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Domestic Violence: Ethical Challenges to the Professionalism of Religious and Faith Leaders for Healing Survivors

A Psychological Analysis

Ruth Dymphna Maduforo



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PREFACE

This book focusing on Domestic Violence and its Ethical Challenges for Professionalism in Religious Leadership and Churches by Ruth Dymphna Maduforo is the fruit of a well-researched thesis at the University of East London, United Kingdom presented in 2019. The work earned the author the First Class Honours Degree at graduation in the University. Ruth also received as further acknowledgment, the John Radford Award of the University of East London, school of Psychology, recognizing a well-grounded research project with quantitative and qualitative methodology guiding its findings.

The focus on Domestic Violence (DV) brings an area of community and clinical psychology, mental health and overall well-being of citizens into focus. The author explores the role of the leadership of Churches, pastors and counsellors within religious and church institutions in providing long term and sustainable healing to the affected and discovers gaps in their approach. Author therefore takes the bold steps to offer some solutions towards filling these gaps. This in itself is the strength of this thesis. Domestic Violence is a scourge and reality in many societies. However, the topic is not given adequate consideration in terms of the required long lasting help and knowledge that victims, offenders and caregivers need.

Ruth uses innovative scientific questionnaire of affected persons with depth of critique to unravel the problem and offer better solutions to the problem. This research exposes the challenges domestic violence has on the mental health, societal stability, upbringing of children into adulthood, the overall well-being of families, societal balance and the protection of all vulnerable members of society, especially women, youth and children.

Globally, Domestic Violence (DV) has been a major issue of concern, especially violence against women. However, the role of the churches in offering solutions to these issues, which is usually varied, indicate some sentimental and pseudo-religious approaches to a phenomenon that is serious. The application of incongruent biblical interpretations to issues that need expertise, counselling, sustainable solutions and radical confrontation of the factors that cause domestic violence are highlighted. A conclusion is that those who profess to offer solutions and care such as the religious leaders and their pastoral agents need proactive understanding of these issues first. Such knowledge needs to be grounded on strong ethical principles, preventive and curative healing methods and expertise with facts, not on false hopes. Durable structures in dealing with the problem are solicited for those who offer solutions.

Ruth offers deep insights into this phenomenon and encourages religious leaders and churches to move from passivity to active engagement with the “problematique”. This is because in many countries of the world, industrialised and developing, people in need often find solace and consolation by resorting to religious and traditional leadership within such institutions for help. These institutions and their leaders enjoy trust, but due to an apparent lack of proper training and resources and lacking in competence and ability to help, provide the wrong solace and advice that is not helpful. It often ends up increasing the pains of the clients and victims of domestic violence who are victimised double time by prolonged pain and unsolved violent environments.

The roles for religious leadership and caregivers start with the acknowledgment of works of research conducted on the influence of the patriarchal nature of the mainstream religions; their structures and teachings on domestic violence which is a continued preaching on virtues to acquire, such as meekness, acceptance of Gods will, consolation on Humility, carrying the cross, recognition of destiny and forgiveness of the serial offender. Such understanding justifies questionable interpretations

of religious texts of the deep wisdom literature and traditions contained in the books of the Bible, the Koran and other religious traditions. They are translated to teach submission of the female to the preponderances of the male and find divine justification .for these excesses.

Recognising the special trust believers and abused persons place on religious institutions and their leadership, Ruth summarises the challenges churches face in handling domestic violence and they include:

- *“Lack of education and training for religious leaders to enable them to deal more effectively with domestic violence.*
- *Not using existing resources or creating support services on Domestic Violence*
- *Not creating a group or forum where women can share their struggles and drive strength from other abused women.*
- *Being careful with theological teaching and scriptural interpretation regarding the role of women”.*

It does seem to me that this research project is a valuable contribution to the search for balanced and peaceful communities and families founded on values and ethical guidelines. The work considers some available opportunities that experts and religious institutions can provide through the training of its personnel with qualified professionals in religious leadership; well-trained experts and pastors; the provision of inter-disciplinary and available educational guides; modules and teaching materials with solid content for training.

