

# Biblical and Theological Training in Response to Spousal Violence in Seventh- Day Adventist Church in Chemamul, Kericho County, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in her multifaceted mission to serve humanity is challenged to prioritize the family, which is the spousal church. However, the reality of abusive marriage relationships is not taken seriously as a matter of church concern to the extent that it is not even recognized by the church members themselves. This paper aimed at examining the training needs of the church in areas of biblical and theological studies for both members and church leaders in response to spousal violence in Chemamul District, Kericho County, Central Rift Conference, Kenya. This was informed by the prevalence of spousal violence among believers in the church in the study area. The study used a descriptive research design with a mixed methodologies approach (qualitative and quantitative) to describe and assess the function of the church in reducing domestic violence in the SDA church. The target population included baptized members, couples or families, family life leader and district pastor from ten SDA churches in the district. They were 20 family life leaders, 221 families or couples, one district pastor and 1119 baptized members of the church. Victims of spousal violence, family life leaders and baptized church members were the sampling unit. The district has only one pastor. A sample of 112 baptized church members, 64 families or couples, 20 family life leaders and 1 pastor were used for the study. The study depended on questionnaires and interview schedules to gather primary data from respondents drawn from ten SDA churches in the district. Data was collected from a cross-section of baptised members of the church, victims of spousal violence, family life leaders and district pastors.

**Keywords:** Biblical studies, Spousal conflicts, Training needs, Theological studies

## INTRODUCTION

The church in her multifaceted mission to serve humanity is challenged to prioritize the family, which is the spousal church. However, the reality of abusive marriage relationships is not taken seriously as a matter of concern to the church to the extent that it is not even recognized by the church members themselves. A meta-analysis by Archer (2000) concluded that women are likely to use physical aggression as men and engage in violence more often than men. Unfortunately, men are largely excluded from the empirical studies as victims of spousal violence. This could be attributed to the fact that women tend to report cases of violence than men. The fact that men do not report being victims, however, does not mean females are not perpetrators of violence. A study by The Lutheran World Federation (2002) indicated that in thirty-five countries over the world, more women worldwide including those in the church had been physically abused by a current or former partner or husband. It was the leading cause of injury to women and, for some, recurred almost every day leading in some cases to death. In addition, a study by Britt (2009) showed that nearly one in four women worldwide reported sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. However, there were no Christian women or men associations in the respective churches to spearhead the struggle to end spousal violence.

Nason-Clark (2004) contended that abusers in the faith-based programs, who were motivated by their pastors to attend, had higher chances of benefiting from those formative programs than those whose attendance was mandated by the courts. In addition, Nason-Clark (2004), explained that there was a growing scholarly interest in the role of faith-based services for perpetrators of spousal violence outside of the church. They should be part of the church's mission that cannot be left to the government alone. This was because clients in a faith-based batterer intervention program are more likely to complete the requirements than those registered in secular organizations. This was therefore the concern of this study in order to address the problem of spousal violence in SDA churches of Chemamul District because the Church was responsible to correct evils and help the perpetrators or abusers to change their violent behaviour.

In Kenya, an empirical study by Onyango (2017) reports that apart from being about 80% per cent Christian, gender based violence is very rampant in the country with an average of four cases of gender based violence reported in the daily papers among married couples. The violence is not only men against women but also vice versa to the point of killing the other partner as with the case of Wairimu Faith who killed her husband Cohen in 2020. In some sections of the country, women are reported to be assaulting their husbands. A study by Mulama (2003) indicated that in Western Kenya women are charged with assaulting their husbands and causing serious physical injuries. A study by Njoroge (2016) examined television news framing of spousal violence against men in Nyeri County. Equally, a study by Kubai (2014) investigated spousal violence against men in Mukurwe-ini and found that many men in the area experience violence from their spouses, reason being that men have neglected their family responsibilities and resorted to alcoholism.

