



**No way out? The dilemma of survivors of domestic violence
and the church's response in Ghana**

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Abstract

Domestic violence/intimate partner violence is a scourge affecting Anlo Ewe women in Ghana's southeastern region due to the prevalence of a patriarchal culture of male dominance interplayed with religion. The narrow interpretation of Malachi 2:16, among others, adds to women's predicaments. This study answers the question: 'what characterize the experiences of Anlo Ewe women on violence and divorce in marriage and what are their perceptions of the role of the church in this regard?' Through semi-structured interviews, narratives of ten female survivors of violence married/divorced/separated; nine of whom are Christians from eight different faith traditions (Mainline, Charismatic, Pentecostal and African Independent Churches) and one a traditional believer, were canvassed.

Using the intersectionality approach through the help of four relevant conceptual frameworks (gender and feminist theory; individual autonomy and community/ubuntu; religious coping; and ecclesiology and diakonia), this study reveals a complex interplay of culture and religion and gender differentiations that contribute to men's abusive nature, infidelities, control over women's sexualities and women's slavery in marriage. As a result, women experience various forms of abuse some of which are interrelated. This study also reveals that, poverty, the sociological and traumatic effects of divorce on children, the shame and stigma of violence and divorce self-imposed by these women and by the community, silence and women's fear of further victimization by men, cause women to suffer abuse. These factors and churches' deceptive and culture-compliant theology on marriage and divorce put women in dilemma as they feel caged in marriage with no way out. In addition, this study reveals the manner in which faith is used to cope is destructive and argues for churches to take a critical look at their theologies and for women to engage in a contextual Bible study. Further, there is an uneven emphasis on the place of the community in the lives of women that reveals a tension and a paradox which needs to be ironed out. Churches' diaconal mission to those outside their communities is found to be lacking and their impact is nominal. To add, Ghana's laws on domestic violence is found to be ineffective, suggesting there is more to be done by churches and the nation as a whole.

Key Words: domestic violence, intimate partner violence, divorce, trap, religion, diakonia, church, autonomy, community, coping, Ghana, Anlo Ewe.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my husband and three children. I love you all.

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AAP - Affirmative Action Plan

AC - Anglican Church

AICs - African Independent/Instituted Churches

AoG - Assemblies of God

ARS - Apostolic Revelation Society

CAC - Christ Apostolic Church

CEDAW - Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

CEM - Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry

CHRAJ - Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice

CID - Criminal Investigation Department

CSO - Civil Society Organizations

DEVAW - Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

DHS - Demographic and Health Survey

DOVVSU - Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit

DV - Domestic Violence

DVL - Domestic Violence Law

DVS - Domestic Violence Secretariat

EPC - Evangelical Presbyterian Church

FAO - Food and Agricultural Organization

FIDA - International Federation of Women Lawyers

FGM - female genital mutilation

GBV - Gender-based violence

GDP - Gross Domestic Product

GHS - Ghana Health Service

GPS - Ghana Police Service

GSS - Ghana Statistical Service

IDS - Institute of Development Studies

IPV - Intimate Partner Violence

IRFC - International Royal Family Church

LWF - Lutheran World Federation

MoGCSP - Ministry of Gender Children and Social Protection

MOWAC - Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs

NGOs - Non-governmental Organizations

NPPOA - National Policy and Plan of Action

PHC - Population and Housing Census

RCC - Roman Catholic Church

SDG - Sustainable Development Goal

VAW - Violence Against Women

VDVSF - Victims of Domestic Violence Support Fund

WAJU - Women and Juvenile Unit

WHO - World Health Organization

WCC - World Council of Churches

UN - United Nations

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Research overview

Gender-based violence, undoubtedly a human rights violation is a global phenomenon affecting largely women and children. The UN (2019) estimates that one third of women suffer sexual or and physical abuse at a point in in their lives.¹ Ghana is also known to record one of the highest cases of domestic violence (a form of gender-based violence) in marriages/intimate partner violence (IPV) within Sub-Saharan Africa (Sedziafa, Tenkorang & Owusu, 2016). According to a survey on domestic violence conducted by Ghana Statistical Services (GSS) in 2015, 27.7 percent and 20 percent of women and men respectively have experienced one form of domestic violence.

Unfortunately, this battle of IPV goes on and is one that is both hidden and visible to the human eye. It is one whose effects are, no doubt, devastating to all appearances. Some women in Ghana are in a dilemma as they feel trapped in marriage in the face of abuse. They do not see divorce as a way out due to the complex interplay of culture and religion, poverty, women's concern for the welfare of their children and family and community expectations of them.

As a global concern, gender-based violence (GBV) has called for the attention of all stakeholders like the United Nations (UN), human rights activists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), scholars, and member states, to curb and reduce its impact. To do this, the UN has adopted several treaties and policies such as the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW) in 1993², the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women

¹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/11/1052041>

² <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/eliminationvaw.pdf> (accessed 23 June 2019)

(hereafter, CEDAW) in 1979³, and the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 in 2015⁴, just to mention a few.

The UN DEVAW affirms that ‘violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women and impairs or nullifies their enjoyment of those rights and freedoms’ (UN, 1993:1). Likewise, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its first Article, defines discrimination against women as gender-based violence, meted out to women because they are women and include such acts as ‘...physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty’ and maintains that it nullifies women’s enjoyment of their human rights and fundamental freedoms (UN, 1992: 1). The United Nations (UN, 2015: 18) on its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 aims at ending all forms of discrimination against women and girls and achieving gender equality and empowerment for them by the year 2030. Ghana, through the Domestic Violence Act 732 and other initiatives, has also joined this struggle.

As a diaconal study, this research focuses on how the church responds to human and societal needs in the light of Scripture. This involves an interdisciplinary approach and specifically focuses on the role of faith and the church as part of diakonia. The church as representatives of God have been commissioned and equipped to deal with issues of discrimination and oppression both within and without it and to liberate and transform. To this end, this study seeks to find out how some churches in Ghana are working to address this menace against women.

This chapter presents to the reader a general outline of the research, the phenomenon of violence and divorce; the research question in relation to the topic; the context of Ghana specifically the Anlo Ewe; my motivation for this study; the methods employed to answer the research question; and the limitations to the study.

³ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/52d920c54.html> (accessed 23 June 2019)

⁴

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf> (accessed 23 June 2019)

1.2 The research question

In view of the societal challenge identified above, the question which becomes the focus of this research is: *What characterize the experiences of Anlo Ewe women on violence and divorce in marriage, and what are their perceptions on the role of the church in this regard?*

Marital violence or IPV as used in this study falls in line with the definition of violence in article 1 of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 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 in private life (DEVAW, 1993).

This means marital violence may be any intentional use of force against a woman by her partner done secretly or openly that negatively results in either physical, emotional, financial, or mental loss that incapacitates her ability to participate in society. It is identified here as a specific form of gender-based violence and will be used interchangeably as domestic violence or Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

By the term, ‘divorce’ is meant a legal dissolution or termination of a marital union either by the court or my custom.

‘Experiences,’ here, mean the nature or forms of violence and divorce as encountered by female survivors, and ‘perceptions,’ mean the understandings/opinions gained from what has been experienced and the help offered.

By ‘church’ is meant the communion of believers irrespective of their denomination. The focus of this research is not on any particular church as female survivors in this region of Ghana belong to various denominational churches from Mainline, Charismatic, Pentecostal and African Independent/Instituted Churches (AICs). So by church, I mean the community of God’s called out ones who believe in the totality of God’s Word and are saved through faith in the birth, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (McGrath, 2017: 355) and who have a diaconal mandate from God to be and to act in the world. This implies the church constitutes, not only, church leaders or

pastors but also the laity, men and women, young and old, rich and poor; an all-inclusive church called by Christ and mandated to fulfil Christ's mission wherever they find themselves.

Finally, by the term 'role', is meant the assumed function of the church with regards the experiences of violence and divorce of abused women.

Violence results from our choices to act or not act in situations of need. This implies violence is inevitable. This is not to provide any justification for acts of violence meted against any human being, neither is it not to say working towards building a society that is devoid of violence is a mirage. It is a possibility when we, the human race as stakeholders, explore every available opportunity and tools at our disposal and work together towards its realization. If it cannot be achieved for some reason, its magnitude could, at least, be controlled to some measure which is more or less the essence of this research.

1.3 The phenomenon of violence, divorce and the scope

The so-called domestic violence is a prevailing canker eating into the fabric of the Ghanaian society. This has had devastating effects on women and children's well-being and livelihood. Homes that should be a haven of comfort have, unfortunately, become a place of torture for most women and children.

The Volta Region, one of the sixteen administrative regions of Ghana comprising multi-ethnic groups of both non-Anlo Ewe speaking people and the Anlo-Ewe⁵ speaking people, is not exempt from this social menace. The milieu of this research is particularly in the southeastern part of this region comprising of the Anlo-Ewe. They are bordered on the south by Togo and Benin and on the south west by Nigeria (See Fig. 2 below). IPV predominates the Anlo society due to the societal

⁵ Anlo Ewes are a sub-group of the Ewe people; one of the ethnic groups in the Volta Region of Ghana. They speak the Ewe language. The Anlo dialect distinguishes them from other Ewe speaking people. Though a few differences exist between the various tribes within the Ewe community with respect to their social structure which would make generalization of the Ewe community as a whole very misleading, basically, they are united in terms of a common language and tradition. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anlo_Ewe

structure - the kinship system and the cultural practice interwoven with religious beliefs. Further details about the Anlo Ewe is touched on in chapter two.

1.4 Motivation

Born and growing up as a young girl in the Anlo Ewe-speaking community in the Volta region of Ghana where I spent my primary and Senior High School education years, I was raised in the Anlo-Ewe culture and have witnessed women suffer from various degrees of abuse at the hands of their male partners. Some had to flee from their homes for safety, others had to endure the tortures they were subjected to in silence while others, unfortunately, were either maimed or met their untimely demise.

As a teacher and a Christian woman working in the church, I have encountered many women whose mothers or themselves have experienced one form of abuse or the other and witnessed the effects on their lives and their children. My curiosity towards the proposed topic led me to an article of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, ‘Violence Against Women: A Challenge to Christian Theology’ published in *Journal of Inculturation Theology* (1994) which title suggests that the whole issue of violence against women, particularly in Africa, has not been tackled and actively addressed by the church. The culture of dominance associated with patriarchy, particularly, in Africa has been the bedrock of social, political, and religious discourses involving power.

Oduyoye refers to the status of women in marriage and, focusing on the Akans⁶ of Ghana, she argues that ‘By getting married, the Akan woman has acquired a double dose of male domination and may be in fact worse off than her sister in a patrilineal marriage.’ (Oduyoye, 1995: 134). Though this statement may not be far from the facts, it purports an exaggeration in that, I hold that women in patrilineal marriages experience higher domination than those in matrilineal marriages, a contrast I wish to elaborate in my study.

⁶ The republic of Ghana is made up of several ethnic groups. The Akan are a matrilineage group and the largest. They are followed by the Mole-Dagbani and the Ewe.

I perceive the chosen topic as a viable problem for an investigation because of an ambivalence interpretation of Christian perception of divorce. The biblical reference, ‘...I hate divorce...’ (Malachi 2:16) believed to be God’s definite resentment of the practice, is a probable cause of the church’s possible silence on the menace. I remember when I got married, the pastor who blessed our marriage told us that divorce ought not to be mentioned in our conversation since it is a repugnant thing to do as a Christian. ‘God hates that,’ he emphasized. Culture and religion have made Christian couples within this context to believe that it is a shameful thing and wrong to be, particularly, a divorced woman. This conception has, probably enslaved women who are consistently enduring marital violence in different forms – physical, sexual, verbal, and the like.

With the plethora of literature available, which I highlight in my next chapter, I observe a hiatus which somehow suggests a marginalization of Anlo-Ewe women from telling their own stories. Not much research has been done on them, particularly with respect their situation and how the church seeks to help them. Against this background, I am motivated as an Anlo Ewe Christian woman to carry out this research.

1.5 The method, purpose and limitations

Writing from the perspective of an activist, with no particular church as a target, and through the help of gatekeepers and the snowball method, I interviewed ten female survivors of violence; nine of whom belonged to several denominational churches and one a traditional believer. And like Kjell Nordstokke says, ‘the world and its problems look different from the perspectives of the powerful than from the perspectives of marginalized groups’ (Nordstokke, 2011: 61), I intend to, through this research, give women suffering from abuse the voice to tell their own stories.

With relatively little research done on religion and intimate partner violence from the perspectives of abused women, I hope to contribute to knowledge in the academic field. I also hope to bring to light the gravity of this phenomenon to sensitize churches and actors so as to provide a possible framework within which they can act to address issues of violence and divorce.

This research does not engage in any quantitative or mixed method study which is relatively time-consuming. It is a qualitative study done with semi-structured interviews with open-ended

questions to allow women to narrate their stories. This study is limited to violence caused or ever caused by male partners of women within marriage. It does not interview the perpetrators, the families, the pastors nor members of the congregations to which the female survivors belong. Its focus is neither to find out the impact of governmental organizations in working to alleviate the problem of violence but focuses on how, through the stories of these women, churches are responding to this societal challenge.

1.6 The structure

Chapter 2

This chapter is the context chapter that outlines the research front with respect to the subject under study in Ghana, the legal framework and efforts with respect to gender-based violence, the cultural, socio-economic and the religious framework.

Chapter 3

Chapter three touches on the theoretical and conceptual framework. Theories and concepts I use in interpreting my empirical data include gender/feminist theory, religious coping, individual versus the community/ubuntu, and ecclesiology and diakonia.

Chapter 4

Chapter four is the methods chapter. Here, I focus on processes involved in gathering my empirical data, problems and dilemmas encountered, research design, types and number of sources, how I sought to validate and authenticate my data and the ethical considerations.

Chapter 5

Chapter five presents my empirical data gathered from informants, after placing raw data into categories and themes.

Chapter 6

This chapter contains the discussion of empirical data through the eyes of the proposed theory and conceptual frameworks and other relevant literature.

Chapter 7

This final chapter highlights my findings, recommendations and possible suggestions for further research.

Chapter Two

2.0 Background and context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter gives the reader an overview of a brief historical background of the research context, Ghana and the Anlo Ewe; the socio-political, cultural and economic situation; the role of the church in society and family life; review of researches on domestic violence and divorce within the context; and the policy and legal framework.

2.2 Historical background of Ghana

Formerly the Gold Coast, the Republic of Ghana is first in Sub-Sahara Africa to become independent from British colonial rule on the 6th of March 1957 under the first president, Dr. Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah. In West Africa, Ghana is situated along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea and bordered to the south by the Atlantic Ocean, to the north and north west by Burkina Faso, to the east by Togo and to the west by Côte d'Ivoire (see Fig. 1), and spans a land region of 238,537 km.²



Figure 1: Map of Ghana in West Africa
(Source: easytrackghana.com)



Figure 2: Anlo Ewe Map (Source: wikiwand.com)

Practicing a multi-party democracy with a parliament elected every four years, Ghana had ten administrative regions comprising of Upper West, Upper East, Northern, Brong Ahafo, Eastern, Ashanti, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) & Ghana Health Service (GHS), 2015) but currently has six additional regions – Oti, North East, Savannah, Ahafo, Bono East and Western North - created after the referendum in 2018 (Kojo, 2018).

With English as the official and standard language of instruction in education predominating government and business affairs, Ghana also has about 250 spoken local languages and dialects. Ghana's population constitutes several ethnic groups of which the Akan form the largest (48%), followed by the Mole-Dagbani (17%), the Ewe (14%), Ga-Dangme (7%) among others (GSS, 2013). Though there has been an increase in Ghana's population, the 2010 Population and Housing Census, estimates Ghana's resident population at 24,658,823 made up of 12,024,845 males (48.8%) and 12,633,978 females (51.2%) (GSS, 2012). In spite of the numerical strength of women, there is great disparity between men and women in terms of education, employment, access to health and wielding positions of power, thus contributing to Gender Based Violence (GBV).

2.3 Socio-economic, cultural and political system

Economically, Ghana is a developing country known mainly for exports in gold, cocoa and oil. Ghana is rich in these natural resources including, diamond, silver, aluminum, manganese, timber, salt, among others. According to the World Bank, Ghana is ranked a lower middle-income country in Sub-Saharan Africa with an annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimated growth rate of 6.8% in 2020 (World Bank Group, 2019). In 2016, they estimated 23.4% of the national population to be living below the national poverty line. As a matter of fact, the Ghana Health Service (GHS, 2011: 17)⁷ in its annual report revealed poverty as one challenge widening the access gap to healthcare in Ghana.

⁷<https://www.ghanahealthservice.org/ghs-item-details.php?cid=5&scid=52&iid=94>

In spite of Ghana's rich natural resources, Ghana largely depends on agriculture to alleviate poverty. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) maintains that agriculture contributes to about 54% of Ghana's GDP. Of the approximate 52% of Ghana's labor force engaged in agriculture, 39% are women engaged in farming (FAO, 2020). Undeniably, women's contributions to national economic growth is relatively significant. In spite of this, poverty has been feminized and women's experiences of marginalization and discrimination at all levels of the Ghanaian society are notable.

Ghana's cultural, social and political system is plagued with gender inequities. The patriarchal culture of the nation, as a whole, does not allow women to hold positions of power as compared to men. Men are considered the heads of the home and women are required to submit to men. In fact, very few women are represented in public office and decision-making processes in all government sectors in spite of the Affirmative Action Plan (AAP) (Tsikata, 2009)⁸. For example, from the 2016 parliamentary elections, out of 275 parliamentarians, 88% are males while only 12% are females (Dzradosi, Agyekum & Ocloo, 2018), a very insignificant representation despite the Affirmative Action. Though the current government is making efforts to meet this goal, there is still much more to be done. These cultural, economic and socio-political conditions existing in Ghana, among others, account for the prevalence of domestic violence against women.

