her, caught her and brutally flogged her with logs of wood. It was very horrible and an eyesore. No one came to her rescue as she cried and shouted uncontrollably. I could not stand to watch it the second time.

People have given various reasons for the practice of FGM. Some of them are listed below:

1. To reduce sexual urge in women. They say that the clitoris, being a sensitive part of the vagina, can cause uncontrollable sexual urge if not removed.
2. It is done as a mark of readiness for marriage and attainment of adulthood.
3. To promote chastity and marital fidelity.
4. Some do this to be socially acceptable in their society and their culture. Girls agree to do this to please their parents and the future husband.
5. Others claim that FGM enhances dilation and child delivery. This is not in any way proven to be true by medical experts.

True Life Story: Ejiro, real name withheld, shared her experience of FGM with me. In excitement, she told me how proud she is to have been circumcised. In her words: *I was circumcised after my husband paid my bride price. It was so painful, but the joy of preparing for motherhood was a source of consolation to me. Secondly, the joy of the gifts that my husband made available was an encouragement. He bought jewelry, dresses, wrappers, shoes, and handbags.*⁴⁰

This is what makes Ejiro a real woman in her context. The husband was also very happy with the wife for undergoing circumcision and proving that she is a strong woman who can endure the pains of childbirth. While this practice is considered obnoxious by some people, others take pride in it.

In my own community, it is no longer widely practiced. My mother told me that such a practice was acceptable in their days as children. When I asked her if FGM has any effect on sexual urge and if it can inhibit one's libido, she asked me: "Is there any part of your body, when cut off, that can stop you from craving food and water when your body system needs them? The answer is no! This shows that FGM does not stop a woman from having the urge for sex because the urge emanates from within.

The covenant of circumcision in Gen 17:10-14 was not meant for women. The Scripture does not ask women to go through circumcision; rather, the instruction to Abraham to circumcise his

⁴⁰ An interview with Ejiro (real name withheld) on her experience of FGM, Ukwuani L.G.A. of Delta State, Nigeria. 10th July, 2023.



household was for the males and not female members of his household. Abraham was to circumcise himself, his son, and the male members of his household. Sarah was not mentioned here.

“The circumcision of women as called in some tribes was meant for teaching positive values about marriage, sexuality, hospitality, homemaking, a woman’s responsibility to her husband and children, community living, solidarity within other women and chastity. The girls being prepared for marriage are taught to avoid promiscuity.”⁴¹ God instructed Abraham to circumcise only the male children, so Female Genital Mutilation is against God’s order.

A close friend told me:

I had a very painful and traumatic experience after giving birth to my first child. I delivered in a very remote village, and because it happened at night, I could not travel to the town where there were better-equipped hospitals for childbirth. My husband therefore took me to a nearby health centre.

During the delivery, I was told that I would need an episiotomy because of the size of my baby. Unfortunately, the nurses took advantage of the situation to mutilate me without my knowledge or consent. Part of my clitoris was mutilated.

I experienced excruciating pain for weeks after childbirth. Sitting, standing, and walking became extremely painful and difficult. At first, I thought the pain was simply a result of the episiotomy. Little did I know that I had been subjected to genital mutilation without my consent—a practice I had always strongly spoken against.

The experience was deeply painful and traumatic, especially because it was done to me without my knowledge or permission and against the values I had always upheld. On my second delivery, the midwife observed that I had been circumcised. At first, I could not believe it. It was only after I had given birth to all my children that I finally came to the painful realization that I had indeed been circumcised. I used to think that childbirth had changed the shape and size of my clitoris, but I eventually understood what had actually happened to me.

Sadly, I cannot reverse what was done to me. The deed has already been done. This is the painful reality that some women experience in parts of Africa. No woman should be subjected to any inhuman or harmful practice against her will. Consent matters, and no cultural practice should be forced upon anyone without her knowledge and agreement. What was done to me was an act of cruelty and a violation of my dignity and bodily autonomy.⁴²

According to my friend, she has forgiven those who subjected her to this experience. I write this paper to draw attention to and challenge some of these barbaric practices. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) does not provide any benefit during childbirth, nor does it prevent a woman from being promiscuous. Rather, it can cause serious physical and psychological harm and, in severe cases, can even lead to death.