The book is an invitation for all stakeholders involved in family welfare and counselling of vulnerable persons, especially religious leaders and churches to recognise the positive role of psychological therapy for healing the domestically violated. Such elements of long lasting healing are built on principles that are values-driven and ethical. They include empowerment, transformation, holistic approach, integrity, competence and sustainability. These values correspond to the strategy of Globethics.net in promoting Ethics in Higher Education.

It is my great honour and joy to congratulate the author Sister Ada Ruth Dymphna Amuka Maduforo (HFSN) whom I have known for near three decades as religious Minister and Sister of the Congregation of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy and with whom I have collaborated at many levels. This new book is a credible and useful contribution to the area of research and bothers on ethics and professionalism. I highly recommend the research project to the reading public and the religious leadership and agents of institutions that provide care and healing to vulnerable people challenged by Domestic violence.

Obiora Ike,
Executive Director, Globbethics.net, Geneva, Switzerland

February 2020

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I thank God immensely, whose love and mercy has brought me this far in my academic career. To Him be the glory now and forever. Amen.

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DEDICATION

I devotedly dedicate this dissertation to my beloved mum Ezinne Fidelia E. Maduforo, who has just celebrated her 80th birthday in 2019. She is always there for me.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a global severe moral and spiritual concern. It tends to violate not only the individual's right but also, all the basic moral principles of religion and traditions (Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence (OPDV,1992). In most religions, the priority is the well-being of every individual and the common good of all. There is an emphasis in every religious tradition about the importance of being mindful of the integrity of the other person (Ware et al., 2003). Thus, religious leaders and faith community play an essential role in providing support for DV victims (Nason-Clark, 2009; OPDV,1992). Hence, religious leaders such as clergy, pastors are often the first place many people will turn to when facing a distressing situation as they can provide counsel, support and safety (Nason-Clark, 2009). Likewise, the findings of Strickland, Welshimer, and Savela (1998) revealed that 40 percent of abused women would seek assistance from their clergy. This present study seeks to build upon the framework of a previous study (Ware et al., 2013) in which faith leaders from different religions provide information regarding the relationship between religion and IPV. Findings from this study suggested that faith leaders perceived a low occurrence of IPV within the church community. Also, they highlighted those aspects of their faith that help reduce violence among partners, and the methods they used in supporting women who were experiencing IPV. Ware et al. (2013) findings noted

that empathy, respect, and emotional expression among partners are preventative factors for IPV. To provide more insights into these findings and observations, the present study organised a semi-structured interview with five sisters who work with survivors of IPV to understand the impact of their faith on these population.

Research Aims

Previous studies found that faith communities can be a resource for healing to women who are faced with intimate partner violence (IPV) (Ware, Levitt & Bayer, 2003). These researches had their focus on faith leaders from Jewish, Islamic and Christian faith. Till date, not much research has been revealing the impact of the faith of religious leaders on IPV survivors. Hence, this study aimed at exploring an understanding of how the religious sisters' (Sisters) faith impacts on IPV survivors.

Definition of terms

Religious sisters: Women who have dedicated their lives to God through religious vows in a religious institute. They do charitable works through different apostolate such as praying, teaching, moral instruction, advocacy, medical or pastoral activities (Crea & Francis, 2015).

Nuns: These are women who live in a monastery; their ministry and prayer life are within the monastery. The terms 'nun' and 'sister' are used interchangeably in a conversation. They are both referred to as 'sister.' Hence, this study will address the religious sisters as 'sister.'

Faith: Faith in the context of this study is not only the expression of one's belief in God but a display of faith in practical works. St James' letter, chapter 4, states: faith and good works go together and that faith without works is dead. Eno's (1984) research on faith and works noted that faith

which speaks without fruits is a false faith that is of no use; a real faith is one that proves itself in works. Hence, the sister's faith reflects its impact on IPV survivors through their works.

Method/Design

This is a qualitative study that conducted a semi-structured interview with five sisters working with IPV survivors. The participant's responses were audiotaped, transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke (2003) six steps thematic analysis.