The persistence of spousal violence among couples in christian marriages raises a lot of concern necessitating the need to investigate the role of the church in mitigating violence in christian communities. As argued by Usher (2015), since all religions have experience of spousal and gender based violence, they have an obligation to change the culture and beliefs of their followers to prevent such vices. Furthermore, it is the mission of religions to champion gender equality and peace among families and therefore, the church cannot choose to remain silent about spousal violence affecting her Christian families.

It can be noted that because of scarce resources, group-based approaches to helping both victims and perpetrators of spousal violence were deemed to be the most feasible method of church pastoral program service delivery (McMullen et al, 2013). Groups offered a platform for victims where they dialogue, collaborate, and arrive at solutions to shared problems of marital violence (Beleli *et al.*, 2007). McMullen *et al.* (2013) argued that offering interventions against spousal violence in a group format reduced stigma, normalised symptoms and promoted understanding among victims and also perpetrators. Additionally, group-based therapies helped victims build friendships, gain community support, and feel socially and emotional safe. People who had experienced sexual or gender-based violence benefited from social and community support when support was given to victims in group settings like workshops or church gatherings (Bryant-Davis *et al.*, 2011). Prayer groups and fellowships, for example, provided a forum for victims to express their emotional worries, aspirations, and terrible personal experiences. More crucially, though, they turned into safe havens of solace and sanctuary for the victims (Parsitau, 2011).

Any serious attempt to combat spousal violence must espouse an intercultural dimension approach. A collaborative approach across a multi-sectorial agency would promote a more holistic, multi-disciplinary response to challenging issues (Beasley *et al.*, 2010). Tracy (2006) pointed out that spousal violence in Christian homes tended to mirror the high rates of the general society. Sometimes spousal violence was attributed to negative spiritual forces. A study by Mouton *et al.* (2015) outlined a situation where a "docile" male member of the congregation, who was "bullied by the wife" believed that he was under a spell from his wife who was "even older than him", that is why he accepted the violent character of his wife. This implied that cultural practices like sorcery tended to be behind the perpetrator's refusal to accept help from the church. To intervene in such dynamics where cultural beliefs and practices play a role in perpetuating spousal violence, the church should develop an intercultural pastoral plan that would help to illuminate such violent beliefs. The church should not work in isolation; such cultural power-game dynamics should be understood. The church in Chemamul, through this study, should play a role together with the community in helping victims of spousal violence understand that it is not natural and normal but has a negative impact on both the victim and the perpetrator and should shun such. This view is in tandem with Nason-Clark (2004) who recommended that

denouncing spousal violence requires the understanding of both the language of contemporary culture and the language of the spirit of individual traditional cultures. This study therefore, sought to address this challenge with a view to offering solutions to the problem of spousal violence in SDA churches in Chemamul District.

Pasch (2015) proposed including seminars for both men and women on gender-based violence in the church ministry manual or catechism. This was necessary in order to raise awareness of gender-based violence (GBV) and methods for eliminating it among the general public. In order to effectively combat gender-based violence, Goodman (2014) advised church leaders and other partners to participate in intervention programs, seminars, conferences, trainings, and fellowships. Church leaders should teach women and men about their rights so that they may speak up for themselves and other members of the community, according to Dudley and Kosinski (2013). This was based on the notion that men and women should collaborate to bring about gender equality because they are partners (Ellison, 2016). The significant flaw in this aspect of the study's literature analysis is that it neglects to consider potential causal factors associated with religious terminology used to discuss marriage and domestic violence.

Langat and Njenga (2014) sought to understand the principles and skills of managing conflict based on the Bible that married couples in Ainamoi Division in Kericho county need in order to sustain and maintain their marriages. The study came with conclusion that marital counselling is in dire need in the society, and so counsellors, pastors and church leaders should create awareness of its importance and the value of getting counselling help before the marriage goal is distorted and yet it's the foundation that God established in order for the married couple to enjoy companionship, enjoy sex and procreate for God's glory. Marital counselling should be given priority by counsellors, pastors and church leaders. Marital counselling program should cover factors that contribute to conflict in marriage i.e. communication, financial management, sexual relations, in-laws, children, behaviour, domestic violence and emotional abuse, time management and career development

The SDA church in Kenya, especially in Kericho is not an exception taking into account the fact that women in the majority of African cultures are considered to have limited rights in society. The gaps in the background of this study creates a need for investigations on the role of the church in mitigating spousal violence among Christian families with special reference to the Seventh Day Adventist church in Chemamul District, Kericho County, Central Rift Conference, Kenya.

## Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the Seventh-day Adventist training needs in biblical and theological studies for both members and church leaders in response to spousal violence in chemamul, Kericho county, Kenya.

## METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive research design with a mixed methodologies approach (qualitative and quantitative) to describe and assess the function of the church in reducing domestic violence in the SDA church. The study was done in all the ten SDA churches in Chemamul District, Kericho County, Central Rift Conference, which include: Kapkures, Chemamul, Kapkitony, Kipseger, Kapchebet, Kapchebet Central, Saanga, Simotwet, Mobego and Kabianga. This was informed by the prevalence of spousal violence among believers in the church in the study area. The target population included baptized members, couples or families, family life leader and district pastor from all the churches listed above. They were 20 family life leaders, 221 families or couples, one district pastor and 1119 baptized members of the church. Victims of spousal violence, family life leaders and baptized church members will be the sampling unit. The district has only one pastor. A sample of 112 baptized church members, 64 families or couples, 20 family life leaders and 1 pastor were used for the study. The questionnaire and interview schedule guides were the two data gathering methods employed in the study. The questionnaire was both open-ended and closed ended questions. It was administered to 112 sampled populations of church members. The study used open-ended interview guide questions for each of the 20 family life leaders and 1 pastor.

## EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

### Training needs of the Church to respond to Spousal Violence in the Church

The section contains respondents’ views on the church training needs for both members and church leaders in a bid to respond to spousal violence.

Figure .1 Frequency of Training for SDA Pastors for Both Members and Church Leaders

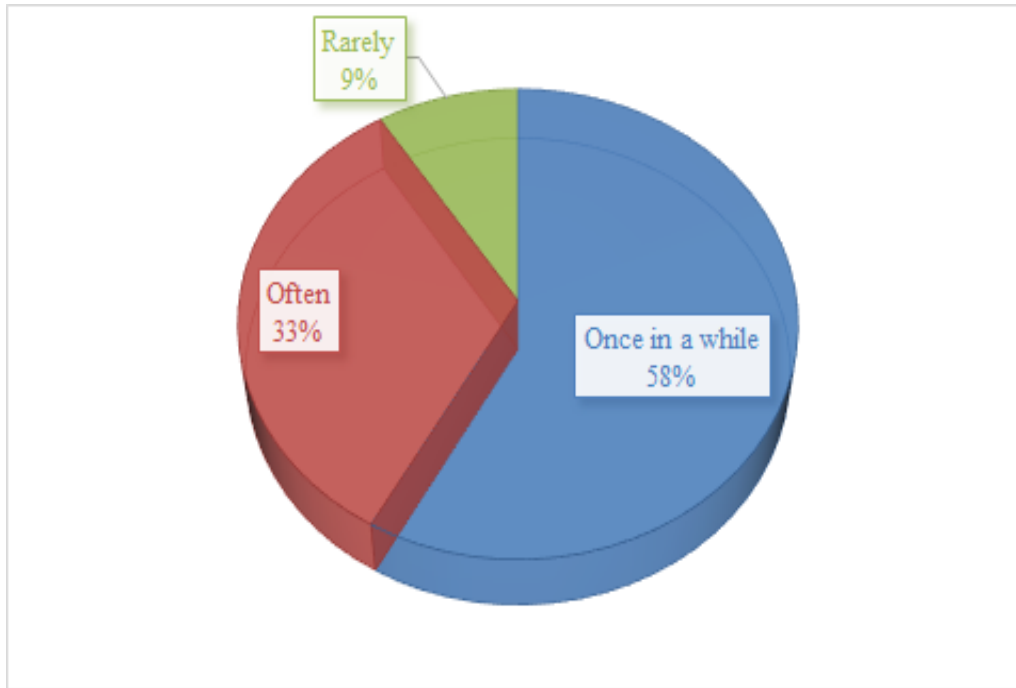


Figure 1: Frequency of training for SDA pastors

Source: Field data (2023)