Say no to FGM. Say no to female circumcision—whether it is performed on girls, pregnant women, or women preparing for marriage, depending on the cultural context. No woman or girl should be subjected to such a harmful practice without her informed consent.

There are many dangers associated with FGM, including severe pain, complications during childbirth, infections, and long-term physical and emotional consequences. Every woman

⁴¹ Kunhiyop, *African Christian Textbooks*, (Bukuru: African Christian Textbooks, 2008), 295.

⁴² Revelation made by a close friend to me in the course of this research on her experience of FGM without her consent. (Enugu, Nigeria, May 21, 2023).



deserves to have her body respected and protected. Sexual intimacy within marriage should be approached with mutual love, dignity, consent, and respect, not through practices that cause harm or violate bodily autonomy.

Effects of Female Genital Mutilation

- i. Painful urination and urinary tract infections.
- ii. Severe pain during sexual intercourse.
- iii. It can lead to sexual problems, pain during sexual intercourse and low libido.
- iv. Difficulty in child delivery, poor vaginal dilation and contraction.
- v. Anxiety and fear on the adults waiting to be circumcised which can cause High Blood Pressure. Bleeding can result from this which can lead to death.

The World Health Organization on “Health Risks of Female Genital Mutilation” says that Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) has no health benefits and causes significant harm to girls and women. It involves the removal or injury of healthy genital tissue, disrupting the natural functions of the body. FGM can result in immediate health complications and long-term physical, psychological, and sexual consequences. Regardless of who performs it, including healthcare professionals, FGM is a harmful practice that violates human rights and poses serious public health concerns. The WHO therefore opposes all forms of FGM and urges healthcare providers not to perform it under any circumstances.⁴³

Change must begin with women who enforce FGM on their fellow women. We ought to stand our feet and reject this practice. Mothers should not surrender their children to this uncivilized practice for it does not have any merit in it. The Church should be vocal, speak up against the maltreatment of women. Stop giving titles to those marginalizing women for not giving in to FGM. The Church should also teach its members about the dangers of FGM. The Bible says, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hosea 4:6).

Domestic and Sexual Violence against Women

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence as:

Any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.

The Declaration requires States to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by Private persons.⁴⁴

“Domestic violence that occurs in private within the family, including wife battery, rape, acid attack, and sexual abuse affect the physical and psychological well-being of women; and as such, they seem to erode the position of women, both at home and in society at large.”⁴⁵ Women often face sexual harassment in the work environment and other places. Most times, rape victims are blamed for rape, as if they attracted the opposite sex through their dressing, words, or actions. This is the reason some

⁴³ World Health Organization, *Health Risks of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*, retrieved from: [https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-\(srh\)/areas-of-work/](https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-(srh)/areas-of-work/) (31 January, 2023).

⁴⁴ United Nations Human Rights, Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Violence against Women, Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_VAW_WEB.pdf on June, 2023.

⁴⁵ F. B. Alokun, “Domestic Violence Against Women: A Family Menace”, 1st Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference, (AHC 2013, 24 - 26, April, Azores, Portugal), 13.



people tag womenfolk as seducers and sexual temptresses, and that they are meant to meet the sexual desires of men.

In South Africa, the escalating cases of rape have been associated with a lie perpetrated by traditional healers that having sex with a virgin will prevent or cure HIV/AIDS. This is one of the reasons for the escalating rape of female infants and young children.⁴⁶

Effects of Domestic and Sexual Violence

- i. Domestic and sexual violence affects the physical and mental health of women. The family of the victim and society at large are adversely affected too.
- ii. Women who pass through domestic violence face long- and short-term consequences such as health issues, retardation or backwardness in the educational and career life of the woman.
- iii. Domestic violence has led to the untimely death of so many women. It can lead to drunkenness, drug abuse, and even suicide.
- iv. Children can also be affected mentally and emotionally when they witness domestic violence in the home from any of their parents. They can grow up becoming violent themselves because it will look natural to them.
- v. Sexual violence can lead to promiscuity or strong hatred towards sex. Some victims tend to withdraw from others and get depressed.