Findings

The findings revealed that the sisters' faith through their prayer life and practical works impact positively on IPV survivors. Majority of the sisters highlights that they were able to help the survivors to build a trusting relationship with them, which resulted in the survivors feeling safe to disclose abuse. Also, other sisters cited that the survivors' participation in their religious activities has helped them to developed religious coping skills such as prayers, bible readings, and meditation. However, some of the sisters' expressed that their reflections on forgiveness disposed some of the survivors to learn to forgive. Although forgiveness may be beneficial, this depend on the vulnerability of the survivors. Besides, for most of the sisters, the survivor's participation in their religious activities is the fundamental element that helps most of the survivors to gain strength and comfort.

Conclusions

The findings support previous evidence that spirituality and religious involvement are resources for IPV survivors to enhance self-esteem. The sisters working alongside with other organisations like women's aid may

be beneficial. The current study advocates the need for sisters and clergy in their attempt to support IPV survivors to incorporate both religious and professional frameworks. Thus, a combined intervention is fundamental.

Key words: IPV survivors; faith; religious sisters; prayer; God.

BACKGROUND

Introduction

This chapter presents a historical background of intimate partner violence, alongside the research that conceptualises IPV in relation to faith and survivors. The aim is to highlight views from different studies and critically discuss them to provide a framework and rationale for the present study.

Intimate Partner Violence

Intimate Partner Violence is physical, sexual or psychological violence which occurs in a close or romantic relationship. IPV is a serious social and public health issue affecting many women globally irrespective of their nations, cultures, religion or socioeconomic statuses (McCauley et al. 1995; Iiika, Okonkwo & Adogu, 2002; Flynn & Graham, 2010). The World Health Organisation multi-country research of women's health and domestic violence affirms that IPV is complex, with public health and social issues affecting women worldwide (Heise, Ellsberg & Gottemoeller, 1999). Violence against women continues to be one of the most common violations of Human Rights (Campbell, 2002; Gracia-Moreno et al. 2006). Office of National Statistics (2016), reveals that 4.5 million

women were victims of IPV based on the self-completion module on intimate violence carried out by Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW). The CSEW findings are mostly concerned with IPV under criminal issues. An indication of underreporting of IPV since not everyone conceptualises IPV as a crime (ONS), 2016, and CSEW records only violence that is known to the police. Hence, it reflects how the issue of IPV is under-measured thus, underestimating the seriousness of the issues of IPV in the UK (Dixon & Graham-kevan, 2011). The reasons for the under-reporting of IPV includes people's belief about the roles of gender (Straus & Gelles, 1992), fear of revenge from the violent partner (Johnson, 2010). Also, some women do not view IPV as something serious to be reported whereas, for others, they may still be financially dependent on the abusers (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Brookoof et al., 1997).

Jekwes (2002) highlighted that the strange position between male and female in a relationship and the normative use of violence to resolve conflict tend to increase the risk of violence between partners. Also, that violence against women is an expression of men's superiority over women. Strickland et al. (1998) found that male perpetrators use scriptural passages to justify their abuse, because of the church's patriarchal norms which give men the power as leaders to their household. IPV can lead to a wide range of issues, including physical injuries, mental health issues and an increase in mortality rate (Weddsdale, 1998; Wilson & Daly, 1992). Also, psychological health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Bell & Naugle, 2008).

Despite the evidence from empirical researches on IPV against women, previous studies noted that women can be perpetrators of IPV. Laroche's (2005) study argues that men do suffer the adverse effects of IPV as well. This study shows that 83% of men experienced violence from women against 77% of women that were abused by men. Likewise, the previous meta-analysis 82 couple-conflict studies of Archer (2000, 2002), revealed that women are more likely to start violence or initiate physical

aggression than men. Besides, (Randle & Graham, 2011) suggested that male underreporting of violence caused by female makes it difficult to establish real data. Therefore, men or women can be a perpetrator of IPV. However, women mostly suffer the detrimental effects of IPV than men considering its frequency and severity such as injuries, mental illnesses, employment and medical attention (Johnson & Leone, 2005; Flynn & Graham, 2010).

Faith as a resource for survivors of IPV

Faith is increasingly becoming a significant resource for coping with trauma and crises (Meichenbaum, 2008). Religious institutes and other forms of religious involvement can offer support in a substantial way to abused women. The studies of Plyes (2000) illustrated how the different concepts of religious groups stand out to speak against violence towards women. For example, the teaching of Judaism and Christianity strive to imitate the mode of Christ's peace and love. Also, Plyes highlighted that some other religions strive to maintain a healthy view of an equal position between men and women. Nason-Clark (2000) noted that in faith communities some survivors have regained strength and hope through engaging in informal networking with women within the church community.