Figure 1 shows that 58% of the respondents attended training in order to respond to spousal violence once in a while, while 33% often attended training and 9% rarely attended such training. According to Bryant-Davis *et al.* (2011), pastors and church leaders training on spousal violence is important to equip them with skills to offer tangible help to victims and perpetrators of abuse. Frequent training on mitigating spousal violence can increase their effectiveness and promote strong, healthy church cultures built on families’ resilience. Such Training is important to remove stigma in church on spousal violence where pastors think spousal abuse only happens in certain kinds of families. Training can help pastors to differentiate between submit” and abuse as well as victim blaming.

### Effectiveness of Existing Training in Dealing with Spousal Violence

The study sought whether existing training is effective in dealing with gender-based violence. The findings are as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Whether Existing Training is Effective in Dealing with Spousal Violence

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very Effective	16	8
Effective	20	10

Moderate Effective	78	40
Not Effective	82	42
<b>Total</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field data (2023)

The study found that existing training is not effective in dealing with gender-based violence as indicated by 42.0% and 40.0% indicating that existing training is moderately effective. Therefore, it can be seen that training is not effective.

### Types of Training that can help SDA respond to Spousal Violence

The study sought to find out types of training that can help Church to respond to Spousal Violence in the Church. The findings are as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Training that can help SDA respond to Spousal Violence

Causes	1-A		2-SA		3-D		4-SD		5-N		Me an	SD
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Creation of awareness	78	39.8	55	28.2	39	20.0	20	10.0	4	2.0	4.3	0.51
Skills training	84	42.8	59	30.2	29	15.0	12	6.0	8	4.0	4.0	0.31
Educational programme	91	46.2	60	30.5	21	10.5	15	7.9	10	4.9	4.4	0.51
Inter-cultural approach	117	59.9	63	32.0	51	2.6	7	3.7	4	1.9	3.7	0.53
Adequate training	111	56.7	42	21.3	30	15.3	6	3.0	7	3.7	3.6	0.44
Group based approach	95	48.7	70	35.6	21	10.5	6	3.0	4	2.2	3.4	36
Pastoral guidance & counselling	88	45.1	40	20.5	34	17.4	16	8.3	17	8.7	4.3	.51

Source: Field data (2023)

All respondents concurred that specific training is required to equip church leaders to handle domestic abuse more skilfully. The majority of respondents, 45.0%, according to the survey, indicated that marriage counselling included methods for dealing with domestic abuse. All respondents believed that specific education and training are needed to equip church leaders to deal with domestic abuse more skilfully. The respondents suggested that training in pastoral counselling should cover marriage therapy and methods for handling domestic violence. People who have been interviewed have expressed interest in subjects like the characteristics of abusers and how women react to them, legal alternatives, practical ways to intervene, and clarification of the roles of the pastor, police, and social workers. A suggestion to incorporate the confluence of HIV/AIDS and Domestic Violence as one of the training topics caught our attention. The pastors suggested that their training incorporate details on potential referral sources for those who experience domestic violence.

### Training of Pastors and Church Leaders to Address Marriage Issues

The study sought to find out whether pastors and church leaders are well trained in biblical theology to address marriage issues properly.