Women of all ages experience different forms of domestic violence. Children and infants are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence because they are often weak, dependent, and unable to protect themselves from their abusers. Numerous cases have been reported in which minors have been sexually abused by guardians, relatives, and other trusted adults.

As a minister and a pastor's wife, I have had the privilege of listening to, counselling, and praying with victims of rape and sexual abuse. I recall the case of a teenager who was sexually abused by her uncle in a community where my husband and I served several years ago. The uncle sexually abused her repeatedly. She confided in his wife, hoping that she would intervene, but unfortunately, the woman did not believe her and did nothing to protect her from the abuse.

The girl had lost her mother at a very tender age. Her father, who was doing business in the far northern part of Nigeria, entrusted her care to his younger brother. Sadly, the uncle betrayed that trust and subjected the girl to repeated sexual abuse.

When the family returned home to celebrate Christmas, the girl finally revealed what had been happening by exposing her uncle. It was a very sad day in the community because such an offence carried serious consequences under the local culture. Incest was regarded as an abomination that could not go unpunished, and the traditional penalty was ostracism. Tragically, the girl was ostracised alongside the uncle who had abused her. I felt deeply saddened that such punishment was imposed on the victim, even though she was the one who had been abused by her own uncle. This was a grave injustice to the young girl, who deserved protection, compassion, and support rather than punishment.

The story of Elizabeth Ogbanje Ochanya will not easily be forgotten by many Nigerians. Tragically, she lost her life at the hands of people who were supposed to protect her. She was reportedly sexually abused for several years by her uncle and his son before she eventually became ill and was taken to

⁴⁶ S. Rakoczy, *In Her Name: Women Doing Theology*, (Cluster Publication, 2004). 287.



the hospital. *Sahara Reporters*⁴⁷ reported that the 13-year-old girl, who died on 18 October 2018, had allegedly been molested, defiled, drugged, and abused from the age of five until her death. The alleged perpetrators were identified as her 52-year-old uncle, Andrew Ogbuja, a lecturer at Benue State Polytechnic, Ugbokolo, and his son, Victor. She reportedly died from complications associated with Vesicovaginal Fistula (VVF) and was buried on 2 November 2018.

These cases reveal the devastating consequences of sexual abuse, particularly when the perpetrators are members of the family or people entrusted with the care and protection of children. They also demonstrate the urgent need for families, religious institutions, communities, and relevant authorities to protect victims, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure that survivors are never blamed or punished for the abuse committed against them.

Elizabeth Ochanya lost her life at age 13 due to VVF, which was caused by her guardian. She was threatened not to let anyone know, lest she lose her life. Some people have faced similar situations and were threatened not to speak up. Stories abound of women who lost their lives as a result of domestic violence. Some women have been killed by their husbands over minor disagreements. I don't believe anyone has reason enough to take the life of another.

Stating the situation of domestic violence in Nigeria, Alokan, in her paper on *Domestic Violence against Women: A Family Menace*, writes:

Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and maiming their wives in the media. The statistics presented by This Day Newspaper (2011) are daunting. About 50 percent of women have been battered by their husbands. Shockingly, more educated women (65 percent) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low-income counterparts (55 percent). Most endure, believing they have nowhere to go and, in any case, believing for good reason that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2 percent of them are not prepared to report to the Nigerian police. Only four states of the federation have passed laws against the insidious crime, whilst several bills against it languish in our male-dominated National Assembly. Of the states that have passed it, the law is yet to be fully tested.⁴⁸

The report above shows that most women who face domestic violence from their partners do not report such cases to the police. They are either shy or lack confidence in the police force. The government should do more to fight against all kinds of domestic violence. The *Premium Times*⁴⁹ reports the killing of a mother of seven by her own husband in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. A mother of seven, Anulika Uguru, reportedly died in Ebonyi State following alleged domestic violence and repeated battery by her husband. The incident occurred in Ekeru-Inyimegu, in Izzi Local Government Area of the state.

⁴⁷ Sahara Reporters, New York. Grieving Nigerian Mum seeks Justice for 13-year-old Daughter Drugged, Raped, Killed by Uncle, Cousin, Three Years Ago, (Sahara Reporters, October 18, 2021).