2.4 The role of the church in society and family life

Though the 1992 Constitution acknowledges Ghana as religiously pluralistic, Ghana is predominantly Christian. According to the 2014 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), 76.9%, 16.4% and 2.6% of Ghana's populace are Christian, Moslem and Traditional believers respectively (GSS & GHS, 2015). Of the 76.9% Christians, 36.3% are Pentecostal/Charismatic, 13.5% are Protestant (Anglican, Presbyterian & Methodist), 10.4% are Catholic and 16.7% comprise other

⁸ The Affirmative Action Policy was formulated in 1998 by the Ghana government after Beijing Plan of Action set targets of 50 percent representation of women at all levels of governance, on Public Boards, Commissions, Councils, Committees and Official Boards including Cabinet and Council of State. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/ghana/10484.pdf>

Christians such as African Independent/Instituted Churches (AICs). This means there is a high proliferation of churches in Ghana aside from the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Going back in history, Christianity in Ghana came with the advent of colonialism. The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in the then Gold Coast in 1471 followed by the Dutch, the British, the Swedes and the Danes (Goking, 2005) quoted in (Stiles-Ocran, 2013). Their initial intention was for trade in gold, ivory and slaves. Eventually, they brought along chaplains to spread the gospel to the indigenes. Among them were missionary groups such as the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (1828) now Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Wesleyan Missionaries (1835) now Methodist Church of Ghana and the Catholic Societas Missionum ad Afros (SMA, 1880), the Catholic Church (Ibid).

In Ghana the Church, in joint efforts with the government, has been involved in education and health as part of their social ministry. There are considerable number of schools and hospitals established by the Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches in Ghana to provide formal education and skills to the public (Eshun, 2013: 38-42). In his master thesis, Eshun highlights the social and diaconal role of some selected Charismatic churches in Ghana also involved in providing formal education and health services to individuals in the face of challenges faced in the areas of education and health (Eshun, 2013).

Basically, the local church is also involved in the daily lives of the people through Sunday and mid-week services where the Word of God is preached and taught, through observing the sacraments of baptism and the Holy Communion, visitations and evangelism. They provide moral guidance to their members through God's Word and support members during marriage, funeral and naming ceremonies. The church provides pre-marital counselling and counselling on marriage life and divorce. They advise on the choice of a partner, sexuality within and outside marriage and gender roles in heterosexual marriages. They also offer some level of financial and material support to members in time of need.

2.5 Prevalence of domestic violence in Ghana

Domestic violence or intimate partner violence (IPV) is a widespread global phenomenon that mostly plagues women in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ahinkorah, Dickson & Seidu, 2018) of which Ghana is no exception. Though the 1992 Constitution of Ghana gives women equal rights with men, gender inequalities are evident in the way women are discriminated against, deprived and marginalized in every facet of life. Research shows Ghana records one of the highest cases of domestic violence in marriages within Sub-Saharan Africa (Sedziafa, Tenkorang & Owusu, 2016). Twenty seven percent (27%) of women in Ghana suffer psychological abuse, 3 in 10 women suffer sexual abuse and 1 in 3 women experience physical abuse from a current or past partner (Coker-Appiah & Cusack, 1999).

There are several other forms of violence against women and children ranging from murdering of wives, stalking, female genital mutilation (FGM), early and forced child marriages, forced prostitution, witchcraft accusations and public humiliations, among others (Cusack & Manuh, 2009).

Early childhood experiences of family violence (Tenkorang & Owusu, 2018; Cusack & Manuh, 2009), economic dependence/independence of women, socio-cultural practices, traditional beliefs and gender norms are known to be the cause of DV in Ghana (Cantalupo, Martin, Pak & Shin, 2006; Ofei-Aboagye, 1994; Akpalu, Ofei-Aboagye & Derbyshire, 2000; Pephrah & Koomson, 2014; Oduyoye, 1995; Dako-Gyekye, Addo-Lartey, Alangea, Sikweyiya, Chirwa, Coker-Appiah, et al. 2019).

The above-named causes influence the attitudes and perceptions of men and women towards violence (Amoakohene, 2004; Osei-Tutu & Ampadu, 2017; Owusu, 2016; Dery, 2019; Odoi, 2012; Adjei, 2018;). Such attitudes and the public perception of divorce force women to stay in abusive relationships (Adjei, 2017; Morris, 2012).

In effect, DV has far-reaching crippling effects on women, children and society (Derry & Diedong, 2014; Appiah, Yaw & Mohammed, 2013; Pool, Otupiri, Owusu-Dabo, Jonge, & Agyemang, 2014; Asante, Fenny, Dzudzor, Chadha, Scriver, Ballantine et al., 2019). Issahaku (2018) provides, from

the perspectives of 53 female respondents in the Northern Region of Ghana, how IPV can be stopped.

Religious leaders are noted for their influence in matters of family, spousal violence and divorce. This is seen in the church's Biblical interpretation of Scripture and attitude towards violence and divorce which negatively affects abused women's decisions regarding marriage (Koepping, 2013; Oduyoye, 2009; Odoi, 2015). Amenga-Etego (2006) calls on joint efforts of the government and the commissioned and equipped church 'to help break the vicious cycle' (p. 23) of abuse against women.

Against the plethora of literature on domestic violence in Ghana, this research seeks to add to the existing literature and to give Anlo Ewe women, who have been silenced by culture and tradition, the voice to air their perspectives on the nature of violence they face in their marriages and on how the church has supported them in issues of violence and divorce.

2.6 Background of the Anlo Ewe

The Anlo have a patrilineal system by which children trace their descent through their father's lineage (Nukunyah, 1969), meaning a father's sisters are more respected than a woman's brothers. Thus, a child could inherit, through male kin, property, name, and rights.

The society has a long-standing history and structures of patriarchy that dominate women and exclude them in many areas (ibid). A man is held in high esteem over and above her, is considered the head of the home and can act without any interference, except from his father (ibid). A man cannot reason together with his wife because she is seen as inferior to him and has nothing better to offer. She is not brought to the table of discourse in decision-making processes and cannot voice out her opinions and sentiments in private and public domains. If she dares speak without invitation, she is seen as disrespectful and insubordinate (Mutimukuru-Maravanyika, Mills, Asare & Asiedu, 2017).

Anlo kinship structure visibly indicates the position of women in the home and in the society. The administration of the state and its defense is left in the hand of men while women remain stuck in

their homes and kitchen. In the words of Nukunya (1969: 155), women 'have no direct say in the affairs of the community.' In fact, culture defines their gender roles as homemakers and bearers of children and demarcates their 'office' to be the kitchen.

Most Anlo men consider themselves masters of their houses leaving their wives in subservient positions. The Anlo woman is required by custom to obey her husband and submit to him by all regards. She must kneel in greeting her husband and learn to address him using 'please.' She cannot eat with her husband but with her children in the kitchen. Her place in marriage is that of submission to her husband; a submission that is not mutual and suggests an imbalance in power relations. This submission is not only required of her by her husband, but enforced as well by her family, her husband's family, the church and the society at large. She cannot express her opinion in any matter that involves the family and the community except by invitation. Failure to comply will attract his beating as a form of punishment to 'put her in her place.' The domineering powers of men do not give Anlo women safe spaces to express the pains sustained in their marriages hence making IPV a prevailing issue and unresolved.

Generally, Anlo women are hardworking. In Westermann and Lugard's (1949: 48) observation, trading was an important venture for women especially. One can find women who are farmers as well. They trade in their husband's farm produce, an economic venture Anlo men would not engage in. This gives us a picture of the economic independence of these women. On the face value, one would see it as a way of women empowering themselves towards their self-emancipation. But a critical look at this would reveal that the Anlo woman is sadly faced with no choice, but to engage in trading and farming to take care of her home especially her children in the face of some irresponsible husbands who have shirked off their marital responsibilities. In addition, she is required to serve her husband's needs which include cooking for him, fetching water for his bath as well as meeting his sexual needs. She is responsible for the day-to-day upkeep of her home which includes making sure her children are bathed daily and prepared for school, and that they are well fed and clothed.

One would think that in the face of such abuses the ultimate for women will be to divorce. Unfortunately, divorce is not common among the Anlo Ewe (Nukunyah, 1969) thus, caging women who feel there is no way out of abusive relationships.

Characteristic of the Anlo community, is the existence of numerous church traditions. These churches perform varied roles in the everyday lives of individuals and families as indicated above (2.4). However, like I earlier referred to Oduyoye (1994), not much is seen and heard of their impact with regards dealing with the problem of violence and divorce in marriage, which is what this study embarks on finding out.

2.6 Legal and policy initiatives

In response to the prevalence of domestic violence, Ghana has enacted several national policies and laws among which is the long-awaited Domestic Violence (DV) Act 732 that took as long as nine years to be passed into law (1998-2007). Motivation for the passage of Ghana's DV law were the advocacy efforts of women activists like the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Ghana; civil society organizations (CSO); and what seemed to be the last straw that broke the camel's back, the serial murder of women in Ghana in 2000. The DV Law 2007 prohibits all forms of violence (emotional, physical, sexual, and economic), and provides openings for reconciliation, protection orders and rehabilitation services to victims and abusers.⁹

The 1992 Constitution of Ghana, the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service (GPS), formerly, Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) of 2003, and the creation of the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) were some measures taken by the government of Ghana to fight discrimination and gender-based violence. CHRAJ is a judicial and administrative body responsible for addressing domestic violence issues and for protecting and promoting universal human rights and freedoms as enshrined in the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

⁹https://www.africalegalaid.com/download/domestic_violence_legislations/Ghana_Domestic_Violence_Act_2007.pdf Accessed on 5 March 2020.

The former Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) in 2008, following the DV Law 2007, formulated the ten-year National Policy and Plan of Action (NPPOA, 2009-2019) which laid out the roles of some key stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the Law and the equality of all women in all spheres of life under the umbrella of the Domestic Violence Secretariat (DVS), which was part of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) (Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), UKaid & MoGCSP, 2016).

DOVVSU was created to address issues of violence and to document domestic violence cases against women and children. The DV Law also created a Victims of Domestic Violence Support Fund (VDVSF), which was to be raised from voluntary contributions from organizations, individuals, NGO's, Parliamentary votes and other sources approved by the Ministry of Finance to support survivors of violence, who are financially and materially handicapped, to report abuse cases, to cater for expenses incurred in rescuing survivors, to rehabilitate, provide shelter homes and to integrate them into the community (Hammond, nd).

However, this Act, which is meant to provide protection to victims and mark out procedures for the punishment of perpetrators, is ineffective because it does not explicitly repeal Ghana's Criminal Code, 1960, Act 29. This is a problem because the latter 'accepts marital rape on account of the supposed consent given upon marriage' (Sedziafa et al, 2016: 3). This situation made it difficult for women who suffer 'marital rape' to seek help in the law courts.

As a step further in promoting the universal rights and freedoms of her citizens, Ghana is part of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 that seeks to eradicate all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination against women and girls and to promote equality for women in all spheres by the year 2030. Globally, Ghana is ranked 104th out of 162 in her performance in the 17 SDG's. The UN's assessment of Ghana's situation of gender equality is one that is a major challenge that is moderately improving (GitHub, 2019).¹⁰

¹⁰ https://github.com/sdsna/2019GlobalIndex/blob/master/country_profiles/Ghana_SDR_2019.pdf Accessed on 5 March 2020.

In addition, Ghana has ratified several UN international human rights instruments like the CEDAW. This ratification obliges Ghana to make clear in article 17(2) of her 1992 Constitution what is meant by direct or indirect discrimination and to ensure her definition of discrimination is in conformity to that of CEDAW's, eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls from all angles by ensuring the abolishment of customary laws and practices that seek to promote discrimination, and to ensure that her laws promote the equal status of women with men (CEDAW, 1979).

Apart from the ten-year National Policy formulated through facilitative initiatives of the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWAC) to implement the DV Act 2007, efforts have also been made to establish Gender-based Violence Courts and a Human Rights Court to enforce the protection and equality of women. Institutional structures like the Labour Commission and CHRAJ have also been put in place to address issues of discrimination and violation of the human rights of women. There have also been efforts to sensitize the public on violence against women and its effects.

However, as a proactive stance, the Committee has questioned Ghana's preventive measures put in place to address violence against women and to effectively investigate and prosecute offenders of domestic violence against women when the need arises (CEDAW Committee, 2014: 2-3). In their concluding observations to Ghana's combined sixth and seventh periodic report to CEDAW, the Committee has called on Ghana to adopt a working law for effective implementation of the DV Act, 2007, to intensify her efforts in preventing and systematically punishing offenders of violence against women and girls and to provide every assistance victims need from care, counselling, rehabilitation and free legal aid. (CEDAW Committee, 2014: 7).

Though Ghana's Criminal Code 1960, Act 29 has been amended in keeping with recommendations of CEDAW, marital rape still continues to exist in most marriages. The cultural belief that IPV is a private matter that should not be brought to the public domain and gender stereotypes prevent victims/survivors from accessing the criminal justice system and this makes it difficult to lay hold on exact statistical figures on domestic violence cases. Socio-economic factors that view men as heads of households and women as dependent on men are all indications of how long a way Ghana has to go in curbing this societal menace.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, I have looked at a brief historical background of Ghana and the Anlo Ewe, the economic, cultural and socio-economic milieu as well as the political and legal situation existing and attempts Ghana has made to ratify international conventions in curbing the problem of violence. I have also looked at the role of the church in society. Having argued all these things, the question regarding implementation of these laws in Ghana and its effectiveness may be lacking as will be considered in my ensuing chapters.

Chapter Three

3.0 Theoretical framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses four relevant and interrelated conceptual frameworks I envisage to use in analyzing my data; Gender/African feminist theories, autonomy and the community/ubuntu, religious coping, and ecclesiology and diakonia. This is to help expose the hidden ill-treatments, injustice and subjections suffered in marriage, at the hands of male partners, by Anlo Ewe women of Ghana and to highlight the dignity of the personhood of these women, with the hope of calling the church to account to challenge women to resist every form of abuse and to work towards their liberation and power.

I use particularly African feminism because it best suits this research context, Ghana, which is situated in West Africa. Specific reference is made to Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African woman theologian, who engages in an interlocution with scholars as G.K. Nukunyah who carried out an anthropological research on the Anlo Ewe. Others from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (otherwise known as the Circle) and some feminist theologians outside the Circle; the likes of Nyambura Njoroge, Susan Rakoczy IHM will also be engaged. I shall also fall on western feminists like Elizabeth Johnson, Mary Daly and Elizabeth Fiorenza Schüssler because, though western feminists have been critiqued as being ethnocentric, they equally seek for the liberation of women.

With regards religious coping, I shall draw on some researchers in the field of Psychology as an epistemological framework. Voices on autonomy and the community/ubuntu like Stephanie Dietrich, Nyambura Njoroge, Susan Rakoczy IHM and others will also be employed. To elaborate on ecclesiology and diakonia, I shall fall on articles of Kjell Nordstokke and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

3.2 Gender

The UN (2006: 1) defines gender as ‘socially constructed differences in attributes and opportunities associated with being female or male and to the social interactions and relationships between women and men.’¹¹ This means gender is a sociological reality. It is traits that are constructed throughout the history of social relationships. It is an integral component of every aspect of the social, economic, religious, daily and private lives of individuals and societies and the different roles ascribed by society to men and women. Thus, gender differences and roles are artificial constructs which determine how women and men ought to behave in a given society and which, in effect, produces social, political, economic, educational and legal inequalities prevailing in all societies and cultures, leading to gender-based violence (GBV) with women and children being the ones on the periphery.

The UN (1993) in its Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women seeks, through the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) number 5, to work towards achieving gender equality by closing this gender gap through empowering women and girls by the year 2030. Gender justice and equality at all levels is, therefore, very vital and a necessary step in combating violence against women and girls. Stephanie Dietrich (2016) argues for a gendered study on *diakonia* - the social service of the church - and notes the influence of feminist theologies in gender studies in how they have been instrumental in critiquing patriarchal structures and in seeking for theological models for equality, dialogue and reform.

3.2.1 African feminist/womanist theoretical framework

Though some African female theologians wish to be identified as feminist and others as womanist for arguable reasons, yet they all share a common concern for the liberation of women (Isabel

¹¹The World’s Women 2005 Progress in Statistics.

https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/ww2005_pub/WW2005_complete_report.pdf (accessed 1st January 2020).

Apawo Phiri & Sarojini Nadar, 2006), not excluding western feminists though they have been critiqued based on contextual differences (Oduyoye, 1995).

Feminists believe that gender roles are social constructs deeply entrenched in cultures and traditions created by some human persons. This has led to the formation of patriarchal structures and systems leaving women at the end rope of marginalization, rejection and oppression and which calls for a much-desired reconstruction and change. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African woman theologian writes that:

socio-cultural norms generally demand submissive and subordinate behavior of women; this in turn, makes them easy victims of violence and predisposes them to accept the violence done to them. (Oduyoye, 1995: 164).

This, according to her, makes a husband feel he has the right to discipline his wife. Though she writes about Akan women of Ghana and the Yoruba of Nigeria, this fact is not far-fetched from the plight of Anlo-Ewe women. As G. K. Nukunya puts it, ‘the man is the master of the house’ (Nukunya, 1969: 155). He is considered the head of the home. Anlo-Ewe women are raised in such a way that they are made to believe they are subordinate to men and are at their beck and call. They are socialized to be considerate of men and to serve them, to the point of denying themselves; a relationship, which, unfortunately, is not reciprocal and mutual.

Growing up as young girls, we are socialized to understand that a woman’s place is in the kitchen and home. Here, a young girl is taught to learn how to cook for her future husband. If she is to please her husband and *keep her marriage*, her ‘office’ was to be in the kitchen and the home where she is groomed to take care of herself and learn how to cook good meals and care for her prospective husband and children. So that it is typical to come to Anloland and see women and their daughters working tirelessly in the home from cooking, to sweeping, to washing clothes, to bathing the children and fetching water for their husbands to bathe while the men sit cross-legged and relaxed behind a newspaper or watching the evening news on the television, waiting to be called to the table. In many ways, he sees himself as above and superior to his wife and must be accorded that respect and total obedience, failure of which is punishable by beating.