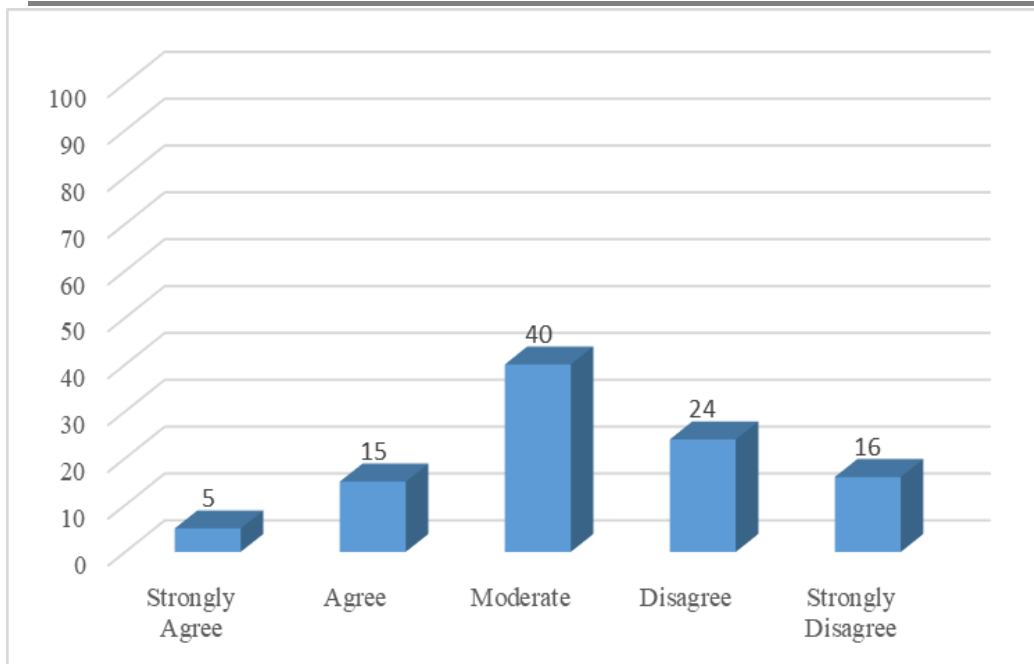


Figure 2: Level of training for pastors

Source: Field data (2023)

Majority of the respondents accounting to 40.0% could neither agree nor disagree that pastors and church leaders are well trained in biblical theology to enable them properly address marriage issues, 40.0% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The key informant interview confirmed that spousal violence is common in this community as shown below.

*Female Church Member 4: “I would be lying to God and you, if I say that there is concern at all about spousal violence, leave alone the training to equip pastors with counselling skills.”*

*Male Church Leader 1: “Yes, there is training, however it touches more on spiritual needs of society.”*

*Female Church Member 8: “as a church leader, I think we need to adapt to modern life in the past we assumed that spousal violence was of the world not the church people*

*Female Church Member 1: We as a society expect too much from pastors and men of God, there no amount of training can help the situation.”*

The findings concur with pastoral guidance and counselling which gives psycho-social support following negative experiences of spousal violence in a manner of mitigating distress (McMullen et al, 2013) and promoting resilience among victims of violence (Beleli *et al.*, 2007). McMullen *et al.* (2013) and Parsitau (2011) described religious faith as a resource for overcoming post-conflict trauma and a cushion between spouses and their harsh emotional, psychological and social realities and for building self-esteem and self-worth among victims.

The study concludes that clergy are not adequately trained to respond to domestic abuse. The program instructs the clergy on fundamental counselling principles and broad ideas about conflict management and resolution but does not directly address domestic violence. The need for retraining was clearly acknowledged by respondents, who also actively outlined the topics that such training should cover. The fact that almost all clergy responding to this have theology training and others have counselling training does not seem to be improving the situation. Along with this, the majority of church leaders believe that their training is insufficient to deal with domestic violence in families.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that the church has not been offering enough support to victims of spousal violence; however, the victims still believe that church leaders have a major role if they can be harnessed in the prevention and management of family affairs.

The study noted that in this case there is lack of guidelines that should foster theology as a way of coming up with a standard that can be used by the church, lack of standards to be borrowed by entire church, lack of guiding practice affects the harmony in conducting counselling. This is the effect of misinformation emanating from the lack of uniform standards in the church. Harmonization can help clergy to respond to this challenge objectively and reduce stereotype and bias while addressing the challenge. A serious challenge noted in the lack of training, though church leaders are trained there is a lack of framework for training. The church leaders indicate that though they undergo regular seminars, the real principles and concepts that could help to build the capacity of clergy are lacking.

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