⁴⁸ F. B. Alokan, "Domestic Violence against Women: A Family Menace" in *Proceedings:*

1st Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference, (AHC 2013, 24-26 April, Azores, Portugal), 3.

⁴⁹ J. Eze, "Woman dies after alleged Domestic Abuse by her Husband", *Premium Times Nigeria*, (April 30, 2022), Retrieved from: <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/ssouth-east/526899-woman-dies-after-alleged-domestic-abuse-by-her-husband.html?tztc=1>



The State Chairman of the Human Rights Defenders (HURIDE), Sampson Nweke, disclosed that the victim, who hailed from Ndiechi Onuebonyi Igbagu, had reported a case of domestic violence and battery against her husband, Sunday Uguru, to his office on 19 April 2022.

According to Nweke, there was a slight delay in serving the husband with an invitation because the telephone number provided to him was invalid. He explained that while the organization was attempting to intervene in the matter, members of the group contacted the deceased by telephone on the morning of 25 April 2022 and invited her to their office for further action.

However, after waiting for several hours that afternoon without her arrival, Nweke called her telephone number again. To his shock, another woman answered the phone and informed him that the owner of the phone had died. The tragic incident highlights the devastating consequences of domestic violence and the urgent need for effective interventions to protect women who report abuse and seek help. Law enforcement agencies do not act fast when a case of domestic violence is reported. Many lives have been lost as a result of delays in intervention. There should be a collective effort in waging war against domestic violence.

Lessons from Tamar

The story of Tamar's rape by her half-brother Absalom helps in creating awareness about the reality of sexual violence and incest.⁵⁰ Tamar spoke publicly about her ordeal at the hands of her own brother. Her courageous protest presents a significant challenge to the Church to speak openly and prophetically against violence, particularly violence against women and children. Tamar's protest has given many women a voice and has encouraged them to speak out against abuse rather than suffer in silence.

The actions of the men in Tamar's story, particularly those who became accomplices in her rape and failed to protect her, have also challenged young men to reconsider harmful attitudes and behaviours toward women. Her story has encouraged a different culture—one that promotes respect, accountability, and the protection of loved ones.

Gerald West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela observe that Church leaders have used the story of Tamar as a resource for encouraging a spirit of openness within the Church. The increasing incidence of rape and other forms of violence against women and children has compelled the Church to reclaim its prophetic voice in confronting such injustices. Tamar's story therefore provides important theological and pastoral resources for equipping the Church to speak against violence, support survivors, and promote communities characterized by justice, dignity, protection, and respect. "Aluta continua, the struggle does indeed continue, but we can win the battle against gender violence and the spread of HIV and AIDS, if we work together."⁵¹

Andrea Dworkin expresses a profound hope for a future in which no woman is subjected to rape. She envisions such a day as a turning point in the struggle for genuine equality. She writes: And on that day, that day of truce, that day when not one woman is raped, we will begin the real practice of equality, because we can't begin it before that day. Before that day, it means nothing because it is

⁵⁰ L. Claassens, Juliana M. *Claiming Her Dignity : Female Resistance in the Old Testament*, (Liturgical Press, 2016), ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/fuller/detail.action?docID=4731252>. Created from fuller on 2023-07-14 06:59:43. 2016.

⁵¹ G. West and P. Zondi-Mabizela, "The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond)," *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004): 4–12.



nothing: it is not real; it is not true. But on that day, it becomes real. And then, instead of rape, we will for the first time in our lives—both men and women—begin to experience freedom.⁵²

Dworkin's reflection underscores the profound relationship between freedom, equality, and the elimination of sexual violence. Her vision suggests that genuine equality cannot be fully realized in a society where women continue to live under the threat of rape and sexual violence. A world free from rape would therefore represent not only greater safety for women but also a significant step toward genuine freedom and equality for everyone.

No human being on earth deserves to be raped. Domestic violence and sexual abuse leave a damaging effect on the lives of victims. This paper has shown the severe effects of domestic and sexual violence on people and society.