The study of Gillum, Sullivan, and Bybee (2006) with their participants argued that trust in God and support from the faith community is an essential part of the lives of survivors of DV. The findings from these studies reveal that most of the women acknowledged God as their primary source of strength. These women admit that participating in different religious activities tend to reduce depression, while, it increases psychological well-being; whereas, for others, it increases their social support. Some studies establish the significant role of religion in human life back to the time of the Chinese Palaeolithic period (Smart & Denny, 2007). Thus, religion remains a powerful instrument that enables individuals to form resilience over suffering (Meichenbaum,2008). For example, faith has a

positive impact on people with different traumatic life events such as mental health problems (Paragment,2007). Likewise, religious institutions for religious sisters are known to be places where those in a difficult situation can go for emotional comfort, solace, and practical assistance (Francis & Crea, 2015).

Itimil, Dienne, and Gbeneol's (2014) in their study among women in a primary care clinic in Nigeria revealed faith and religion as coping strategies for IPV survivors. They opined, that faith is increasingly becoming accepted due to its effects in reducing the rate of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Again, they showed that religion ranks the highest among other forms of coping tools. Therefore, spiritual healing is vital for victims to enhance a sense of meaning and authority to shape back their lives (Dunbar & Jeannechild, 1996; Mattis, 2002). Faith is seen as essential during suffering, as it enables the individual to know the importance of prayers, meditation and making prayer petitions (Canda, 2013).

Bell, Busch, and Fowler's (2005) study with counsellors working with survivors noted that counsellors' spiritual beliefs and religion are sources of strength for survivors of domestic violence. Equally, the counsellor's belief helped survivors to make a tremendous change in decision making and a way forward in their lives. These researchers indicated that spirituality was not the principal focus of their study but considering its importance on the participants, it then became central to the research. These affirm that spirituality and religion play vital roles in the lives of human beings. Thus, Drumm, Popescu, and Cooper (2013) posited that scriptural readings offer individuals strength through emphasising on those aspects of teaching and traditions which underscore human rights and safety. For example, the Christian message of love offers a form of shield for survivors against abuse (Itimi et al., 2014). The Korean study on IPV among immigrant women revealed that the church and clergy play an essential part in the lives of these women through the provision of social events and other alternative community services (Choi et al., 2018). Conversely,

Nason-Clark (2000) pointed out the need for the training of the clergy regarding the issues of violence against women because some clergy encourages women to remain in the abusive environment by making excuses for their abuser.

The positive impact of religion on survivors explains why some abused women visit their religious leaders and religious institutes for guidance and support (Rotunda, Williamson & Penfold, 2004; Boehm et al. 1999). Therefore, spirituality and being part of a faith community is paramount to some survivors; to them, they viewed whatever is happening in the context of their faith (Giesbrecht & Sevic, 2000). In support of this, Nason-Clark's (2009) study on Christianity and DV confirmed that religious people tend to look into their faith community for different forms of assistance. Thus, many abused women have found faith, spirituality, and religion as the source of power to rebuild their lives and develop a good family relationship (Meichenbaum, 2013).

Faith as a barrier to survivors of IPV

Although faith and religion are seen to be a resource for support and healing for IPV survivors, it can also stand as a barrier for women living in an abusive environment (Pyles, 2007). Boehm et al.'s (1999) discussion with survivors of IPV noted a feeling of spiritual distress among the survivors. This is because the survivors are unable to get the sort of support they had expected from their faith leaders. For example, in some Christian and Jewish religion, certain biblical passages are used to argue that women are responsible for maintaining their marital relationship at all cost (Clark, 2001; Nason-Clark, 2000). Likewise, survivors of DV in Fortune's (2000) study revealed that they were instructed by some faith leaders to remain in abusive relationships despite the danger they faced. Instead, other women within the religious communities helped the abused women (Gillum et al., 2006). Previous studies showed that some clergy are not adequately informed and may lack the knowledge to handle the

situations of abused women (Nason-Clark, 2000). She observed that members of the clergy do not engage with activities or support that would enhance the life of survivors such as collaborating with agencies that aid abused women. Instead, the clergy clings to the idea that things would get better and the abuse will stop, thereby encouraging the abused women to return to their abusive situation as mirrored in the work of Nason-Clark (1996). Also, some clergy's inability to manage abused women's issues adequately can lead to denial, minimizing the problem or trying to resolve it through positive interpretations which then lead to what is called clergy's silence and neglect as echoed in Fortune 's (1991) study.