One sees this act of men beating their wives as an exercise of power over and against women; an act of domination. Some feminists believe the dowry or the bride-price which is paid by the man’s

family to the woman's family in marriage, may probably be one reason that accounts for this feeling of control the husband has over his wife. Oduyoye (1995: 136) sees this as connoting "giving away" a human being' which is a dehumanizing cultural practice against women that places them as slaves to culture. Nukunya (1969: 92), in his discourse on the *srɔnu* or *tabianu*, interprets it as literally meaning 'the marriage payment'. Though tradition may not see it this way, arguably, I am tempted to conclude, from the use of this phrase, that this exchange implies the selling and buying of the bride.

This payment of the bride-price brings to question the autonomy of women. Oduyoye (1995: 137) writes that it signifies 'the control of a woman's sexuality' by her husband. This corresponds to what Nukunya (1969: 96-97) says that a husband is conferred 'rights over her sexual services' and 'has a legal monopoly over his wife's sexual services'. In Africa, child-birth is valued and more especially in patrilineal cultures where a husband sees it as his duty to procreate to perpetuate his descent group. This means a wife has no control over her sexuality and has no say when issues of when and how many children to reproduce are involved. Oduyoye (1995: 134) clearly sees this as neglect of 'a woman's personal biological or psychological need...' In my view, it is dehumanizing, degrading and devaluing of women who are treated as mere sexual 'objects' there to gratify men's sexual desires.

Christine Obbo (1981) believes male dominance goes hand in hand with female subservience. From Genesis 1:27, we understand that men and women are both created by God and have equal standing with God. Among the Anlo, male children are preferred over female children as it is believed they continue the family name or lineage. A woman who gives birth to only females is blamed. Incidentally, one Aunt of mine was threatened with divorce because her first five children were girls, and her husband desperately wanted male offspring. For fear of losing her marriage and to please her husband, she became pregnant against her will.

For Oduyoye (1995), women are hurting because they are increasingly discriminated against and dominated by men because of traditional stereotypes of gender roles. Women are entrenched in positions of servitude in silence and unfortunately, have resigned themselves to their fate, seeing no way out. Dora A. Owusu believes culture, women's economic dependence on men and religious beliefs against separation in marriage are principal factors that impose silence on women in Ghana

and make them mute in pain as they endure abuse (Owusu, 2016). This silence, according to her, triggers further abuse and reinforces family and community tolerance of domestic violence against women. Seen in the light of what Nukunya writes that:

Anlo regarded marriage as ideally a permanent union between the spouses and their kin groups, and divorce was allowed *only* for flagrant breach of the husband's obligation to his wife, her parents or any of his close affines, for childlessness and for the wife's adultery (my emphasis in italics) (Nukunya, 1969: 103)

Divorce among the Anlo is 'rare' (Ibid) and is *only* permitted under the above-named conditions. This arguably implies that violence against women is not to be ground or excuse for divorce since it is a usual thing for Anlo men to beat their wives (Ibid: 108). Though divorce is relatively common today, it will not be a surprise to see and hear of women suffering various degrees of abuse in marriage among the indigenes, who feel *trapped* with no way of escape and silently groaning in pain for fear of further victimization by the church and society.

Culture and religion overshadow women's presence and seem to form a blockade that seems difficult for women to surmount. Christianity, particularly, is believed, through its naïve interpretations of Scripture and Biblical patriarchy, to perpetuate violence against women. (Phiri, 2002). Sinenhlanhla S. Chisale (2018) posit that Christian wives who experience domestic violence are unable to speak up about it because of how they have been religiously and culturally socialized. In Ghana, and I believe this generally applies to most African countries, the privacy of the marriage institution is understood in terms of *not washing one's dirty linen in public*. Chauke (2003) maintains that women who are abused in marriage are taught through religion to protect the image of their husbands who abuse them by not voicing out. Critiquing class, race and gender discrimination, Oduyoye (1995: 173) views that, 'the church seems to align itself with forces that question the true humanity of "the other" and, at times, seems to actually find ways of justifying the oppression or marginalization of "the other."' She asserts that the experiences of women in the church in Africa are an indication of how Christianity rather demonstrates complicity to bad cultural practices and indoctrinates women into compliance and submission which in effect depersonalizes them. (Oduyoye, 2004: 72). Rose Mary Amenga-Etego (2006: 38), a member of the Circle, observes 'the Church is not intervening appropriately and responsibly.' Based on a

survey that she claims was carried out between 2001 and 2004 on violence against women by the Institute of Women in Religion and Culture¹², she writes that:

abused women are prayed with and asked to continue to pray for themselves in order to prevent the abuse. They are then advised to be patient, humble, submissive, and to wait on the Lord to intervene... It falls on them, therefore, to find the solutions through self-adjustments and prayer – the key to making changes in their own lives to accommodate the men or violence... (Ibid).

Patriarchy, it has been observed, is one structure of society that breeds violence against women. As Elizabeth Johnson (1992: 23) defines it and as would be understood in this research, it:

is a form of social organization in which power is always in the hand of the dominant man or men, with others ranked below in a graded series of subordination reaching down to the least powerful who form a large base.

This implies there is never an opportunity for women to equally rise to positions of power which leads to the effectual growth in injustice, control and the marginalization of women and makes violence against women thrive.

Diakonia as the social service of the church upholds Christian anthropology as understood in Genesis 1:26-28 as the unconditional common identity and the equal dignity of *all* human persons - male and female as creations of God in *imago Dei*, ‘the image of God’, having equal value and dignity before God, and responds to human suffering in a way that emphasizes the recognition and acknowledgement of this fact. In the words of Elizabeth Johnson, ‘Women are equally created in the image and likeness of God, equally redeemed by Christ, equally sanctified by the Holy Spirit;’ (Johnson, 1992: 8).

Notwithstanding, theological and historical evidence has shown that women are subjected to all forms of abuse in marriage owing to sexism, patriarchal interpretation of Scripture and the androcentric understanding of God as male. From the order of creation, based on the second account of creation in Genesis 2:18-23, men are considered as created directly in the image of God

¹² This survey is said to have been conducted in Accra and its environs and among students of the Trinity Theological Seminary at Legon. Accra is the capital city of Ghana and can be described as metropolitan because of the wide spectra of people from different tribes and culture in Ghana that migrate there.

and superior while women are portrayed as secondary creations and for that matter inferior and subject to men (Dietrich, 2014; cf. Johnson, 1992).

Mary Daly (1973) holds that the patriarchal representation of God the Father dominating ‘his’ people, is one that is distorted in human consciousness which has, unfortunately, made the oppression of women in society seemingly right and fitting, the result of which is a mystification of roles in which the husband dominating his wife is representative of God “‘himself” (p. 13). She attributes this to a culture which gives rise to religious doctrines and symbols of oppression played out by theologians’ claim of women’s submission as God’s will.

Ally Moder (2019: 86) describes this as ‘a false concept... that dehumanizes women and perpetuates their experiences of domestic abuse.’ For instance, scriptures as Ephesians 5:22-23 have been misinterpreted and taken out of context to mean the sole submission of wives to their husbands. In my opinion, following the preceding verses of that passage, it should rather be understood as a call for mutual submission between husbands and their wives. Such scriptures also tend to overshadow and place unequal emphasis on wives to submit to their husbands as opposed to husbands loving their wives as ‘...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,’ (Ephesians 5:25-33).

The church’s doctrines has, consequently, led to the agony and lamentations by women. Fundiswa A. Kobo (2018) interprets this cry of African women to mean a cry for life and liberation from patriarchy and oppression which have been justified and perpetuated by a complex interplay of Christian dogmas and practices fused with culture and the use of the Bible.

Daly (1973) further points out that in a culture where human qualities have been sharply divided by persons into traditional sexual stereotypes of male aggression, manipulation and dominance over female passivity and self-abnegation, these have developed and sustained the roles and structures of patriarchy. Consequently, women feel estranged and lack a sense of belonging. However, she believes that when culture ceases to give credibility to religious symbols of patriarchy, they will die out. To achieve this, she calls for women’s self-awareness of their full personhood and to be actively involved in being critical of any structure, norm and representation

that society has prioritized under male-dominance. She maintains women need the courage to self-actualize themselves by confronting dominant structures.

Dietrich (2016) believes Christian anthropology does not neutralize the language of masculinity and femininity but only signifies the transformative dimension of diakonia as captured in Galatians 3:27-28 that in Christ Jesus through baptism, all are one and where there is no dichotomy between male and female (cf. Fiorenza, 1994: 205-20). This ramifies an equal relationship between a husband and his wife. Of this, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) posits that the male-female relationship should be one of mutuality, equality and partnership as modelled in the Trinity and should be reflective of a God-like relationship in speech and actions (LWF, 2010: 28-29)¹³.

This concept of Christian anthropology is evident in the ministry of “Jesus, the feminist” (Fiorenza, 1994: 107), who comes to subvert the social order of female exclusion, marginalization and oppression in the Judeo-Christian traditions and to include, affirm and defend women. Of particular interest is the woman caught in adultery who had probably already experienced some form of dehumanization and was about to experience yet another degree of violence at the hands of men who were equally guilty of what she was being accused of (John 8:3-12). Oduyoye (2001) believes both men and women are together human and created in God’s image and must together reflect God’s image of caring, compassion and justice. This implies a relationship of mutuality and reciprocity between husbands and their wives.

In a nutshell, the end to discrimination and violence against women will require the church in its diaconal praxis to understand the equal intrinsic value and dignity of men and women as humans created in *imago Dei* and the need for just relationships of reciprocity and mutuality. A further discussion of feminist perspectives of gender differences and roles and how they promote and perpetuate inequalities and violence against women in the home, church and society will be done in chapter six.

¹³ “It will not be so among you!” (Mark 10,43). A Faith Reflection on Gender and Power. <https://www.lutheranworld.org/sites/default/files/A%20Faith%20Reflection%20on%20Gender%20and%20Power.pdf> (Accessed 1st January 2020).

3.3 Autonomy and community/ubuntu

Dietrich (2014) describes autonomy as the capacity of a rational being to make informed decisions without being forced and to follow after her own passions, dreams and desires, thus making her an independent being. Though this principle, according to her, has been criticized as placing too much emphasis on the individual, it is important for understanding diakonia in that, every human being as God's creation has an inherent dignity and right to autonomy regardless of her condition which ought to be respected in the course of helping her at some point in her life.

Though independent by virtue of her autonomy, she is at the same time dependent on others. She is involved in the lives of others even as others are involved in her life and so 'accommodates social arrangements such as family... or other human relationships' (Ibid: 16). In this regard, Dietrich maintains the importance of supporting people through their social networks of the family and the community in diaconal work.

The South African concept of *Ubuntu*, (Eze, 2010) as quoted in Dietrich (2014: 17-18), which acknowledges the importance of the community in bringing out the best in others is worthy of note. Characteristic of African societies is a life lived in communality where members are expected to show concern and advance the well-being and common good of the other. This life is described by Nyambura Njoroge as:

Life is only life when it is lived and shared in communion with others... The individual is an entity in relation with others. The community nurtures its members and prepares them to meet the challenges of life both individually and corporatively (2000: 112, quoted in Rakoczy, 2004: 52).

Unfortunately, Rakoczy (2004) reveals that the emphasis on group identity in Africa is blown out of proportion to the detriment of the individual such that women are compelled to comply and desist from asserting their individual gifts and identity. Though community life is important, within the African culture, are oppressive structures that do not augur well for the well-being of women and which question Njoroge's view of the community as nurturing and truly there for its members. A critical look at how the family and community play on the individual's autonomy will be discussed further.

3.4 Religious coping

Religious coping is the use of religious beliefs, practices, experiences, emotions and/relationships to cope (Pargament, 2010). Pargament maintains that it may either be conceptualized as internal or external. Internal religious coping refers to the use of private strategies such as personal prayer to a higher power for help, while external religious coping entails falling on the social support from one's religious community or a spiritual advisor. He views that the nature of the stressful event and the socio-cultural context have a great influence in defining religious coping. In other words, how religion is used in coping may be relative depending on the specific stressor and the context within which it occurs.

Psychology acknowledges that goal-oriented beings at some points in life become stressed due to challenging life events and because they have in them the need to conserve, they find coping mechanisms, one of which is religion (Abu-Riaya & Pargament, 2015). In very distressing situations, they more likely turn to religion to cope other than their economic and social resources (Ibid: 25). This, according to Abu-Riaya and Pargament, has proven to contribute to the well-being of individuals.

Pargament (2010: 276) also outlines several methods of religious coping for various reasons such as to find meaning, gain control, comfort and closeness to God, intimacy with others and God and for transformation.

Pargament (2010) opines that religious beliefs and practices help individuals understand and cope more effectively with adverse situations caused either internally by their genetic predispositions or externally by challenging environmental circumstances. However, he acknowledges that religious beliefs can at times impede the coping process. This will be discussed further in the course of this study.

3.5 Ecclesiology and Diakonia

The term ecclesiology, as the church's doctrine, is coined from the Greek word, 'ekklesia', meaning church. The World Council of Churches (WCC, 2005) points out several Biblical

descriptions of the church as the people of God, Jews and non-Jews inclusive; as brought together into one body of Christ and with Christ as the Head; as the temple of the Holy Spirit and empowered by Him to be witnesses and for every good work; and finally as *koinonia*, used ecumenically to mean, fellowship and communion as the church's nature and mission.

The WCC (2005) defines the church as instituted by God through his Word and the power of the Holy Spirit. This means the church is not a human institution. The Word of God is the foundational basis and pivot around which the church revolves.

The congregational church in its mission has a diaconal mandate which Nordstokke (2019) believes is the mark of the church. He employs an understanding of the *notae ecclesiae* (mark of the church) as tools in analyzing the diaconal church in its being and mission as experienced in everyday life from the perspectives of the marginalized. Unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity, according to him, are the marks that identify the diaconal church for what it is and does.

The church's unity is evident in listening to the voices of the marginalized in the church to ensure there is justice, peace and reconciliation. It stands in solidarity with others irrespective of one's social status and creates spaces for the inclusion of all in mutual love, care and sharing. Holiness as another mark of the diaconal church entails the church as made holy by God's Word and the sacraments and hereby, affirms the dignity and value of every human person, serving and caring for them in all simplicity. By catholicity, the church is a public arena encompassing all and embracing the unique diversity of all persons, not only within it but also 'beyond geographic, social and cultural borders' (Ibid: 36). The apostolic church relates openly with those seen as outside the community of faith – unbelievers, women, etc. – boldly defending their dignity and inviting them to belong and to equally participate in a convivial life.

How is this church experienced in the real lives of people? According to the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) (Nordstokke, 2009), the congregational church comes together as *koinonia* and is visible only through its worship, proclamation and evangelization and through its service to humanity. The LWF holds that these three dimensions of the church go hand-in-hand such that the absence of one can never mark out the church for what it is and does. What the church preaches

needs, therefore, to inform its practice and its practice must, on the other hand, reflect what it proclaims. In simple terms, the diaconal church must not only *talk the walk, but also walk the talk*. How churches work to help abused women in their diaconal mission will further be discussed in chapter six.

3.6 Conclusion

In summary, I have touched on four main theories/conceptual frameworks; gender and feminist theory, autonomy versus community/ubuntu, religious coping, and ecclesiology and diakonia, which I shall be using to discuss my data in chapter six.

Chapter Four

4.0. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Methodically, this chapter presents detailed and relevant tools and processes I used in collecting my data and justifying their use (Madden, 2010: 25). It involves the design, procedures for sampling, sampling size and data collection tools. Also, considered are thematic analysis of data, validity and reliability, ethical considerations and challenges I encountered during data collection.

4.2 Research design

For Creswell (2014: 4), qualitative research is how individuals and groups make sense of a social phenomenon such as domestic violence, particularly, marital violence and divorce as mentioned in 1.2 above. Though Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln (2000: 7-8) state that qualitative studies are seen, among others, as unscientific and critical, yet they offer a deeper understanding of lived experiences and perceptions of individuals (Patton, 2002) which, in this case, is the experiences and perceptions self-narrated (Carter, 1993) by female survivors of violence in marriage and divorce.

Quintessential of qualitative studies, this research did not rigidly follow through with the initial method planned. There were slight modifications as I went to the field, hence making it flexible and suggesting an emergent design (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Questions that were asked were interposed with more probing questions to elicit for more elaborative responses from participants. The tools for data collection were also a bit modified due to developments on the field. For example, gatekeepers, who are individuals through which access is gained to research sites for a qualitative research (Creswell, 2014), were used to gain access to the participants contrary to the plan of establishing initial contact with participants on the field.

With a transformative worldview in mind that challenges the social oppression of violence and the further marginalization of women forced to stay within marriages which threaten their human

dignity and well-being by destructive cultures and religions, the choice of study is a case study. A case study is an in-depth inquiry into an existing phenomenon (Yin, 2015). Typical of this research is multiple-case studies of ten female survivors of violence and divorce. Robert E. Stake is of the view that even though a researcher can carry out more than one case study, yet each case is a concentrated inquiry into a single case (Stake, 2000), which I intend to do.

4.3 Sampling

In terms of sampling, purposive sampling was adopted in this study. Purposive sampling demands a critical thought of the parameters of the population the researcher seeks to study and to make a careful choice on this basis (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). Samples were chosen based on their relevance to the research question.

4.3.1 Target and size of samples

The location of this research was among the Anlo Ewe of southeastern Ghana, as indicated in my introduction and context. Participants were purposefully selected from three localities; Anlo Afiadenyigba, Tegbi and Akatsi, which form part of Anlo Eweland. No specific church was targeted prior to the collection of data. The intention was to interview ten abused or ever abused Christian women and gather their perspectives on how their respective churches have helped or are helping them in their experiences of violence and divorce. However, from the interviews, nine participants belonging to the following churches - the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), Anglican Church (AC), Assemblies of God (AoG), Apostolic Revelation Society (ARS), Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry (CEM), International Royal Family Church (IRFC) and the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC), with the exception of participant (P7) who was not a Christian, but a traditional religious believer, were obtained.