The Role of the Church in Combating Violence against Women

The Church has an important theological, pastoral and prophetic responsibility to challenge practices that degrade women and girls. FGM/C and gender-based violence cannot be treated merely as private family matters or cultural traditions when they result in physical, psychological, sexual or social harm. The United Nations' definition of violence against women recognizes gender-based violence as conduct that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including coercion and deprivation of liberty.⁵³ Consequently, the Church should not remain silent when women are subjected to violence in the name of culture, marriage, or family honour.

One of the major responsibilities of the Church is education. Many harmful practices continue because people lack adequate knowledge concerning their consequences. The paper demonstrates that some people continue to defend FGM/C as a means of controlling women's sexuality, promoting chastity, preparing girls for marriage, or gaining social acceptance. However, the World Health Organization emphasizes that FGM has no health benefits and can cause immediate and long-term complications affecting women's physical, mental, and sexual health.⁵⁴ Christian education should therefore help members distinguish between cultural practices that promote communal wellbeing and practices that violate human dignity.

The Church should also provide pastoral care for survivors. Women and girls who experience domestic or sexual violence require compassion rather than condemnation. Victims may experience fear, shame, isolation, emotional distress, and difficulties in trusting others. The Church should create safe environments in which victims can speak about their experiences without being blamed or stigmatized. The experiences narrated in this study demonstrate the devastating consequences that can arise when victims are ignored or when their testimony is dismissed. The Church's pastoral ministry should therefore include appropriate counselling, prayer, protection, and referral to competent professional and legal services.

⁵²A. Dworkin, "I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape," in *Transforming a Rape Culture*, ed. Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2005), 21.

⁵³ United Nations Human Rights, *Information Series on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: Violence against Women*, retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/SexualHealth/INFO_VAW_WEB.pdf, June 2023.

⁵⁴ L. Claassens, and Juliana M. *Claiming Her Dignity: Female Resistance in the Old Testament*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central.



Furthermore, the Church has a prophetic responsibility to confront injustice. The biblical account of Tamar provides an important resource for theological reflection on sexual violence and the need for the Church to listen to women who have experienced abuse. Claassens' discussion of female resistance in the Old Testament demonstrates the significance of recognizing women's voices and dignity in biblical interpretation.⁵⁵ Similarly, West and Zondi-Mabizela show how the Tamar story has been employed in campaigns against gender violence in South Africa and beyond.⁵⁶ The Church can therefore use biblical narratives not to silence victims but to encourage truth-telling, justice, protection and restoration.

Church leaders must also avoid supporting harmful cultural practices simply because they are regarded as traditional. The paper recounts an experience in which an educated pastor defended FGM/C on cultural grounds. Such attitudes demonstrate that education alone does not necessarily eliminate harmful practices. Christian leaders must critically examine cultural traditions in the light of Christian teachings concerning human dignity, love, justice, and the protection of vulnerable persons.

The Church should further cooperate with governmental and community institutions. Domestic and sexual violence cannot be effectively addressed by preaching alone. Law-enforcement agencies must respond promptly to reported cases, while communities should establish mechanisms for protecting victims and preventing further abuse. The paper notes that delayed intervention by law-enforcement agencies can contribute to the loss of lives. Alokani's study similarly identifies the seriousness of domestic violence against women in Nigeria and the reluctance of many victims to report abuse to the police.⁵⁷

Finally, the Church should encourage men and women to become advocates for the protection of women and girls. Violence against women is not only a women's issue; it is a social, moral and theological concern that requires collective action. Churches can organize seminars, women's and men's programmes, youth education, premarital counselling and community awareness campaigns addressing FGM/C, domestic violence, rape and other forms of abuse. Through such interventions, the Church can become an instrument of healing, justice and transformation.

Conclusion

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, domestic violence and sexual violence against women constitute serious challenges to human dignity, bodily integrity, family wellbeing and social justice. The discussion in this paper has shown that harmful practices may continue because of cultural expectations, misconceptions concerning sexuality, pressure to conform, patriarchal structures, silence, and inadequate institutional responses. Although some communities regard FGM/C as a cultural requirement associated with marriage, adulthood, chastity or social acceptance, such justifications do not remove the physical and psychological dangers associated with the practice. Kaplan and other researchers have documented the health consequences associated with FGM/C,⁵⁸

⁵⁵ A. Dworkin, "I Want a Twenty-Four-Hour Truce During Which There Is No Rape." In *Transforming a Rape Culture*, edited by Emilie Buchwald, Pamela Fletcher, and Martha Roth, 21. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2005.