Also, the clergy preaching about the persecution and sufferings of Christ as the stand for every Christian may imply that abused women ought to accept and endure the suffering like Christ's (Fortune, 1991). Itimil et al. (2014) noted that biblical teaching of female subordination to male authority may encourage domestic violence against women, especially where survivors are with abusers who take advantage of such passages. For instance, Ephesians. 5: 22-24 state that "Wives be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord." Hence, encouraging patriarchy, power, and superiority of male over women and family (Fortune, 2000). An indication that in certain situations the church may not be as safe and supportive as survivors would desire it since it cannot adequately address women's abusive environment. Gnanadason (1993), study showed that survivors might view the church's way of addressing violence against women as encouraging them to remain with their abusive partner.

The above evidence illustrates how faith and religion can act as a resource and barrier for IPV survivors in their journey of recovery. However, some of these studies were based on individual perceptions (Pyles, 2007; Gillum et al., 2006). Also, the research did not incorporate the voices of the clergy adequately (Pyles, 2007). However, the overarching conclusion is that faith enable IPV survivors to rebuild their self-esteem and can impact negatively on them if not handle adequately. Therefore,

faith leaders in their position within the community are very crucial in the lives of abused women who need to understand their situation and the means of escaping the abuse. Hence, a well informed and positive support from faith leaders would be a life-saving for the abused and a source of healing for survivors. These explain why many survivors who are in search of coping strategy of how to manage their abusive environment seek for assistance from their religious communities (Boehm et al. 1999; Geisbrecht & Sevcik, 2000). Based on these, researchers suggest that the clergy, faith leader, and social workers should understand the impact of religion on the survivors healing process since many of these women will often visit them for assistance (Nason-Clark, 2009).

Rationale

Before presenting the rationale for this research, as a researcher and for the authenticity of the study, it is essential that I make a personal presentation of the study. Throughout this research, I have engaged in personal reflexivity to highlight the unavoidable presence of the self, as a researcher. The reasons for exploring this topic began with my work as a parish sister in the church. Among those that approached me seeking for support, many of them were women who either have been previously abused or are currently in an abusive relationship. Many of them would want someone to listen to them; others would ask for practical and spiritual guidance. Not sure of why they would repeatedly come to me for advice, I decided to carry out this research to enable me to understand the impact of my faith on these women.

The study of Ware et al. (2003) acknowledged that faith communities can be an essential resource for IPV survivors. However, few researches are devoted to how faith leaders understand the impact of their faith on

¹ Parish sister is a religious sister who assist the priest in the church in carrying out pastoral activities such as teaching, religious counselling, supporting the sick, and the needy in the community.

IPV survivors. Faith is a paradox, in as much as it can enhance IPV survival, it can equally hinder their journey of recovery from abuse (Pyles, 2007). Thus, the outcomes of this current study should be considered by faith leaders especially religious sisters as they endeavour to support survivors overcome their traumatic experiences. My research is to contribute to the lack of enough literature on how religious leaders especially sisters view the impacts of their faith on women faced with IPV.

Research question

This study was designed to explore how religious sisters (sisters) understand the extent to which their faith impact survivors of IPV who encounter them in their role as faith leaders and in their apostolate.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter would outline the research paradigm that guides the study to adequately answer the research questions as shown in chapter 2. This section will provide the reasons why particular methods are chosen for data collation and analysis. Also, the researcher's personal reflexivity in relation to the study will be discussed, and the ethical consideration will be highlighted as well.