Participant 7 was brought in to replace one whose children did not want her interviewed after second thoughts. Upon inquiry, I was told they claimed they had been deceived by some researchers through previous interviews carried out on them. In spite of her religious belief, she too had survived some forms of violence as will be revealed in my analysis chapter. I saw her as a relatively interesting case to interview, to find out what role the churches in that community have

played for persons like her as their diaconal task. Can a congregation embedded in a Christian faith have a community inclusive project that seeks to reach out to human persons irrespective of their faith? This, I sought to find out and will be further discussed in chapter 6.

In effect, nine (9) female survivors of violence (P1-6 and P8-10) who are either married, divorced or separated between the ages of eighteen to sixty-five (18-65) belonging to the eight churches afore mentioned, and one (1); (P7), a traditional religious believer, were interviewed. A tabular representation is shown below (table 1).

Prior to going to the field, I was filled with dilemmas about gaining access to participants on time and whether they will open up to narrate their experiences considering the sensitive nature of the research topic. Contrary to this, and to my surprise, all ten participants were gotten in time through gatekeepers. The first two participants were gotten when I decided to visit a pastor friend at his church at Akatsi. After I had given him the information letter that spelt out details of my research, he gave me the opportunity to speak with married/ever married women in his church whose ages fell within the specified category after the service. I shared with them the focus of my study and gave them the opportunity to ask questions for clarification, which some did. I left my telephone number with them to contact me when they were ready to share their stories. The pastor friend insisted I conduct the interview right there and called out one young woman who declined. I made it clear to him nobody needed to be compelled as this will quash the intent of the interviews. However, three women voluntarily walked up to me after the service to share their stories out of which I interviewed Participants one and two (P1 and P2), for lack of time, as the third woman had to join a waiting bus home.

All participants were got through snowball sampling, a method used to reach 'hidden' or 'hard-to-get' respondents through others (Heckathorn, 2011) with respect to the sensitive nature of the topic under study. Before getting to the field, I had spoken with my sister-in-law about my line of research and she got me connected to her male colleague who hails from the northern part of the Volta region of Ghana. After speaking with him regarding my line of research he, in turn, contacted his sister, the gatekeeper, who resides within Anlo Afiadenyigba community by virtue of marriage. She was very resourceful in getting me contact numbers of five participants (P3-P7) through her brother who were interviewed in one day at separate times.

Participant eight (P8), was also got through the snowball approach. My mother had spoken with one of her adopted sons about the scope of my research. He contacted a Christian sister he fellowships in the same church with who agreed to meet me Monday evening. She was interviewed on my way back from Anlo Afiadenyigba.

My last two samples were also gained through a gatekeeper and the snowball method. I had informed my brother-in-law about my research area and he liaised with a Criminal Investigation Department (CID) officer, of the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) of the Ghana Police Service (GPS) at Akatsi. I contacted her and she promised to look into the various cases but first speak with the survivors for their permission. Through her initiative, I interviewed participants 9 and 10 on Friday. On the whole, all interviews were done within the space of one week, from 17th – 24th of January 2020 and transcriptions started immediately after.

Table 1: Individual Interviews

CHURCH	LOCATION			TOTAL
	AKATSI	TEGBI	ANLO AFIADENYGBA	
I.R.F.C.	P 1 & P 2			2
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD			P 4	1
CHRIST APOSTOLIC			P 5	1
ANGLICAN CHURCH			P 6	1
-			P 7	1
C.E.M.		P 8		1
ARS	P 9			1
R.C. CHURCH	P 10			1
E.P. CHURCH			P 3	1
TOTAL	4	1	5	10

P = PARTICIPANT

4.4 Data collection instruments

Interview was the principal tool or method used in collecting my data because in line with the research question, I sought to gather a thick description of the experiences of violence and divorce solely from the perspectives of the survivors. Below is explanation in details of this tool.

4.4.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews, known to be the most effective and convenient means in most qualitative researches, were used in collecting data (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Though questions and responses may be biased (Yin, 2015) yet they allow the interviewer to enter into the world of the interviewee to understand how they perceive a social phenomenon. I used semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions because, they allow for flexibility and enable me to slot in probing and follow-up questions to evoke more elaborative responses from interviewees; which I did at some points during the interviews.

Quite distinct from focus group, telephone and internet interviews, face-to-face interviews were conducted with all ten participants (Creswell, 2014). This created a private, interactive and relaxed atmosphere for interviewees to freely express themselves due to the sensitive nature of the topic unlike most focus group interviews. It also allowed me to observe physical and emotional expressions of interviewees.

As is common in any relationship, I was conscious of any power imbalances as noted by Kvale and Brinkmann (2015) and allowed informants to freely steer the conversation (Hakim, 1987) in their own words even when at some point, some of them begged to be helped in formulating their thoughts, for lack of better words.

The open-ended interviews were carried out within an average time of 60-90 minutes per participant using a tape recorder. Prior to the inception of the interviews, time was taken to brief participants on the focus of the research, nature of questions that will be asked and their role in the research. Open-ended questions on the nature and effects of abuse experienced, their

understanding of and reactions to marital violence, their perceptions on violence and divorce, and ways they have been supported by their respective churches were asked.

During the interviews and very key to this study, is the use of an insider I used as translator at some points of the interviews. According to Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey (2000), this helps avoid mistakes and saves time. Based on her experience as facilitator and counselor with women, and on her knowledge of the terrain of the setting and fluency in the Anlo language, she was useful as a guide. Though I am an Anlo Ewe, relatively little of my formative years was lived in this locality accounting for my inability to understand some Anlo vocabulary expressions.

4.5 Validity and reliability

Validity and reliability speak to the quality of a research (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Qualitative researchers have a goal of verifying that data collected are valid and reliable. By verification, is meant ‘the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain.’ (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002: 17). Validity entails the accuracy of information. To this end, the method of triangulation (Creswell and Miller, 2000) was used. This was done through purposive sampling, the use of recorders, taking of field notes, transcriptions and thematic analysis. I ensured the participants interviewed fit into the proposed samples with regards the setting, gender and age and the information they provided were in keeping with the research topic and question.

One way to test for reliability, is to ensure that what is measured at one given time, measures more or less the same or is coherent if done subsequently (Yin, 2015). As I gathered the data, I constantly and intermittently checked how my data relates with what I needed to know and my proposed theories. I looked out to ensure information collated was consistent. Participant 9, for instance, readily provided graphic images as evidence of the nature of abuse she had experienced. The transcriptions were cross-checked with the notes and the recordings taken to ensure there were no discrepancies in the information obtained. Where the need arose for clarifications, participants were made to clarify.

Moreso, in the case where a CID official was used to gain two participants, and the fact that one such case was being processed for court is prove of the reliability of information garnered from such participants.

Though the translator and I hail from this context, our presence, did not in any way, influence the information garnered from the informants as they were made to understand and freely express their views on the subject under study.

4.6 Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis involves presenting data in a structured and logical way. To start with, a bottom-up approach was adopted in organizing raw data collected through interviews by comparing field notes with the audio recordings and transcribing them. All ten participants' names were first coded as P, meaning, Participant and identified with numbers 1-10 as in P1-10, to ensure their anonymity. Coding is a process of filtering large chunks of data into smaller chunks or categories/patterns (Creswell, 2014). I searched for substantive meaningful words that describe given terms and used different colors to represent them.

4.7 Ethical considerations

The research involved ethical issues as confidentiality, anonymity and the right of participants to access their information at any point in the research. Information letters were given out to those participants who were literate enough to read and to those who were not, contents of the letter were translated in the local dialect. An informed consent was obtained from all ten participants (Creswell, 2014) orally due to the sensitivity of the research.

Participants were also cautioned before the recordings, not to mention their names nor that of any persons that might easily be identified. Where names of other persons were mentioned, they have been coded to protect their identity. This was as a measure of giving the participants an extra layer of anonymity (Fontana & Frey, 2000) due to the sensitive nature of the research and in keeping

with recommendations made by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (see Appendix ii).

Participants were informed about their rights to access every information processed about them and to withdraw their consent at any stage of the research. When some participants asked me what they were going to gain from being interviewed, I made it clear to them there was no payment involved. I explained it was a study being carried out to see how churches were helping and how the research could practically and possibly impact the lives of Anlo women surviving violence in the near future.

Also, to protect participants from further abuse and harm so as not to hinder the purpose of processing data and in conformity to NSD recommendations, care was taken in the interviews to not generate emotional outbursts in them. But where these were unavoidable, time was taken to briefly counsel them. Caution was also taken not to conduct the interview with the knowledge of the abusive partners. This was particularly with Participant ten (P10), who did not care to be interviewed at home in the presence of her husband, but upon persuasion, changed the venue to her work premise. In addition, notes, audios and transcriptions taken were not connected to the internet and were safely stored from easy access by other persons than me and deleted after the study.

Since at some point, I had to use an interpreter who had access to the information shared by these informants, I made her provide her consent to confidentiality orally due to technical constraints.

As a follow-up plan, one participant who needed help was linked up to a friend whose organization was into counseling and empowering women through training programs. But generally, in view of women's situations, most would need to be followed up.

Finally, at the end of my interviews with participants 3-7, I gave some money as token to the gatekeeper, a food vendor, for abandoning her food she had put up to sell that day in order to take me round the five respondents.

4.8 Problems/challenges

First, as earlier stated, one participant was withdrawn at the last hour from participating in the interview. Second, I was limited financially and by time. As a student, my trip from Norway to Ghana was self-funded. Travelling a distance of about 165.8km by road from Accra, the capital city of Ghana to the Volta Region, specifically, Anloga, where I stayed and around the various locations mentioned above to meet up with participants were also catered by myself. This made it challenging to reach other possible participants.

The third challenge was with the information letter which was not printed out on Vid Specialized University's letter head. My efforts to get access to respondents through one DOVVSU of the Ghana Police Service in Dzelukope, a suburb of Anlo community, with the letter proved futile as it questioned the genuity and intentions of my efforts on the field.

Fourth, is communication in the local dialect. As I struggled with rightly framing some questions to participants and understanding some answers from them for lack of fluency, this called for translation and the resultant effect of a prolonged time spent with each interviewee.

Finally, as was to be expected, some interviewees became emotional in the course of narrating their stories and time had to be taken to calm them before proceeding with the interview. These stories, I must say, had traumatizing effects on me emotionally as a researcher.

4.9 Conclusion

In summary, I have indicated and justified my methods employed in answering my research question through the use of qualitative and multi-case study. Ten women who had survived abuse and were either married, divorced or separated were targeted in Anloland, out of which nine were Christians and one a traditional religious believer. Information from them was canvassed through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face on an audio recorder and transcribed. I have discussed methods used in verifying the reliability and validity of my data, in analyzing relevant themes and ethical considerations as well as challenges encountered on the field.

Chapter Five

5.0 Presenting the analyzed data

5.1. Introduction

This chapter presents, the first analysis of the perceptions of female survivors of how society and their respective churches have responded to them in their experiences of violence and divorce in marriage. Though I did not visit the churches to interview the respective pastors as described in my methodology which I could have done, and though I could also have interviewed families and possible public and or private organizations involved with these women not oblivious that these could be other methods of gaining information needed, the limit of this research is the knowledge presented strictly through the voices of these women. My research, therefore, intends to tell the women's stories to give them a voice. The respondents are coded as P1-10 and their responses are italicized in the ensuing paragraphs.

Responses of the women are organized under main emerging themes such as defining violence in marriage; the nature and effects of violence; poverty and its impact on violence; traditional stereotyped gender roles; the dilemma of survivors of violence; and finally, the role of religion. As will be observed, I have classified some responses as sub-themes under some of these major themes.

5.2 Defining violence in marriage

Undoubtedly, marital violence is a menace in the contemporary society of the Anlo Ewe of southeastern Ghana, the context of this study, widely known for its patriarchal culture as noted in the earlier chapter. It is interesting to reflect on some of the comments or responses of the various survivors I engaged with.

When female survivors were asked what they understood of marital violence, what cut across these definitions, is violence as an act that produces wickedness, sorrow, pain and affliction. It is

observed, however, that their meaning of marital/intimate partner violence (IPV) were subjective and peculiar to the nature of abuse they had experienced.

The following are some definitions gathered from some respondents:

Marital violence is persistent hatred, abuse, wickedness and aggression of a husband toward his wife. It is an estranged relationship between a husband and his wife. It is a life of suffering and no joy or cordiality. (P4)

'The suffering and pain husbands mete out against their wives that is life-threatening...' (P9),

'When a woman is married to a man and the man physically and verbally abuses her and depicts characters that do not show love for her...' (P10).

5.3. The nature and effects of violence

Their experiences of violence was not uniform. In asking the women to share any bitter experiences in marriage, they vividly narrated the nature and the effects violence had had on their lives. The nature of violence ranged from physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic abuse/neglect most of which were inter-connected. So that one may, for instance, be suffering from sexual abuse and at the same time, emotional, verbal and physical abuse. An example is the case of P10 who said, *'He beats me... He had insulted me... and beat me up again...'*

The effects, according to them, were devastating. While some almost lost their lives, had physical defects and developed health conditions, for most of them, it was a matter of pain; humiliation; sorrow; and the lack of fulfilment and peace. Some of their responses were:

'I will not be where I am today if my marriage was good and I hadn't experienced those pains. It has affected my appearance... I have aged prematurely and look wretched...' (P5).

I have become an invalid and unable to use my hands to work as I used to. I can't wash clothes anymore. I have become an unhealthy person as I feel pain in parts of my body every now and then. (P9).

'I don't know what to do... I am in despair. My heart is in so much pain...' (P1).

I felt humiliated and depressed... I was never happy in that marriage till it ended... there are some sicknesses I should not be suffering from, but I am suffering from today. I do not have the peace of mind and all my children's welfare are my worry. (P3)

I am never a happy person; I am not free within myself. I am in sorrow and pain and would often weep in the quietness of my room... This sorrow and lack of peace of mind has affected me so much that I often forget things... I have become so thin. (P6)

5.4 Poverty and its impact on violence

It was discovered that women's poor economic status contributed to their experiences of violence.

Some responses were:

Whatever I need, when I ask him, he never does it for me... I have to fend for myself and the education of my children. The times I am unable to pay their fees, they are sacked from school and have to stay at home. (P1).

P3 said, *'In my pregnant state, I don't have enough food to eat, nor enough money to seek medical attention or clothes to wear...'*

I could not afford my basic needs... my children and I suffered a lot and there were days we starved and ate the chaff of corn as if we were ducks... I would ask him for his support, and he would ignore me and leave the house... for one full year... two years... without making any provisions... I single-handedly took care of my nine children... I sometimes had to borrow money from others to whom I became heavily indebted... On his return, he never cared to ask about our welfare nor help pay off the debts... (P4).

The man will maltreat you, not meet his financial responsibilities to his wife and children... he never took responsibility... for their education. Sometimes, the wife alone has to toil to make ends meet in the home... some men even beat their wives in spite of all they do. (P5).

When I am sick, he doesn't show any concern... Sometimes, I have had to borrow money from some benevolent people to meet my health needs. When I show him prescriptions from the doctor, he wouldn't even support me... I cannot easily divorce him because it is costly to do so. I do not have enough to feed myself let alone raise money to divorce my husband. That's why I chose to stay. (P6).

P9, who almost lost her life, is currently separated from her husband. She does not want her husband imprisoned because of the meagre support she receives from him to cater for their child.

In her words, *'I wouldn't want him to be imprisoned because of our son. So, he can be around to take care of our son.'*

P10 said, *'I wouldn't want him to be imprisoned for me to be burdened with single parenting.'*

5.5 Traditional stereotyped gender roles

It was gathered that men and the community enforced gendered roles. This is reflected in women's silenced voices and shame because of how they are socialized; men's infidel attitudes and their patriarchal understanding of women reflected in men's sexually and physically controlling behaviors and female servitude.

5.5.1 Silence and violence

The cultural practice of how women are socialized, and shame were discovered as some factors that make women suffer in silence.

5.5.1.1 Gender socialization

Women in a patriarchal culture like the Anlo Ewe have been socialized from birth to endure pain in silence. When participants were asked what they did in the face of abuse and whether they sought help, most of their responses revealed how the culture of silence was a prevailing issue. Some responses were these:

'I endured this for several years... I think that in spite of all that we go through in marriage, it is important that we endure.' (P4).

Most of the experiences I have gone through, I have not shared with anyone... It was many years later before I began to open up to tell her (mother) about some of my experiences. And she would tell me to be patient and to continue to endure. (P3)

'He had insulted me and when I replied to his insults, he questioned why a woman would insult him...' (P10).

'I keep to myself. I don't talk about this... But I never spoke about my situation to people... I kept things to myself...' (P8).

'Because, I have no one to hear my story... It was only then my family heard about my marriage issues, and even then, it was my husband who reported it to them...' (P7).

'There's no one to turn to. Not even my family members could help me let alone another person...' (P6).

5.5.1.2 The stigma of shame

For some women, the violence they suffered made them feel less dignified and shame simply kept them from speaking up and seeking help. For instance, P1 said, *'I am ashamed to talk to him...'* (pastor) (P1)

P3 felt humiliated for being sexually abused. She said, *'I feel ashamed of these things...'* And feared shame from failing her children. *'I worry that my little efforts for the welfare of my children will amount to nothing...'* She also feared shame from failing her community. *'I never want anyone to point fingers at us ... that we are arguing...'*

He would beat me to the point of stripping me naked openly for others to see my nakedness... I have never told anyone about this before as I am telling you now... I became indebted to people... I never wanted them to know... Moreso, I can't just walk to my pastor and talk to him about it. (P4)

And P5 said of her husband, *'He will insult me and my family and disgrace me before my compatriots... beat me up to the point of stripping me naked...'*

I can't really tell why I am still in this marriage ... some women question why I submit myself to be enslaved in marriage by a man ... When people ask me whether I am married, I tell them yes. But in reality, this is no marriage. (P6)

'He hasn't treated me well and has disgraced me in public...' (P7).