⁵⁶ G. West and Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, "The Bible Story That Became a Campaign: The Tamar Campaign in South Africa (and Beyond)," *Ministerial Formation* 103 (2004): 4–12.

⁵⁷ F. B. Alokani, "Domestic Violence against Women: A Family Menace," in *Proceedings: 1st Annual International Interdisciplinary Conference (AHC 2013, 24–26 April, Azores, Portugal)*, 3.

⁵⁸ A. H. Kaplan, S. M. Martin, et al., "Health Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in the Gambia, Evidence into Action," *Reproductive Health* 8, no. 26 (2011).



while the World Health Organization maintains that the practice provides no health benefits and may result in both immediate and long-term complications.

The paper has also demonstrated that domestic and sexual violence can occur within homes, families, communities, and other social institutions. Women and girls may be particularly vulnerable when perpetrators are persons who are expected to provide protection. The experiences presented in the paper illustrate the devastating consequences of sexual abuse, domestic violence, and institutional failure to protect victims. The case of Elizabeth Ogbanje Ochanya, for example, demonstrates the tragic consequences that can result when a vulnerable child is abused by persons entrusted with her care.⁵⁹ Such cases require the Church and society to reject silence and create stronger systems of protection.

The Church has a significant role to play in confronting these challenges. It must educate its members about the dangers of FGM/C and violence against women, provide pastoral care for survivors, challenge harmful cultural practices and speak prophetically against injustice. The story of Tamar provides an important biblical resource for encouraging the Church to hear the voices of women who have experienced violence and to promote justice and dignity. The Church must therefore avoid becoming an institution that protects perpetrators or silences victims in order to preserve family or community reputation.

Government and law-enforcement agencies also have an important responsibility. Reports of domestic and sexual violence must receive prompt and appropriate attention. Perpetrators should be held accountable according to the law, while victims should be protected and supported. Families and communities should likewise reject victim-blaming and create environments where women and girls can report abuse without fear of further punishment or stigmatization.

Ultimately, the elimination of FGM/C, domestic violence and sexual violence requires collective action. Women, men, churches, families, traditional institutions, government agencies, health professionals, educators and community leaders must work together to protect vulnerable persons. Cultural practices should be evaluated critically rather than accepted simply because they are traditional. A culture that preserves human dignity, justice, compassion and the wellbeing of women and girls is more consistent with the Christian responsibility to love one's neighbour and protect the vulnerable.

The struggle against violence against women is therefore both a social and theological responsibility. As West and Zondi-Mabizela demonstrate through the Tamar campaign, the Church can transform biblical reflection into practical advocacy against gender violence. The Church must recover and sustain its prophetic voice so that women and girls are not only protected from violence but also treated as persons created with dignity and worth. The recommendations of this study remain important: FGM/C should be discontinued; law-enforcement agencies should respond promptly to reported cases; perpetrators should face appropriate legal consequences; abusive relationships should be confronted; and survivors of rape and other forms of violence should receive adequate counselling, protection and social support.

Recommendations

⁵⁹ Sahara Reporters, "Grieving Nigerian Mum Seeks Justice for 13-Year-Old Daughter Drugged, Raped, Killed by Uncle, Cousin, Three Years Ago," October 18, 2021.



FGM should be disallowed and discontinued because it does not have a deep root in religion but it is often performed for cultural or social reasons.

The law enforcement agents should act fast when the case of domestic violence is reported.

Abusers and violent partners should face the law when reported to the police. Abusive relationships should be condemned.

Rape victims should be adequately counseled and given a sense of belonging so that the process of healing can be enhanced.

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Oral Interview

Interview with Ejiro (real name withheld), on her experience of Female Genital Mutilation, Ukwuani Local Government Area, Delta State, Nigeria, July 10, 2023.

Interview/Revelation by a close friend concerning her experience of Female Genital Mutilation without her consent. Enugu, Nigeria, May 21, 2023.