The Research Paradigm

A qualitative approach

The present study uses a qualitative approach over quantitative method, where the researcher's aim is the identification of cause-effect relationships among variables (Willig, 2003). The preference for qualitative approach is because it allows the researcher to explore the quality and nature of the complexity of the human experience and how it links to events (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Thus, a qualitative approach has the potential to generate new information, unlike quantitative that generates only a broad knowledge about occurrences (Willig, 2003). This approach will help to produce a rich insight into how sisters understand their faith

and a more in-depth picture of how they explain its impact on IPV survivors. Therefore, the present qualitative study uses a thematic analysis, as it aims to identify, analyse and report the different themes within the data that describe participant experiences (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Epistemology

Epistemology is precisely about the nature of knowledge and how this knowledge is produced. There are different types of epistemological positions according to Willig (2013) underpinning qualitative research. However, exploring in full the participants' experience of the phenomena, the present study adopts the position of the essentialist/realist (Willig, 2013). In this position, Willig (2013) argues that there is one true reality that exists independent of the observer, and that the researcher can capture the reality without bias. This position enables the researcher to generate knowledge that captures and reproduces the real experience of the participants (Bruan & Clarke, 2006). Therefore, how the participants describe their experiences determine the reality of the events, indicating a link between language, meaning and people's experience (Willig, 2013).

Participants

Five religious sisters recruited from a religious institute whose community is at Willesden Green in Central London. The sisters' work centres on women facing IPV. Initially, it was problematic to recruit religious sisters who were willing to share how their faith impacts IPV survivors. Out of ten sisters contacted, five accepted to participate. The other five, although they work with IPV survivors, they were not sure of how their faith through work impacts on IPV survivors. The sisters were purposively selected in this study considering the researcher's area of exploration. With purposive sampling, the researcher selects the participants due to their knowledge and experience as it would enhance the richness of the

data (Tangco, 2007). Criteria eligibility required the sisters to be over 21 years old with some years of experience working with IPV survivors. Below is participants characteristic.

Figure 1: Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Age	Years in profession
Sr Pat	58	7 years
Sr Mel	47	12 years
Sr Arlen	45	5 years
Sr Noreen	38	6 years
Sr Elis	31	5 years

Ethical Considerations

The ethical approval for this project were sought and obtained from the University of East London (UEL) school of psychology Ethic Committee, before commencing with the collation of data (see Appendix A). The interview schedule was inclusive (see Appendix B).

Ethical duties of the researcher

Before the interview, an invitation letter (see Appendix C) containing information regarding the project was given to the sisters as to enable them to reflect on the nature of the study and its aim. The interview took place in a location that was familiar and safe for both participant and researcher. Also, participants were given a consent form (see Appendix D) with detailed information regarding confidentiality and the right to withdraw. For instance, participant can withdraw their data if they wished

from the day of the interview up to two weeks. Also, the right to discontinue the interview in the event of any distress or discomfort without consequences. Considering that participants might become distressed during the interview, as it is a very sensitive topic, participants were then, made to feel relaxed, and the researcher avoided any confrontational attitude. After the interviews, participants were given debrief form (see Appendix E) with the aims of the study and available support should they find the process distressing. For confidentiality, the researcher used pseudonyms, and no participants personal details were saved except for data collected.

Furthermore, it was important for the researcher to consider the impact of the research processes for personal well-being and reflexivity. Hence, the researcher was always in touch with the supervisor of the project; this enabled personal reflection throughout the process.

Data collection

Interviews

The interview schedule was designed as open questions, as this allow both participants and researcher to engage in an informal conversation to discuss the researcher's topic (Longhurst, 2003) Also, it enables the questions and unexpected issues to flow appropriately. Hence, prompts were used as the need arose to investigate issues in more detail. The questions were constructed in a way to explore an in-depth understanding of the sisters' faith and how it impacts on IPV survivors. Interview took place in a room and at a time mutually agreed upon between the participants and researcher. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants consent, which lasted between 45 minutes and 60 minutes. Participants were thanked at the end of the interview protocol. After the transcription, recordings were deleted, and the data saved up until the write up was finished. The research was not intended to cause any discomfort to participants. However, being a sensitive topic, one cannot predict if participants

may become upset as it involves relaying their experiences with IPV survivors. Thus, a debrief form (appendix 4) was given to them at the end of the interview with information of what to do should they experience any discomfort.