P8 also felt humiliated when her attempt to initiate sex with her husband was met with a rebuff:

I was hurt... initiating sex with my husband was not something I was accustomed to... I am the shy type and feel ashamed to tell my church about what I am going through... I never spoke about my situation to people.

She also said, *'If I speak ill of my husband and eventually things turn out well, how will I go back to tell my story ...?'*

5.5.2 Men's self-acclaimed rights to infidelity

P2's experience was, *'He has married another woman without my knowledge. When I found out, I picked up a quarrel with her and he beat me up for that...'*

P3 said, *'He flirts a lot with many women and has children with 2 other women... he was flirting with other women...'*

P4 had this to say:

He deserted me and the children to live with another woman for one week ... during my fifth pregnancy... he could desert me for two-three years... flirting with another woman... yet I still remained faithful to him.

P5 said, *'It's worse when the man sets his eyes on another woman. The man completely shirks off his responsibility in the home...'*

'My husband set his eyes on another woman and ignored me...' (P6).

He would leave and desert the children and I... for two to three years to be with other women... and later return... He drove me out of that house to give way to the other woman. (P7)

'His attitude towards me changed drastically when he started flirting with women... My husband would... leave without informing me to be with her for days and return.' (P8).

'It was an issue of marital unfaithfulness on his part... he said I had no right to question him about it... He hit me.' (P9).

5.5.3 Patriarchy and the perception of women

The way men perceived women is reflected in first, how they controlled women sexually, second, in the physical inequalities and power asymmetries that existed between them and third, in how women were enslaved.

5.5.3.1 Men's dominance over women's sexualities

P2 said, *'There are times, we struggle when it comes to sex because he sometimes tries to forcefully sleep with me.'*

While some women saw it as their duty to sexually give in to their husbands, *'No. He's my husband. So why would I deny him sexually?'*, said P4.

Others, while they refused their husbands sex, were either beaten or financially denied as a form of 'discipline'. *'I rather deny him of sex out of anger... he would leave early the next morning without leaving a penny with me.'* (P6)

For those who would resist, it was met with some machismo. P5 said:

When it's night for me to rest, you want to mount me to make me suffer... We fight over this a lot and he beats me for this. Sometimes, I have to wear jeans shorts to bed just to deny him sexually.

He sometimes forces me to have sex against my will... He would come wanting to sleep with me. Sometimes, this ends in a struggle between us to the point of tearing my underwear. I am never happy about it. I would become physically weak and he would overpower me and have sex with me, and this ended up in pregnancy. (P3)

Contrary to the above responses, P8's experience was her husband's control over her reproductive organ through sexual denial when she initiated sex:

For 5 years, my husband has never touched me... making sexual advances at my husband is something I never used to do...He mocked me for doing this... he told the woman... to tell the doctor to remove my womb. He did not inform me about it. His intention was to stop me from giving birth. (P8)

5.5.3.2 Physical inequalities and power abuse

In another instance, P4 said:

He would beat me... during my second pregnancy as well... my third pregnancy... he would use a cane to beat me up mercilessly as though I was his child... as when one sees a snake and attempts to kill it... He... plucked moringa tree branches as thick as three of my fingers put together and gave me a beating of my life... There were times he would not speak to me... and would not want me to speak up.'

P5, whose husband was a Police Officer, had this to say:

Some men even beat their wives in spite of all they do... My husband beats me severely... My husband was a policeman... He would beat me till I get a cut on my lips... I was taken to have it stitched. I still have the marks till today... Most times, the battering is undeserved... Since your mouth is not sealed, should you speak, the man becomes infuriated and vents his anger on you.

Before I knew it, he hit my head from behind me... He would also verbally abuse me often, but I could not answer back to avoid being fined... My husband is a fetish priest and by custom, I cannot verbally abuse him. (P7)

'Since his attitude towards me had changed, he now brands me as a thief and no longer keeps his money in the room.' (P8).

P9, crippled over an issue of custody over their one-and-a-half-month-old baby said:

My husband had hit me for the first time since we married... I was in pain and lost all hope... I insisted on having my baby... he butchered me with a machete... I tried to resist and avoid its impact and got wounded on my arms and hands.

And P10 said:

Initially, when he insults me, I endure the pain... I retorted back with insults... he questioned why a woman would insult him... he started jabbing his fingers at my face repeatedly... I also began to jab my fingers at his face. He hit my hand... he pushed me, and I fell back and hit my head against a chair... he threw his fist at my lips. I lost one tooth... He began to strangle me.

5.5.3.3 Women's servitude in marriage

P3 said, *'When he returns, I would still cook for him as a wife...I learnt from my mother that no matter how a man beats me, I should never deny him his meals.'*

Against her expectations, P4 said:

I think that men and women are both supposed to be each other's helper, but I never saw this in my marriage... my husband never helped me... I would help him to farm... I would support him, serve him in every capacity... wholeheartedly, but he never catered for my well-being.

P5's perception of her husband's treatment toward her made her question her humanity. In her words:

A man... brought you in to serve him, you do it in submission ... from cooking his meals on time, to washing his clothes, to preparing water for his bath... the man will maltreat you... the wife alone has to toil to make ends meet in the home... I saw myself as a slave.

I have single-handedly catered for myself and my children, their feeding, clothes and everything... He only married me to make me suffer. Why would a woman work and toil to cook and feed her husband?... I serve your meals... I wash your clothes... Women are never to be subordinates to men and slaves to men... When a man marries a woman, they have become one, they have become like brother and sister... But I have become like a slave that has been bought. (P6)

'We women are enslaved in marriage. We are slaves to men... This should not be. We ought to live with our husbands in love, unity and understanding.' (P7)

At first, I saw myself as his sister... I have submitted myself to him. I don't want to act superior to him so that he can love him... I wash his dirty clothes, and attend to his needs because he also buys food for the home... I do what I have to do for him though he does not love me. He no longer cares about me. (P8)

'There is too much suffering and pain in marriage that women suffer... marriage is supposed to be good, full of joy and unity, kindness and love. Women are never to be slaves to men.' (P9)

God never intended anyone or women to become slaves to men in marriage... As a human being, I feel I am not in my natural state... I have lost... my dignity and my life as a woman... It appears that I have become a slave to my husband. (P10)

5.6 The dilemma of survivors of violence

Women who survive violence come to crossroads in their lives and are in a dilemma as to whether to stay in or to quit their marriages. This is because of multiple reasons they encounter. To the question of what they did in the face of abuse, whether they sought help and whether divorce was an option, the following three responses were obtained.

5.6.1 '*Because of the children...*'

For women who were abused, divorce was no option. Their self-interests and happiness were second to the welfare of their children. P9 said, '*I am in a dilemma because of my condition, I get confused... I wouldn't want him to be imprisoned because of our son. So, he can be around to take care of our son.*'

P1 had this to say:

I feel like divorcing him because of what I am going through... But when I think of the children, I am unable to and choose to rather be in the marriage and endure... I don't know what to do... I am in despair. My heart is in so much pain.

P2 said, '*But when I leave him, where will I go to with 4 children...?*'

P5 said, '*For the sake of the children, the woman stays in the marriage.*'

And another said, '*I thought of divorce... But I never followed through because of the children.*' (P3).

P8 said:

If I leave, what will become of the children?... If I had no children by him, I could easily leave. I have heard that when a wife divorces her husband and her husband takes custody of their children, things happen afterwards.

5.6.2 '*My mother said ..., my family said, ... the chief ...*'

Some families were supportive:

'But his sisters encourage me.' (P1)

'I told my family about it and my father would call my husband to advise him.' (P5)

'My family supported me in many ways. Some donated blood, money and food to help.' (P9)

'My family supported me when I told them of the abuse.' (P10)

Other families were not concerned:

'They didn't do anything about it. My parents are alive but none of them are concerned about my situation.' (P1)

'I told my mother about it, but she didn't do anything about it. She reminded me that they had warned me against that marriage, but I refused to listen to them.' Her father's reaction was also, *'Nothing. He said he never was in support of my marriage.'* (P2)

'Even after his demise, his relations are not concerned about the welfare of my children.' (P3)

'My father was never in favour of our marriage... So, whenever my husband maltreats me, my father would ignore.' (P4)

When we marry our husbands, we marry into their family and become part of their family. But at our husbands' demise, no relative of his asks about the welfare of the children and the 4 children have become my sole responsibility.... Not even my family members could help me let alone another person... When I asked my brother, who is a police officer for help... he asked me whether I had no husband nor children... My mother... never helped.
(P6)

'Because the family never went in for the man for me; I saw him and wanted to marry him, when you report anything to them, they do not care about you... Not even to my own parents.' (P7).

And others put pressure on the women:

(P3) said, *'My mother, who had herself experienced a lot in her marriage, would also encourage me to endure and never quit my marriage.'*

P4, referring to her mother said:

I endured this for several years... she advised me against divorce and to endure... My mother would... tell me it was too late to turn back, there was nothing I could do... I paid heed to my mother... I didn't also want to leave him and enter into another relationship with any man because of my mother... In spite of these things, as the elderly always advised, I took care of my husband.

I would have been long out of this marriage but for the encouragement of one Mr. and Mrs. A... I would often tell her (mother) and she and my sisters would encourage me... to endure. (P8)

When her husband first abused her physically, P9 said, *'his family called us both to settle the issue and advised that we do not stay apart from each other.'*

P10 who lost her tooth because of the physical abuse said:

Our respective families settled the case between us... I informed my parents and brothers and he also informed his uncle and siblings. They called us together to settle the misunderstanding between us... Meanwhile, we are still together as husband and wife.

On the contrary, P9's family supports her decision to divorce her husband because she came close to death. She said, *'My family is not happy about what I went through... My family is in support of my wish to divorce him because I almost lost my life.'*

And the influence from the community:

'The nurses advised us against sharing our personal issues in marriage with our friends to prevent the avoidable' (P3)

In P10's case, the chief in the community also had to intervene:

He also went to the chief to report the matter. The chief called me... The chief wanted the matter settled at home... out of court since it was a marriage issue... the Chief Commander of Police asked us to report to the police station the outcome of proceedings.

'In our church, women leaders and the pastor's wife counsel us to never sexually deny our husbands no matter what.' (P5)

My decision to forgive my husband for what he had done is as a result of the impact of the church's teachings. I remember we are taught at church through the word of God to forgive one another. (P10)

5.6.3 Fear of further victimization

Some women, for fear of further abuse at the hands of other men, chose to endure abuse in their marriages. Participant four (P4) had this to say:

I never thought of separating from him or divorcing him to marry another man... if you leave him to marry another man, how would that other man be? He may be worse off than my husband.' Because of that, I... continued to stay with him throughout my seven pregnancies.

'When she decides to marry another man, trouble, he is even worse off than the first', said P5.

P6 said, *'My fear is that when I leave him to re-marry, I might marry another of his kind. So, I chose to stay.'*

Participant 8, who was going through sexual, verbal and emotional abuse said, *'If I should divorce their father and leave to marry another man, I don't know how his attitude is. Because of this I told myself I will not leave.'*

5.7 The role of religion

This is presented in two parts. First, how personal faith has been resourceful for abused women in coping and two, how the church as an institution has helped.

5.7.1 Intimate partner violence and coping through personal faith

One remarkable thing that kept most female survivors going was their faith. The following are some responses:

'I have committed myself to Christ. It is only in church that I find joy and forget about my sorrows and pain... I encourage myself that it shall be well.' (P1)

P2 said, *'That is why I committed myself to worshipping God so that God will have mercy on me so that all these things will end.'*

P3 said, *'The Bible makes us understand that we should not trust in any man. Trust only in God. He alone can make things work well. That is my confidence... I only ask of you to pray for me.'*

P4 said:

I was hopeful in God... I would have died but God's grace saved me... I heard the story of Bartimaeus in the Bible... I also heard of Job whose faith in God was tested... I could relate with the experiences of these men and found strength to move on.

She must suffer as a follower of Christ:

Even our Lord Jesus Christ ... suffered many things... He forgave them. As followers of Christ... You will also suffer... But never lose hope... Hold fast to him. There is victory at the end. (P4)

I expected God to do for me what He did for men and women of old in the Bible... I kept praying to God... I prayed to the Holy Spirit to be my advocate... I prayed that if what I was going through was the will of God, so be it. But if it was not God's will, then God should change him... It has not been easy... Had it not been the Holy Spirit, I could not have been able to withstand... I know God is in control... The teaching of God's word through the pastor has been of immense help to me and is helping me to survive in my marriage. (P8)

P9 said, *'Had it not been God's grace, I would have died. I faced death but survived it.'*

5.7.2 The role and impact of the church

Here, I present the teachings of the women's respective churches with respect to marriage, family and divorce; and the churches' impact in the lives of the women based on their unique experiences of violence.

5.7.2.1 Anlo concept of marriage and the Christian theological understanding of marriage and divorce

Respondents, it was discovered, belonged to various church traditions such as the Roman Catholic Church (RC), Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC), Anglican Church (AC), Assemblies of God (AoG), Apostolic Revelation Society (ARS), Charismatic Evangelistic Ministry (CEM), International Royal Family Church (IRFC) and Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) (See table 1).

As earlier presented, from the support respondents received from their families (See 5.6.2), we understand the concepts of marriage and divorce among Anlo Ewes. Though the church traditions differ, based on the stories of these women, there is a common attitude to their understanding of marriage and divorce.

In answer to whether respondents had thought of divorce in the face of abuse, these are what some had to say:

I never thought about divorce. My church does not... encourage divorce. Because, they expect that in such situations, we talk to the church mothers or church fathers or leaders to settle the matter. If there is no understanding, then we speak with the father, that is the priests. (P10 of RC)

My church does not support divorce because according to the Bible, it is wrong. They believe marital problems, and that includes abuse, is the work of demons and so they expect that as husband and wife, we are united, and with time, he will change. (P9 of ARS)

According to P8, a member of CEM, she does not ‘*expect to divorce*’ and does ‘*not believe in divorce.*’ She claims, ‘*My pastor never encouraged me to divorce. He told me to not give up and that God will intervene... He assured me my husband was not to be blamed for his actions and that demons were using him.*’

P4 of AoG who had experienced battering, emotional abuse and neglect said:

The church never encouraged me to divorce. The church teaches against divorce and to endure whatever suffering or hardship we go through in Christ and to pray... What the word of God speaks against is... for instance, with my present experiences, I have no right to divorce my husband. Instead, I am supposed to pray for God to intervene.

P5 who belonged to CAC had this to say:

On such occasions, they counsel us to endure and adapt to our husbands to avoid similar occurrences... We are taught how to serve them with joy and live at peace with them. All the church did was to counsel us... My church does not support divorce.

5.7.2.2 To what extent has the Church been able to help?

In answer to this question, some women admitted receiving teachings from the church. Some women also admitted to the church meeting some of their material and financial needs though they expected the church to have done more. Some responses were:

'I told my pastor about it and the church contributed financially to support me in starting a small-scale business.' (P2)

That pastor or the church ... help me with money, clothes, food and my health and bills are their concern... My prayer is that God would strengthen them... to do better and more than they did. (P4)

'I expected more from the church... But they never met my expectations, so I left.' (P5)

'They prayed with me and encouraged me... But I would have been happy if they had found some way to help me out of my situation, other than what they did.' (P6)

P7 who happened to be a traditional believer (4.3.1, paragraph 2) but had also experienced violence said no church came to help her.

My pastor... supported me financially to see the doctor for an operation... Making sexual advances at my husband is something I never used to do. But through teachings received during our Women's Meetings, we are educated by our women leaders on these things... My pastor invited him to have a word with him, but he refused to turn up... My pastor... and his wife... would call me to ask me about them and pray for me... counsel me ... and encourage me... The teaching of God's word through the pastor has been of immense help to me... in my marriage. (P8)

Yes, they supported me financially, prayed for me and visited me while I was on admission at the hospital... I expected more from my church but what they offered was what they had. Right now, I have no work doing. I would have liked it if they had helped to find something for me to do, ... so I can also work and be independent and to move on with my life. (P9)

In her final words, (P9) said, *'Women should be helped and supported in the sense that there should be some form of punishment for men who abuse women and make them suffer to serve as a deterrent to others.'*

My decision to forgive my husband for what he had done is as a result of the impact of the church's teachings. I remember we are taught at church through the word of God to forgive one another. (P10)

5.8 Conclusion

Overall, I have presented my respondents' understanding of IPV; the varied forms of violence and its effects experienced; poverty and its impact on violence; silence and violence; stereotyped gender roles such as men's infidelities and the patriarchal understanding of women with regards women's sexual roles, physical inequalities between men and women, and the slavery of women in marriage. I have also presented the dilemmas of female survivors of violence when it comes to love for their children, pressure from family and the community and the fear of further abuse. Furthermore, is personal faith as a coping mechanism; the role of the church with regards family ethics, marriage, and divorce; and finally, the impact of the church from the perspectives of the women.

Chapter Six

Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses and interprets the analyzed data presented in the previous chapter. Since this paper is a social science/diaconal research, my method will be more interdisciplinary. I will engage with the voices of abused women using knowledge from social science, religion, theology and psychology at some points in my discussion. This, I intend to do in light of the four proposed theories outlined in chapter three: Gender and African Feminist/Womanist theories; Autonomy versus the Community/Ubuntu; Religious Coping; and *Diakonia* and Ecclesiology.

6.2 Understanding violence in marriage

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as ‘the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation’ (Dalberg & Krug, 2002: 5). This means violence may be either personal, interpersonal or against a community. The focus of this paper is inter-personal violence, otherwise, intimate partner violence.

Domestic violence is a scourge that plagues Anlo Ewe women. Their experiences and perceptions of IPV involves the use of aggression by men, which agrees with WHO’s understanding of violence as constituting the ‘use of physical force’ (Ibid). For instance, P4 defined it as:

Marital violence is persistent hatred, abuse, wickedness and aggression of a husband toward his wife. It is an estranged relationship between a husband and his wife. It is a life of suffering and no joy or cordiality.

This use of aggression took varied forms such as physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and economic as would be revealed in the course of this chapter. I discover that women’s concern for their children that puts them in dilemma and forces them into staying in abusive relationships and their

poor economic status, are among factors that account for domestic violence. I agree with Peprah and Koomson (2014: 171) who maintain that the economic activities of women make them financially responsible, empower them and is likely to reduce domestic violence. Unfortunately, most Anlo Ewe women have no means of livelihood and depend on men for their survival and their children. One woman said:

The man will maltreat you, not meet his financial responsibilities to his wife and children... he never took responsibility... for their education... some men even beat their wives in spite of all they do. (P5)

In Ghana, men are considered bread winners in the home. A man's inability to provide for his home undermines his masculinity and his status. The frustrations of not being able to meet this expectation may sometimes translate into anger which is vented on their wives. Unfortunately, women are not in any lucrative jobs and eventually depend on men for survival. Poverty places women in vulnerable positions and disables women from taking decisions toward their total well-being and liberty and that of their children. Some women choose to remain with their abusive partners just for the meagre support they would receive from their partners, which is not forthcoming. To be left alone as single mothers with the children to struggle to make ends meet, women would rather endure abuse. When gender roles are stereotyped and make women 'homemakers' confining them to the home and the kitchen, it creates a dependency syndrome that is devastating for women.

6.3 Gender and African feminist/womanist theories

As noted earlier, gender is a social construct that defines how women and men ought to behave in a given society. This gender stereotypes produce structures of patriarchy that have negative implications on women and men, promote injustice and inequality and contribute to IPV. History and theology has revealed the church's role in playing along with culture and confirming these patriarchal structures. The critical role of feminist/womanist theologies have been noted as relevant in gender studies, particularly in *diakonia*, in achieving gender justice and equity (Dietrich, 2016).

6.3.1 Gender socializations and its effects

The behavioral patterns ascribed by a particular society to individuals and groups because of their biological make-up define the roles of men and women in society, thus promoting inequalities and limiting, especially women. Gender norms tend to be generally accepted by societies as ‘normal’ over time, as they become part of their culture and influence how women and men are socialized. Though this may be relative depending on the cultural context, I find that women prioritize their children’s welfare over their own welfare. Research has shown that children who come from broken marriages suffer most (Ernest, 2003; Matsafu, 2005). Most times, women have had to endure abuse for the sake of their children. Of this, P3 said, ‘I thought of divorce... But I never followed through because of the children.’

P8 also said:

If I leave, what will become of the children?... If I had no children by him, I could easily leave. I have heard that when a wife divorces her husband and her husband takes custody of their children, things happen afterwards.

Most often, we hear stories of women quitting their marriages for some reason and leaving their children behind to be mothered by another woman who ends up maltreating and neglecting them. Some children end up as slaves in the home and eventually become burdens to society. Others are sold out to work with fishermen with their basic needs not catered for.¹⁴ In the process some, unfortunately, meet their untimely demise. These concerns cage women in abusive marriages.

Undeniably, the effects of IPV are negative physically, emotionally, socially and economically. Oduyoye (1995) maintains women are in pain because they are discriminated against and dominated by men due to stereotypes of gender roles. P9, for instance, was physically maimed and rendered incapacitated and this made her more vulnerable. Other women are in despair and in constant pain while others too suffer humiliation. The culture of silence and shame are among factors that account for domestic violence. These makes women more susceptible to violence and effectually inhibits the holistic functioning of women’s personhood.

¹⁴ <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/02/africa/ghana-child-slaves-intl/>

6.3.2 Silence, shame and intimate partner violence

As earlier indicated in my theory chapter, Anlo-Ewe women are socialized from birth into certain patterns of behaviours and to endure pain. This reflected, from my interviews, in how women react when abused. They are expected by their male partners and society to keep mute in the face of abuse and to endure. Oduyoye (1995) sees this as making them easy victims of abuse and predisposing them to accept the violence done to them. For instance, P8 who had experienced physical, sexual and emotional violence said:

I keep to myself. I don't talk about this... I never spoke about my situation to people... I kept things to myself... If I speak ill of my husband and eventually things turn out well, how will I go back to tell my story?

Women are forced into making difficult choices in marriage that threaten their well-being. They feel morally obligated to protect the images of their abusive husbands. Rather than open up, most women refuse to talk and endure abuse because they have been socialized into believing that violence and pain is a part of their normal lives. Socio-cultural norms that justify abuse of women and keep them in silence impose burdens on women. In fact, they are hushed because they are told they are not the only ones going through what they go through, neither will they be the last. This is manipulation and an infringement on their human rights to speech, freedom and dignity. Women tend to identify with violence. They become more vulnerable to further abuse by their male partners and by other men in future marriages. This probably explains why women continue to endure suffering at the hands of men they are more familiar with for fear of further victimization by some other men who are no different or worse than their husbands. P4 who had experienced multiple physical and emotional abuse and neglect, for instance, said:

I never thought of separating from him or divorcing him to marry another man... if you leave him to marry another man, how would that other man be? He may be worse off than my husband.' Because of that, I... continued to stay with him throughout my seven pregnancies.

This suggests women put up with the common acts of violence that most men in the Anlo Ewe society engage in and confirms what Nukunyah (1969: 108) says that it is usual for Anlo men to beat their wives. Derry (2019) re-iterates that most men in Ghana construct and express their masculinities in marriage through violence to their wives. Most men give cultural justifications for

their actions. When society acts like there are no alternative models of action, violence, thus, becomes a recurrent cycle for women who are forced into silence. I quite agree with Owusu (2016: 26) who posits that silence contributes ‘in triggering, sustaining and strengthening men’s violence towards women.’ This makes it difficult for women to seek help and for society to help them. This is one factor that explains the prevalence of IPV in this society.

The act of violence is in itself shameful and degrading. Most female survivors feel no peace, feel humiliated, depressed and de-humanized as men treat them like mere objects. The shame of themselves which, of course, is to be expected; the shame of failing their children and families, and the shame of the larger society, it was revealed, kept most women from speaking up and seeking help. The thought of divorce and the stigma and shame that goes with it makes women rather keep mute and endure abuse in marriage. The general impression about divorced women in Ghana is that they are not good marriage materials. Society sees it a shame when a woman cannot keep her marriage. Most times, she is the one to blame for the break-up.

In addition, society considers it shameful of women when they talk about their experiences of abuse in marriage because of the cultural belief that whatever goes on between a husband and his wife is a private matter that must not come out to the open. If she talks, eyebrows are raised, questions are asked, and fingers are pointed. She is labelled by society as an insubordinate wife, a talkative, a home-breaker, and a nagging wife and reminded of her place and role in the marriage. Most times, it is either society chooses not to believe her story, or they pretend and deny it ever happened. Such attitudes shown women put them in a dilemma as to whether to quit their marriages or not. To avoid the blame projections and the stigmatizations, women tend to see no way out of their violent marriages.

Women, therefore, tend to be the victims of abuse and shame when, in fact, men and society should be the ones to feel shame for their acts of commission and omission. Women’s sufferings are as a result of a complex interplay of self-stigmatization as well as that which is imposed on them by close associates and the larger society. This leaves much to be desired of cultural laws and practices and societal attitudes that promote the dehumanization of women and call for their amendments.

6.3.3 Patriarchy and the position of women in marriage

Stereotyped gender roles create and feed structures of patriarchy that marginalize women. As Elizabeth Johnson (1992: 23) defines it and as will be operational in this paper, patriarchy is a social organization that maintains power always in the hands of men in dominant positions while others (in this case, women) below are kept in subordination. Patriarchy defines men's perceptions of women and dictates how women are treated. In effect, men's acts of infidelity; sexual control; power abuse; and female servitude are blindly excused by society.

6.3.3.1 Men's self-acclaimed rights to infidelity

Traditional stereotypes of gender roles, according to Oduyoye (1995) hurt women and increase their discrimination and dominance by men. As was observed, 8 out of the 10 women interviewed claimed their husbands were unfaithful to them. Men could neglect their wives and children and easily walk out and into their marriages to be with other women as and when they pleased, without being held accountable. For instance, P9 said, 'It was an issue of marital unfaithfulness on his part...he said I had no right to question him about it... He hit me...'

When men's infidel acts go without question, they eventually become norms handed down to generations. Tradition expects women to remain faithful to their husbands as they cheat on their wives. It sees nothing wrong with men when they desert their wives for other women but everything wrong with women when they do the same. Patriarchy and its structures legalize men's infidel attitudes. Gendered stereotyped roles empower men and give grounds to men's unfaithfulness and violence and call for gender reconstructions.

6.3.3.2 Men's dominance over women's sexualities

Women have been turned into puppets and are expected to be at the beck and call of men's sexual desires because men feel they 'own' them. Some feminists believe the bride price which is *paid* by a man's family to the bride's family during marriage, may be one factor that accounts for this

feeling of control. Oduyoye (1995: 137) sees it as signifying ‘the control of a woman’s sexuality’ and brings to question her autonomy.

From the responses gathered from my respondents, one woman saw it as her duty to give in to her husband’s sexual demands. This, I believe, is because of how women have been socialized and indoctrinated into believing so. They are ‘threatened’ to satisfy their husbands sexually to save their marriages. Women for fear and for the love of keeping their marriages would give in to their husbands unwanted sexual demands. Some men dictate to women as to when to have sex and when to give birth. Ruether (2008: 7) sees this as patriarchal control over women who have been turned as passive instruments of men’s sexual and reproductive demands. A case in particular was with P3 who said:

He sometimes forces me to have sex against my will... He would come wanting to sleep with me. Sometimes, this ends in a struggle between us to the point of tearing my underwear. I am never happy about it. I would become physically weak and he would overpower me and have sex with me, and this ended up in pregnancy.

This is inconsiderate of women’s bodily, emotional and psychological well-being. P3’s issue brings to question the issue of ‘marital rape’ which is arguable, especially in most African contexts. Marital rape here, means, having sex against one’s will in marriage. This is against human rights and is punishable by law. Unfortunately, the Anlo culture and the Ghanaian society in general, see marital rape as a mirage. This is because, as I earlier indicated in chapter two (2.6), Ghana’s Criminal Code of 1960, Act 29 accepted marital rape based on the supposed consent given in marriage (Sedziafa et al, 2016: 3). Though this law has been amended through interventions of CEDAW, marital rape is a reality that continues to exist today and that brings to question the effectiveness of Ghana’s laws.

In addition, women’s difficulties in accessing the law courts in the face of abuse has proven difficult in some cases. It is either they are ignorant that such interventions exist for them to access or there are unnecessary delays when accessing them. A case in particular is with P9, a young woman of 29 years who, as I indicated above, was brutalized to the point of death. She had been through that horrific ordeal since June 2016, but as at the time of the interview her case which was reported to the Police, had not yet been processed for court. Worse of all, she still continues to live

in the same community as her abusive husband, which may possibly endanger her life; an indication of largely inadequate shelter homes for survivors.

Men's sexual control over women is evident in their sole decisions of and 'rights' to initiating the sexual act and in reproduction. P8 had this to say:

Making sexual advances at my husband is something I never used to do...He mocked me for doing this... he told the woman... to tell the doctor to remove my womb. He did not inform me about it. His intention was to stop me from giving birth.

Unlike men, women cannot initiate sex in marriage due to stereotypes of gender roles. When they do, men and society see it as out of place and tag women as 'spoilt'. Though it is women's bodies that carry the child, not to talk of the unease and the pains that go with conception, yet it is men who decide for women when to conceive children and this plays down on women's autonomy, dignity and well-being.

6.3.3.3 Physical inequalities and power abuse

We all as humans wield some level of power. Though power means different things in different contexts, by power here, I mean the ability to control and to influence (Sykes, 2006) quoted in (Kearsley, 2008: 25). When others tend to use this power over and against others, it results into power abuse and violence. Letty M. Russell (2006: 53) posits that 'When power is exercised as a *zero sum game*, those in authority build their power by taking it from those who have less possibility to resist.' This only means when culture and society situate women in unequal positions to men with the latter over and above the former such that women have no voice, it places women in vulnerable situations and makes it easier for men to abuse them.

Men's physique and how they consciously assert domineering powers over and against women is a misnomer and clearly has an exaggerated sense of power that dehumanizes women as slaves and that is unnecessary. Derry (2019) reveals that abusive men see beating their wives or causing them physical pain as a means of controlling and correcting them and find cultural justifications for it. Men see women like children they feel they are in positions to discipline rather than protect, thus abusing their power. They see women as enemies that would harm them that they must get rid of.

Some women cannot speak to or with their husbands and in the case of P4, her husband beat her up like ‘his child’ or a ‘snake.’ The way men see women reveals the asymmetrical relationships that exist between them. It is a distorted understanding of Christian anthropology that all human persons are equally created in the image and likeness of God and for that matter are one in Christ Jesus through baptism (Genesis 1:26-28, Galatians 3:27-28).

I believe the physical differences between men and women can be positively appropriated to build equal and mutual relations and I agree with Dietrich’s (2016) view that when Christian anthropology is rightly understood, it does not negate the male-female language, but rather transforms relationships into one of equality, reciprocity and mutuality which *diakonia* as the church’s mission intends to do. When the church understands this, it works to break every barrier that estranges relationships between men and women.

6.3.3.4 Women’s servitude in marriage

Patriarchal perceptions of Anlo Ewe women in marriage is one that abhors and degrades a woman as a slave to a man who is considered ‘the master of the home’ (Nukunya, 1969: 155). Women work tirelessly in service to their husbands who never acknowledge nor appreciate women’s efforts. Some women said:

A man... brought you in to serve him, you do it in submission ... from cooking his meals on time, to washing his clothes, to preparing water for his bath... the man will maltreat you... the wife alone has to toil to make ends meet in the home... I saw myself as a slave (P5)

I think that men and women are both supposed to be each other’s helper, but I never saw this in my marriage... my husband never helped me... I single-handedly took care of my nine children... I would help him to farm... I would support him, serve him in every capacity... wholeheartedly, but he never catered for my well-being (P4).

This agrees with Dillip, Mboma, Greer and Lorenz (2018: 459) who reveal that in this age of globalization when women are becoming part of the workforce, men in southern Tanzania admit to women doing everything in the home. I do not quite agree with Oduyoye (1995: 134-35) who,

though she does not sound emphatic, maintains that ‘By getting married, the Akan¹⁵ woman has acquired a double dose of male domination and may be in fact worse off than her sister in a patrilineal marriage.’ She says culture demands too much service of Akan women to their maternal uncles and husbands to the detriment of their well-being as compared to women in patrilineal marriages like Anlo women.

I wish to argue here that though this may be true, I beg to differ in opinion and arguably so, because, I find out that the situation of Anlo Ewe women in patrilineal marriages are worse off compared to Akan women of matrilineal descent. First, Anlo women are similarly required by custom to serve their fathers and husbands. As is revealed through my interviews, women’s service to their husbands is one of slavery. They toil from cooking the man’s meals, washing his clothes, preparing water for his bath, and taking care of children in the home, aside engaging in farming and petty trading to make ends meet. P4 said it was a service that was never reciprocal and mutual and that never saw her husband catering for her well-being.

Secondly, by virtue of their matrilineage, the Akan woman is recognized in the family and society. Men and women equally participate in family meetings and women’s concerns are championed and finally decided by the *Jhemma*, the Queen Mother, who is a kingmaker and is senior and the only advisor to the *Jhene*, the King (Oduyoye, 2004: 71). This is contrary to the position of Anlo Ewe women who, according to Maravanyika, Mills, Asare and Asiedu (2017), in their participatory action research carried out in Anlo Beach; a fishing community of some Anlo Ewe identified in the Western Region of Ghana, ‘Women are also not part of formal decision-making bodies in the community.’ (p. 6). As a challenge to their research, they observed that the Ewe patriarchal culture did not allow women to publicly speak when men were present (Ibid: 7). Similarly, as Nukunya (1969: 156) puts it, ‘It is considered unseemly for a wife to enter a conversation with her husband and his male colleagues unless invited to clarify a point.’ Failure to observe this is considered a sign of disrespect to her husband. This was also evident in my interviews through women’s silenced voices. Some women admit communication gaps existing between them and their partners and this does not make their situations better off the way I see it. Though this silence, I must admit,

¹⁵ The Akan form one of the many ethnic groups. They are the largest ethnic group in Ghana and of matrilineal descent. By this women are given recognition than men in this society.

is gradually being broken through education and enlightenment, it is to a relatively small degree which attests to the prolific nature of IPV.

Third, though this may not be so today because of the economic situation of Akan women, traditionally, they have rights over their sexuality and can assert these rights over their offending husbands (Awusabo-Asare, Anarfi and Agyemang, 1993). This is a right that Anlo Ewe women never had and from my empirical research, do not have and places Akan women in better positions comparatively.

I further discover in Oduyoye's later writings in 2004 that, she observes, as compared to the situation of Akan women, that among the patriarchal-patrilineal Yoruba of Northern Nigeria, though a wife worked in her husband's house, notwithstanding, she was not part of those that made decisions. This quite resonates with the situation of Anlo women who do not make decisions in the home nor in the community and implies that the domination of Anlo women by their husbands far exceeds that of Akan women. It is one that is deeply rooted in a patriarchal culture passed on by tradition to generations by mothers to their daughters from birth through socialization and, who in turn, have internalized this.

6.4 'My mother said..., my family said..., the chief ...': individual autonomy versus community/ubuntu

The popular Ubuntu principle of South Africa holds that, 'a person is a person through other people.' (Eze, 2010) as quoted in Dietrich (2014: 17-18). This principle acknowledges the humanity of the individual personhood and looks out for them in their time of need. It underscores the role of the community in the life of the individual. This is similar to the concept of communalism or the community as referred to and championed by some West African scholars (Ikuenobe, 2006), just to mention a few, to be a distinct and valuable feature of African societies and would be used interchangeably in this study.

Communalism, here, is the theory that places the community at the centre of activities of individual members of a society (Gyekye, 1996). The community, therefore, has, what we call, communal values that govern the lives of its members and places a moral obligation on them to work toward

a common good and a better society. This means that the community becomes the pivot around which the individual's life revolves. She sees herself in the light of the community and draws meaning to life from the community. By community, I mean the family, church and society as a social support network.

Communalism is characterized by solidarity, mutuality, brotherliness, interdependence and cooperation (Gyekye, 1996). It is a concept that guides the individual through life's stages. For instance, it is a widespread practice in Ghana for the community to come out in mutual help of and solidarity with the individual person during such occasions as child-birth, marriage and funerals because of the belief that the individual is born into a community and lives within a community with others. Nyambura Njoroge's asserts the role of the community as:

Life is only life when it is lived and shared in communion with others...The individual is an entity in relation with others. The community nurtures its members and prepares them to meet the challenges of life both individually and corporatively (2000: 112, quoted in Rakoczy, 2004: 52).

This suggests the individual's life is intertwined with others and draws her being from the community. Gyekye opines there is the idea in Africa that 'the individual cannot develop outside the framework of the community' (Gyekye, 1996: 50). This goes without dispute because, as a social being, she falls on the support of the community in time of need. The role of this community is to nurture, support, protect and build the individual into a better person. Hoff, Hallisey & Hoff (2009) admit that the individual's social support system is essential for human growth, development and crisis intervention. As was evinced, women who experienced violence received some form of interventions from their families and the church in the form of cash, kind and encouragement (5.6.2). This was a show of support as quintessential of communal living. This promotes unity, love, care, and a sense of belonging among individual members of a community. Communalism also promotes social cohesion, a practice where individual resources are harnessed to cooperate and work together toward building a healthy and prosperous society (Stanley, 2003).

However, my empirical research reveals this concept of communalism as obtrusively unrealistic. A critical analysis of this concept evinces the negative side of communal life which seems to be more pronounced in African societies than expected and I agree that the emphasis on group identity in Africa is too strong that it harms the individual (Rakoczy (2004) woman who is forced to comply

and desist from asserting her individual gifts and identity. As was revealed, the importance of the social support network system is largely lacking, or, better put, mystified, in the lives of women who survive abuse in the sense that community interests are placed above individual personhood. It is either the community is indifferent about women's situations or they prioritize their interests above that of the individual woman. For example, some respondents said, 'My mother, who had herself experienced a lot in her marriage, would also encourage me to endure and never quit my marriage.' (P3)

'I told my mother about it, but she didn't do anything about it. She reminded me that they had warned me against that marriage, but I refused to listen to them.' (P2). Her father's reaction was also, 'Nothing. He said he never was in support of my marriage.' (Ibid)

'My father was never in favour of our marriage... So, whenever my husband maltreats me, my father would ignore.' (P4)

I endured this for several years ... she advised me against divorce and to endure ... My mother would... tell me it was too late to turn back, there was nothing I could do... I paid heed to my mother... I didn't also want to leave him ... because of my mother... In spite of these things, as the elderly always advised, I took care of my husband. (P4)

I would have been long out of this marriage but for the encouragement of one Mr. and Mrs. A... I would often tell her (mother) and she and my sisters would encourage me to endure. (P8)

Our respective families settled the case between us... I informed my parents and brothers and he also informed his uncle and siblings. They called us together to settle the misunderstanding between us... Meanwhile, we are still together as husband and wife. (P10)

'In our church, women leaders and the pastor's wife counsel us to never sexually deny our husbands no matter what.' (P5)

He also went to the chief to report the matter. The chief called me... The chief wanted the matter settled at home... out of court since it was a marriage issue... the Chief Commander of Police asked us to report to the police station the outcome of proceedings (P10).

We earlier saw that stereotyped gender roles and the way women are socialized predisposes them as victims of violence. This concept of communalism appears to place women in far graver

situations and to be more devaluing than one could think of, especially when women's right to taking decisions that affect them most have been denied. Typical of most African societies is, not only the nuclear family that comprises wife, husband and children, but also the extended family comprising mother, father, brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparents, etc. Each of these extended families have a leader, *Torgbui*. Several of these extended families come together as a community with the local head or chief, *Fia*.¹⁶ It would also meet the case to know, though this is not the focus of my discussion, that aside the living, the dead are also considered part of the community and are worshipped as is the case among the Anlo (Nukunya, 1969).

The involvement of the extended family, particularly, the elderly in the life of the individual in view of communalistic living cannot be underestimated. They are believed to be the embodiment of wisdom and knowledge and are most often consulted in decision-making processes. This is reflected in the lives of my respondents. It is *prima facie* that the family and other members of the community make women feel their opinions matter as far as women's situations in marriage are concerned. This is critical to the point that even decisions as to the choice of man to marry was left to their parents so that their refusal to defer to their parents choices resulted in neglect or indifferent attitudes to women when they encounter abuse, as in the case of P2 and P4.

Community opinions are prioritized over the individual. Consequently, it appears women tend to be more receptive to the opinions of the community against their personal desires to their own detriment. This suggests that women are forced into marriages and to remain in abusive relationships. Members of the church who form part of this larger community are not excluded from this mishap as they decide for these women what they must do and how they must react in the face of abuse.

To add, community heads who are considered custodians of the law and who should know better and look out for the welfare of women are rather, sad to say, obstacles to women's liberation and autonomy in the name of culture and communalism. It seems to me that they are more of custodians of culture than they are of the law. Thus, they are blinded to the realities of women's hardships and needs. Women's experiences reveal that community interests are valued above individual

¹⁶ Among the Anlo, community and family heads are not necessarily chiefs. They are addressed as *Torgbui*. However, one of them could be enstooled as the local chief, known as *Fia*, who can also be addressed as *Torgbui*.

interests. Considering the nature of violence women experience, women desire stability and a change in their marriage relationships especially for their children's sake; a change that is not left with them to enforce since they are the victims here. This change could either come about when their abusive partners change for the better which, my empirical data shows, is not likely due to the patriarchal culture of male dominance. Women, therefore, know that divorce is imperative but see no way out stemming from this pressure from the community. Women's voices and abilities to decide are ignored or swallowed up in the voices and interests of the family and community which are much louder and pronounced and which, in effect, question their individual autonomy, humanity and dignity.

Dietrich (2014) describes this autonomy as the capacity of a rational being to make informed decisions without being forced and to follow after her own passions, dreams and desires, thus making her an independent being. She claims though individuals depend on each other, every human being, regardless of race, class and gender, has an inherent dignity and autonomy. In my opinion, the fact that an individual depends on the community does not mean she must defer to the community and not utilize her right to autonomy and decide what is the ultimate good and is in her best interest for her personal well-being, especially when her life is threatened.

We have already seen from the shame women feel that rather than worry about themselves, they worry more about what their children, families, church and society would think and say of them and this keeps them bound in abusive relationships. Community demands loyalty of its individuals but cannot offer them loyalty in return. One would think that for the insecurities women feel in their homes, the community will be there to offer them the security and support they need as they create spaces for them to freely express their sentiments and desires and ensure a pursuit toward realization. But unfortunately, the community is more concerned about safeguarding culture and tradition than it is of the dignity and personhood of its members so much so that, the greatest passion of the community becomes their weakness.

As these women crave to be included as part of the community, they comply and would not want to disrupt the tranquility and social order and norms of the community. This is a moral obligation that the community expects from its members that the community, on the other hand, is not considerate of nor does it see itself to keep under any moral obligation to its members whatsoever.

Perhaps, from a utilitarian perspective (Driver, 2006), the community may see its actions as good as long as they are in the interest of all. But would a society be good if all persons were primarily seeking for social order and ideals to the detriment of the individual member of that society? A question that society needs to consider and find answers to. As long as these individual women are put in harm's way for the good of the community, this is an act that is exploitative and questions the integrity of the community.

A life lived in mutuality is a give-and-take affair. When women give more to the community than they take from it, it suggests a relational imbalance; an asymmetrical relationship that needs to be ameliorated. Obtrusively, and quite opposed to the general assertion that we are very often made to believe, the community is never there for the individual and does not look out for her well-being. Sad to say, within this context, women are not free to express themselves because the community of which they are a part of is not altruistic, does not respect their right to autonomy and fails to give ear to women's concerns. When the community expects the input of individual efforts towards its build-up but fails to acknowledge the broken and hurting bodies of its individuals, it is a matter of serious concern. There is an antimony, I find, existing between the community and the individual personhood that needs critical attention. Although human dignity is being trumpeted yet, de facto, women's dignity and autonomy are violated – a paradox which must be solved.

Autonomy, like dignity, is an inalienable attribute of human personhood that society should never overlook and is only possible when it understands and acknowledges the humanity and dignity of every person as created in God's image. It is a right that the individual possesses. Though this right may be taken away from her and rightly so only when it is likely to harm her, it is necessary that society gives women safe spaces to freely make choices and decisions towards their total well-being.

Communities need to be considerate of the peculiar needs and preferences of its individual members. Rather than turn women into passive invalid beings incapable of making decisions for themselves, it is important for society to understand that for a healthy and just society, the individual voices of these women matter. Like the popular adage goes, *no one knows where the shoe pinches, but he who wears it*. When together society focus on listening to the voices of abused

women, it creates an awareness and the eventual result is a conscious effort to deal with structures that inhibit women's full potentials and growth.

Overall, the community holds an important position in the life of the individual. The individual owes it to the community to see to its progress. Very well said. But she must ask herself whether this community of which she is a part is worth dying for. She would need to understand there is an extent to which she must go. She would need to draw the line, though this will come at a cost, especially in our African context where the general belief of the community's role in the individual's life cannot be denied. It would take a bold decision to defy all odds and walk toward her freedom.

6.5 The role of religion

Religion, whether Islamic, Hinduism, Buddhism, or Christianity, is embedded in human lives. Christianity, particularly, is believed to be instrumental in either hindering or enhancing the journey of survivors after domestic violence (Nason-Clark, Fisher-Townsend, Holtmann & McMullin (2018: 7), or in situations of crisis. Adeney Miriam (2002) also acknowledges that, sometimes the gospel empowers women to confront, and at other times empowers them to comply. She holds that many African women have hit their limits on all fronts and to find meaning and motivation to cope, 'for some, it is their Christian faith and fellowship that carries them.' (Ibid: 219). I, hereby, analyze how personal faith and the church's theology on marriage and divorce have been instrumental in helping and harming survivors in crisis.

6.5.1 Intimate partner violence and coping through personal faith

Hoff et al. (2009) define crisis as an acute emotional upset that arises from situational, developmental or socio-cultural sources and that result in temporary inability to cope by means of one's usual problem-solving resources. Three types of crisis - situational, developmental and socio-cultural – can be identified here. The focus of this study is limited to situational and socio-cultural crisis. According to Hoff et al., situational crisis are unexpected happenings in an

individual or group of people's lives such as abuse, illness, loss of job, or natural disasters. Socio-cultural crisis, on the other hand, are those caused by social norms (Ibid) of race, class and gender.

Clinical Psychologists acknowledge the role of religion during crisis (Pargament, 2010). The situation of these female survivors is, as we will recall, poverty and the absence of or a relatively low level of social support which could, in a way, aid in preventing or reducing the impact of violence on their lives. Clearly, the lack of finances and support from their families and the communities make them find solace in religion. Women have in them the will to make their marriages work and to provide stable homes for their children. And since they do not want to become objects of disdain in the society, religion tends to be the only way out.

My data reveals how female survivors use personal faith in coping with violence which reflects securing their relationship with God, spiritually connecting to others and believing that there is greater meaning to what is happening. The following responses from the women when asked what they did in the face of abuse were these:

P4 said:

I was hopeful in God... I would have died but God's grace saved me... I heard the story of Bartimaeus in the Bible... I also heard of Job whose faith in God was tested... I could relate with the experiences of these men and found strength to move on... Even our Lord Jesus Christ ... suffered many things... He forgave them. As followers of Christ... You will also suffer... But never lose hope... Hold fast to him. There is victory at the end.

P1 said, 'I have committed myself to Christ. It is only in church that I find joy and forget about my sorrows and pain... I encourage myself that it shall be well...with me.' P2 also said, 'That is why I committed myself to worshipping God so that God will have mercy on me so that all these things will end.'

I expected God to do for me what He did for men and women of old in the Bible... I kept praying to God... I prayed to the Holy Spirit to be my advocate... I prayed that if what I was going through was the will of God, so be it. But if it was not God's will, then God should change him... It has not been easy... Had it not been the Holy Spirit, I would not have been able to withstand... I know God is in control... The teaching of God's word through the pastor has been of immense help to me and is helping me to survive in my marriage. (P8)

Some women try to find meaning to their experiences as they relate to Biblical stories of Jesus' suffering and that of some biblical personalities and internalize them. Others also find the tenacity to move on as they fellowship with other believers, affirming, as we earlier saw, the importance of one's social support system in moments of crisis. Nason-Clark et al. (2018) reveal that the social life of congregations have proved to be useful for survivors of violence. In their words, 'Women living with IPV with social support networks report a stronger sense of safety and better physical and emotional well-being compared to women without social support.' (Ibid: 13).

Personal faith and religious teachings in the face of life's adversities and difficulties is seen to be paramount in the lives of abused women. In a theological sense, crisis opens them up to vulnerability and trust in the care and power of God. During such occasions, women very often have their worldviews shattered. Religion and meaning-making become part of the coping process by praying, reading God's Word, going to church, and other sacred rituals. The outcome may be positive or negative. Looking at it from the perspectives of most of these women, though arguably so, the outcome seemed positive. At least, it seemed some of them had grown closer to God and were spiritually built-up. What keeps them rebounding is their faith in the Triune God who they believe will change their husbands and their predicaments. This affirms the involvement of the Triune God in the transformation, reconciliation and empowerment of humanity; a liberating *diakonia* supposed to be the church's task. (Nordstokke, 2009: 24-27, 2011: 55-62).

This rebound, I must admit, is not to say that their lives are transformed. But I observe that largely, personal faith is a life-line that keeps most survivors of violence on the move. In my encounter with them, I had the impression that they were hopeful that God will end the violence, though unrealistic as long as the structures that perpetuate violence are still in place and as long as men do not take responsibility for their abusive behaviours.

Though personal faith has helped survivors of violence to be resilient, it, nevertheless, raises concern of how faith can also be a misnomer when used as a tool toward one's self-destruction. Their use of faith reveals a false concept that is, somewhat distorting and misleading. This, I find, to be probably arising from what societal norms have taught them to believe, as their moral obligations to tolerate their violent partners. This faith also shows a limited/narrow understanding

of this concept of faith probably stemming from misinterpretation of Scripture. This, in effect, makes them unable to resist social structures of violence.

The Scripture points out the nature and essence of faith. Faith is not passive but active. Faith alone, is not enough to save, but is effective when complemented with works (James 2:14-26). Throughout Scripture, and in the ministry of Jesus, we see how Jesus radically subverted the social order and came to the defense of the marginalized and the violated. Rather than continue to stay in abusive relationships, do nothing and trust God to bring a change, a correct understanding and application of faith propels one to work out her faith by defying all odds and challenging destructive norms and structures toward her own liberation. When an individual puts faith in the right perspective, she trusts God for strength to resist every barrier to her liberation. For faith should not enslave but liberate. As to whether religion does truly help survivors of violence or not will further be reflected on in the ensuing paragraphs.

6.6 The role and impact of the church through the lenses of ecclesiology and diakonia

The church is understood as the congregation instituted and mandated by God, founded on God's Word (the Bible) and called into fellowship and communion for every good work through the power of the Holy Spirit (WCC, 2005).

Nordstokke holds that, this congregational church is called into diakonia, to not only proclaim the gospel, but also to serve. He affirms that the church is made holy by God's Word and the sacraments; an affirmation of the worth and dignity of all human persons. The church is, therefore, called to stand in solidarity with the marginalized regardless of their race, class or gender to listen to their voices and boldly defend their dignity and invite all, including those outside the community of faith into a life of equal participation in conviviality. This, according to Nordstokke, is what marks out the church for its being and mission (Nordstokke, 2019).

In concomitant with the diaconal task of the church, this section reflects on how the various churches of the women interviewed have been responsive in their diaconal mission. This, I do by analyzing Anlo concept of marriage and divorce vis-à-vis the churches' theology of marriage and

divorce as gathered from the perspectives of abused women, and finally reflect on the churches' impact.

6.6.1 Anlo Ewe concept of marriage and Christian theological understanding of marriage and divorce

Nukunya defines marriage as 'a union in which the man and woman, having passed through the approved customary procedures, are legally recognized as husband and wife, and are therefore subject to all the rights, duties and obligations such a relationship entails' (Nukunya, 1969: 63). This union, as earlier stated, among the Anlo, is not only a union between spouses, but also a union between both families of the couple, i.e. the extended family.

In Anlo customary marriages, family representatives of the bridegroom officially go in to ask for the hand of the bride in marriage from her parents in a ceremony called knocking, with a token i.e. the 'knocking fee', of 2 bottles of imported or local gin (Ibid). But this varies.¹⁷ When this is accepted by the bride and her parents which very often was usually the case even when it was against the bride's wishes, though one may find cases of flexibilities in women's choices in contemporary times, preparations are made for the marriage ceremony. It would meet the case to mention here, that where women go against their parents' choice of partners for them, there are repercussions they suffer as we saw above (6.3) in the case of P2 and P4.

As a recap, we have also seen in chapter 3, that Anlo marriage ceremony entails the 'marriage payment' of the *srɔnu* or *tabianu*, otherwise known as the bride price, by the bridegroom's family to the bride (Nukunya, 1969: 92). This idea of payment, in my opinion, connotes that wives are bought by their husbands and this has been critiqued by some feminists as making men feel they own their wives.

According to Nukunya (Ibid), the Anlo believed in the permanency of the marriage union except in cases of childlessness, infidelity on the part of the woman and the husband's failure to honor his

¹⁷ The knocking fee is flexible in contemporary Anlo and can be substituted with money equivalent to the price of imported or local gin, especially when the families involved are Christians.

obligations to his wife and her family. This means divorce¹⁸, as defined in chapter one, was not common and as I understand it, violence was not an occasion for divorce. Moreso, women are the ones who initiate divorce after enduring cruelty at the hands of their husbands (Ibid). This, of course, is to be expected as they are the ones most affected in the marital union.

This was proven in my data where women were the ones wanting to divorce their husbands. I have tried to discuss in the preceding sections, where I mentioned as some of the reasons women stay in abusive marriages women's considerations for their children, the shame that goes with violence and divorce, perceptions and influence of the community, poverty, fear of further victimization and the culture of silence. It is only after women have endured multiple abuse for several years before they try initiating divorce.

Because of the ethos of the permanency of the marriage union, their families do not support their decisions to divorce. This is reflected in their confessions as stated above (6.3).

With regards the church's theology, recalling in chapter four, my approach to gaining my data led me to ten women of which nine were Christians belonging to eight different faith traditions and one a traditional believer (see table 1). In view of this, there is no kind of joint theology on marriage and divorce presented here. But, from the responses of these women, within the Christian traditions, most churches in Ghana emphasize against divorce, suggesting their believe in the permanency of the marriage union. Evidence of this can be seen from the confessions of some abused women:

The church never encouraged me to divorce. The church teaches against divorce and to endure whatever suffering or hardship we go through in Christ and to pray... What the word of God speaks against is... for instance, with my present experiences, I have no right to divorce my husband. Instead, I am supposed to pray for God to intervene. (P4 of AG).

On such occasions, they counsel us to endure and adapt to our husbands to avoid similar occurrences... We are taught how to serve them with joy and live at peace with them. All the church did was to counsel us... My church does not support divorce. (P5 of CAC).

¹⁸ In Ghana, there are three forms of marriage; customary, ordinance and Islamic. A typical customary marriage is one described above. They may or may not be registered in court as ordinance marriages but are still recognized as valid. This applies to Islamic marriages as well. In customary and ordinance marriages, the marital union could either be dissolved by custom or the courts.

I never thought about divorce. My church does not... encourage divorce. Because, they expect that in such situations, we talk to the church mothers or church fathers or leaders to settle the matter. If there is no understanding, then we speak with the father, that is the priests. (P10 of RC).

My church does not support divorce because according to the Bible, it is wrong. They believe marital problems, and that includes abuse, is the work of demons and so they expect that as husband and wife, we are united, and with time, he will change. (P9 of ARS).

My pastor never encouraged me to divorce. He told me to not give up and that God will intervene... He assured me my husband was not to be blamed for his actions and that demons were using him. (P8 of CEM).

As we can see, power, hierarchy and exclusive mechanisms prevail in the church. Oduyoye maintains that the church has power structures within it that oppress people and are obstacles to them (Oduyoye, 1990). I observe that, rather than make men face up to their obligations and be morally responsible for their actions, women are told demons are to be blamed for men's violent behaviors and encouraged by the church to pray for God's intervention. Second, women are counselled and taught how to live at peace with and adapt to their abusive husbands as if they are the ones who cause problems in the home. To add, based on several Old and New Testament Scriptures, women are made to believe that divorce is a sin against God and is out of the question. A typical example is Malachi 2:16:

For the Lord, the God of Israel, says: I hate divorce and marital separation and him who covers his garment (his wife) with violence. Therefore keep watch... that you deal not treacherously... (with your marriage mate) (Malachi 2:16, Amplified Bible).

What is disturbing, upon re-reading this verse, is why church leaders will highlight just a nominal fraction of this Scripture and remain silent on the other half. Through my hermeneutical lenses, a careful reading of the early verses of this chapter and text reveals this Scripture has been taken out of context. As was the case, Jewish men were in the habit of abusing their 'unoffending wives' (v.13) and divorcing them to marry non-Jewish wives.

This verse clearly shows that violence against women which precipitated divorce was what God was never happy with and intended dealing with among His people. We can safely infer through a sound hermeneutical approach to the Bible, that violence against women is not God's will. This is

evident throughout Jesus' ministry in how He related to women. Violence is evil and dehumanizing and ought to be named and shamed by the church.

I find the church's understanding and interpretation of Scripture to be patriarchal and very narrow in this regard. Just like in the Jewish culture and religion, women were marginalized, so we see history repeating itself here as Anlo women are marginalized through the church's theology deeply embedded in a patriarchal culture. And like the title of the book edited by Dana L. Robert (2002): 'Gospel Bearers, Gender Barriers', the church though very important part of human life is quite often an obstacle to women's productivity.

What I am in doubt of, which I did not investigate though, is how much of teachings against marital violence goes on in the pulpit of these churches. It will not be surprising, if probably through latter research, one discovers an absence or disproportion in the frequency of messages preached in favor of divorce as against marital violence. Inferring from this, one can conclude here that the church's theology on marriage and divorce is one that is distorted and oppressive and is very much related to Anlo cultural understanding of marriage and divorce; an inculturation, so to speak. Considering this in light of the intersectionality approach, we see the interplay of culture and religion working together to re-enforce women's oppression.

A church that does not act against oppression, injustice and exclusion is complicit in perpetrating oppression. The church in its diaconal mission does not listen to the voices of these marginalized women and stand in solidarity to be a voice for and with them both within and without. This is probably because, one, its doctrines are one that is distorted and problematic. Two, it does not fully comprehend its nature and task in society and three, it fails to recognize and respect the humanity of these women as equally created in God's image. And I believe that if the church wants to eliminate all the sufferings in this world, then the church must first do away with all that is dark and negative inside it.

With regards women's attitudes to the church's teachings, though one cannot deny the positive role of religion in human life, I believe there is a limit to accepting church doctrines when they are destructive to lives. But how can this be possible when women are deceived into accepting oppressive doctrines of the church? This would call for women re-reading the Bible to discover

the truth of God's word for themselves. If the church will not stand in solidarity with women in naming and shaming violence, divorce should not be an option for women, but the ultimate.

6.6.2 To what extent has the Church been able to help?

In view of all that has been discussed, the question remains as to how the social action of the church has impacted the lives of abused women. From their perspectives, the following confessions can be considered. P6 said, 'They prayed with me and encouraged me... But I would have been happy if they had found some way to help me out of my situation, other than what they did.' Other responses were:

My pastor... supported me financially to see the doctor for an operation... Making sexual advances at my husband is something I never used to do. But through teachings received during our Women's Meetings, we are educated by our women leaders on these things... My pastor invited him to have a word with him, but he refused to turn up... My pastor... and his wife... would call me to ask me about them and pray for me... counsel me ... and encourage me... The teaching of God's word through the pastor has been of immense help to me... in my marriage. (P8).

Yes, they supported me financially, prayed for me and visited me while I was on admission at the hospital... I expected more from my church but what they offered was what they had. Right now, I have no work doing. I would have liked it if they had helped to find something for me to do, ... so I can also work and be independent and to move on with my life. (P9).

My decision to forgive my husband for what he had done is as a result of the impact of the church's teachings. I remember we are taught at church through the word of God to forgive one another. (P10).

P7 who happened to be a traditional believer (4.3.1, paragraph 2) but had also experienced violence said no church came to her aid.

Following from the responses above, the church is involved in some form of interventions such as counselling, prayer and visitation. Women are taught to forgive. The church provides financial and material support for some of these women. They are also involved in the proclamation of the Gospel and in providing sexual education that women need to boost their marriages through counselling.

Notwithstanding, we understand that the diaconal role of the church is not only in proclamation, but a call to transformative action (WCC, 2018). The church's interventions were not enough for these women as they expected the church to have done more. Counselling, did not help them much. Teaching abused women to forgive could be interpreted as an act of preaching peace and reconciliation. But can there be peace when there is no genuine repentance and justice? Like the theology of the church in South Africa during the apartheid era, such a theology could be interpreted to mean the church condoning the evils of injustice (Leonard, 2010).

Also, financial and material provisions did not transform their lives; an indication that the transformative aspect of diakonia was lacking. P9, for instance, wished that the church's help had made her independent. And I think that as long as women in her situation remain dependent, they continue to be more vulnerable to abuse in and outside the church and makes it difficult for them to resist oppressive structures. Their dependence may increase the power asymmetrical relationships in the church and limit their chances of equal participation.

Finally, the church in its apostolic witness has failed to open up to those outside its community of faith. P7, who is a traditional believer attests to this. Yes, creating internal bonds within the Christian community strengthens relationships. But it is likely that when these bonds become too much, they can make it difficult to reach out to those outside and establish relationships with them.

6.7 Conclusion

In summary, I have highlighted the meaning of marital violence and its varied forms and effects on women and children. Poverty, shame and the way women are socialized makes women suffer in silence and predisposes them to further abuse. Gender stereotype roles breed structures of patriarchy that promote female subservience and power abuse and legalize male infidelity. Women's autonomy are undermined in issues of their sexuality and roles as slaves in the home. To add, all individuals though independent, are interdependent beings who rely on each other. It is important that society, in spite of the moral duties the individual owes it, values and respects the individual's right to autonomy and give her a safe space to make her own decisions toward self-actualization. This affirms her human dignity and power and creates just, equal and mutual societies. Next, within the framework of the church's diaconal task, I have juxtaposed Anlo

concept of marriage and divorce with that of Christian theology and observed that there are no sharp distinctions. The church's theology is one that conforms to the prevailing culture. An analysis of the impact of the church's social actions in the lives of abused women has proved to fall short.

Chapter Seven

7.0 Summary and recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the key findings in view of the research question. It is also a conclusion of all that has been found and discussed through the onset of this study and offers recommendations and suggestions for possible future research.

7.2 The Research Question

The research question I attempted to answer is: ‘What characterize the experiences and perceptions of Anlo Ewe women on violence and divorce in marriage, and what are their perceptions on the role of the church in this regard?’

Through semi-structured interviews, I solicited responses from ten female survivors of violence of which nine were Christians belonging to eight different denominations and one a traditional believer. This revealed a number of findings which are outlined below.

7.3 Key Findings

Using the intersectionality approach in discussing my data through the eyes of the four theories and concepts as elaborated in chapter three, a number of findings were evinced. Nevertheless, these findings cannot be generalized to all women in Ghana since the focus of this study was Christian women who had experienced abuse in marriage and were either married, separated or divorced. First, the experiences and perceptions of violence and divorce as narrated by the women reveal that women in the Anlo context suffer painful experiences of all forms of abuse in marriage that is uncalled for stemming from the existing patriarchal culture and religion. Second, I find out that the traumatic and sociological effects of divorce on children is a factor that makes women susceptible to abuse and remain in abusive relationships. Third, gender role differentiations,

women's poor economic situations, the culture of silence, and the shame and stigma of violence and divorce self-imposed by these women and by the community also contribute to perpetuating marital violence. Unequal relations between married couples originating from a prevailing patriarchal culture of male dominance results in men's abusive powers leading to women's servitude, men's infidelities and their control over women's sexualities. I also discover that Ghana's laws on domestic violence are ineffective.

This study also reveals a tension and relatively too much emphasis on the role and place of the community as being there for the individual which, in reality, is not the case. Communities' understanding of the value, dignity and autonomy of women's personhood is clouded and this inhibits women's possibilities of making reasonable decisions and choices toward their full development and liberation.

Furthermore, this study exposes an intersection of religion with culture which aggravates women's experiences. Though one cannot deny the positive role of religion in human life particularly in relying on personal faith in coping with violence, the manner in which faith is used by abused women reveals a misconception and misnomer of this faith concept as indoctrinated by the church. Also, violence is attributed to demons. Moreso, the church's theology on marriage and divorce is found to be culture-compliant and twisted stemming from misinterpretation and misapplication of the Bible. Rather than facilitate women's empowerment and take solidarity walks with them to speak against structures of injustice churches, within this context through, their theology, succeed in manipulating women to feel that there is no way out of abusive marriages. In addition, it is revealed that the church's diaconal mission to those outside its community of faith is lacking. Finally, the church's impact is very minimal and suggests there is more to be done by the church in helping abused women through their experiences.

7.4 Recommendations

Following from the findings above, I would like to make some few recommendations. Churches within the Ghanaian context:

- Need an understanding of their diaconal mandate and mission to their members and those without the church.
- Need to organize inclusive programs to reach out to individuals and communities outside their faith.
- Proactively need to raise awareness about domestic violence in the church by advertently educating, naming and shaming violence.
- Need to be mindful of internal structures of power and patriarchy that make them conform to existing cultures and to the crimes of injustice by addressing problematic doctrines that arise from misinterpreting Scriptures.
- Need to organize programs and projects to facilitate women's processes towards empowerment.
- Need to encourage women to divorce as a reactionary measure when they encounter violence.
- Need to counsel and find practical measures in meeting the needs of survivors, particularly with respect the welfare of their children to aid in solving domestic violence.
- Also, pastors need to be educated and trained in how they handle domestic violence issues in counselling survivors.
- Churches need to encourage women to come together to re-read the Bible and discover the truth for themselves.
- Women should be encouraged by the church to break the silence around violence and boldly speak against systemic structures that violate their dignity and personhood.
- Sensitization campaigns should be intensified in the community on domestic violence and women's rights to autonomy and speech.
- There should be more public education on government interventions put in place and how such interventions can be easily accessed when needed.
- The government should find effective ways of implementing DV laws.
- Churches and the government can provide shelter homes for abused women.

7.5 Suggestions for Further Research

Since this study, for lack of space, only provided perspectives of survivors of violence and divorce on the church's role, other possible angles for further research could be to interview the perpetrators of violence and some community heads and members. Also, the pastors of the various churches as well as some congregation members (male and female) could also be interviewed. In addition, public bodies involved in domestic violence could also be interviewed to find out their perspectives and their role in addressing domestic violence. Finally, a contextual Bible study on Malachi 2:16 and other Scriptures on divorce can be carried out from focus groups of abused women, perpetrators and pastors.

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Appendix i: Interview Guide

1. Can you tell me a bit about yourself? (age, occupation, religious background...?)
2. Can you tell me about your marriage life? (how did you meet your spouse? when? How many children?)
3. What are some pleasant experiences you've had in marriage?
4. Have you had some bitter experiences in marriage? Can you tell me about them? How long have you been abused? How do you understand violence/abuse in marriage?
5. Is there anything you would like to share with me about your sex life? Do you have any bad experiences from your sex life? Can you share an example with me?
6. How has it affected your life and that of your family:
 - a. Emotionally?
 - b. Spiritually?
 - c. Physically?
 - d. Mentally?
7. What were your dreams and expectations in marriage? How has this experience affected those dreams?
8. What happened afterwards? What have you done so far about the situation? Have you sought help anywhere? If yes, where? When? If no, why not?
9. Have you thought about divorce? If yes, why? If no, why not?
10. Is your family aware of your experience? If yes, how did they react?
11. Does your church know about your experience? To what extent has your church been able to help you?
12. What more do you expect from your church?
13. If you are given the chance to send a message to your church regarding the way they helped you, what will it be?
14. Is there anything we haven't talked about that you really want to tell me?

Appendix ii: Information Letter and Consent

Are you interested in taking part in the research project:

“NO WAY OUT? THE DILEMMA OF SURVIVORS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE CHURCH’S RESPONSE IN GHANA ”?”

This is an inquiry about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to carry out interviews of some selected persons. In this letter we will give you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

In accordance with my partial fulfilment of a master’s degree program in Diakonia and Christian Social Practice, it is a requirement for me, Elorm Ama Stiles-Ocran, to write a thesis paper on the above-mentioned topic. This is to find out how Anlo-Ewe women who have survived violence in their marriages are being helped by the church, as their diaconal response. The question I seek to address is: What characterizes the experiences and perceptions of Anlo-Ewe women of violence and divorce in marriage and what role does the church play in this regard? This, I hope, will sensitize the churches in Ghana about the phenomenon of violence and provide a framework within which they can act to address the issue of violence and divorce.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Vid Specialized University is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

Since the focus of this research is on Anlo-Ewe women who have suffered violence in marriage, between 5-10 abused or ever abused married/divorced/separated women between the ages, 18-65 are being asked to take part in this research.

What does participation involve for you?

If you choose to take part in this project, you will be interviewed for about 45minutes on what your experiences and perceptions are about the abuse, how it has affected you, whether your church has been of help to you through that experience and in what ways they helped. Your information provided will be recorded electronically and notes taken down on paper.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you choose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you choose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

- I will be the only one who will have access to your personal information and will process your personal data by replacing your name with respective codes which shall be kept confidentially locked on my computer away from every collected
- data. The only information that will be made public is your approximate age.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end by 30th June 2020 by which time all personal information written down and recorded will be anonymised.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Vid Specialized University, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Vid Specialized University via Professor Stephanie Dietrich on +47 952 496 15 or her email address: Stephanie.Dietrich@vid.no. You could also contact me via my mobile number on: +47 925 49 875 or my email: estilesocran@gmail.com.
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personvertjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours Sincerely,

Project Leader
(Researcher/supervisor)

Student

.....

Consent

I have received and understood information about the project, “No Way Out? The Dilemma of Survivors of Domestic Violence and the Church’s Response in Ghana” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent to participate in an interview and for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. 30th June 2020.

Consent of participants were recorded on audio tapes.

Appendix iii: NSD Recommendations and Guidelines

NSD Project Number: 972777

Date of Approval: December 19, 2019.