Personal reflexivity

During the recruitment, there were responses from sisters about not being sure of whether it was their faith or counselling skills that have had an impact on survivors of IPV. This reflects the lack of awareness among the sisters of how positive or negative their faith impacts women from this population. It indicates the extent that this aspect was something that needs to be given attention to; hence, confirming the importance of my decision to carry out this research. At the beginning of the interview, listening to the sisters and how positive some presented the outcome of their encounter with the survivors. I wondered how much this portrays their experience in real life situation. Also, if it reflects the need to present themselves well because they were sharing their experiences with another sister who is the researcher. Throughout the analytic process, the impact of my experiences and views were kept under review during supervision. This period of supervision involved a reflection of how I was engaging and immersing myself in the sisters' world and how their experiences were impacting upon me. Also, how this may have influenced my interpretation of the data.

During the data analysis, I felt the oscillation between the feelings of compassion for the religious sisters who listen to such traumatic stories from the survivors; and a feeling of doubt of how they could be sounding so positive in their encounter. I felt as though I was becoming conditioned to the sisters' interpretation of survivors' violence. I wondered if my experience conveyed something of how the sisters' experienced survivors'

violence as something they should learn to live with as 'normal', and perhaps not too serious. Hence, some of the interpretations were linked to my own experience as one involved in supporting IPV survivors.

Conversely, if someone who is not a sister should carry out the analysis, the outcome of the interpretation could have been different. However, supervision helped me to refocus on the sisters' own experiences, and to allow their voices to be fundamental to data interpretation. The religious sisters' accounts were somehow fragmented, yet meaningful; their emotional experiences seemed all mixed up, yet emotionally packed. In trying to understand the tones used in their accounts, it was a struggle between personal experiences and their experiences. Thus, making the process a very lengthy one. In fact, most of what was captured in the data were new to the researcher. Hence, the data helped to identify appropriate literatures to my research topic which previously I did not know about. This literature helped to make sense of their account and provided impetus to carry on with the research.

The Process of Data Analysis

A qualitative thematic analysis was used in this study to enable the researcher in identifying, analysing, amalgamating, and recounting themes within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Fereday and Muri-Crochrane (2006) thematic analysis aims at recognising the different themes that describe participant experiences about the research question. Furthermore, the data was analysed using the inductive thematic analysis method of Braun and Clarke's (2013). The process began with listening to the audio recordings, followed by transcribing verbatim. The data was read several times, to plunge into the participant's world, for familiarisation and code generation. Next, step, was searching out of text and areas within the data, for example, laughter, tone, and pauses. Then possible sub-themes were found, the themes were reviewed in a non-judgemental stand, and were then put into different sections that would

enable it to produce a clear pattern of the data. The researcher went on with defining and naming the themes by producing a clear definition and what each theme represents. Finally, relevant extracts were selected and analysed in relations to the research question and existing literatures. The entire process was done several times in a reflective manner for accuracy and completeness. Codes were discussed by the researchers and the supervisor of the project until there was an agreed theme to produce the report.

Finally, the analysis identified five overarching themes that reflected how the faith of the sisters' impact on IPV survivors. These themes are illustrated below with quotes from the data: building of trust; learned religious coping; learn to forgive; enhancing self-discovery and encouraging couple intervention.

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

This chapter illustrates how the sisters experienced and made sense of the impact of their faith on IPV survivors, following a thematic analysis of the data as outlined in chapter 3. The sisters creating a conducive and safe environment for dialogue was a practical way of helping survivors to build trust in them as illustrated in Theme 1. Theme 2 provides an account of how the sisters used their religious belief and their understanding of forgiveness to dispose the survivors to learn the benefits of forgiveness. Finally, Themes 3, 4 and 5 illustrate how the sisters through their various religious activities such as prayers, meditation, bible readings and religious events were able to assist the survivors to find strength and comfort in their situation.

Findings

Theme 1- Building of trust

An overarching theme and a general view shared by most of the participants was that the nature of their interaction and approach in respond-

ing to the survivors helped them to develop a trusting bond with the sisters. Further, the sisters seemed to confirm this by emphasising the importance of active listening. The extracts below illustrate the impact of the sisters' empathic understanding of the survivors.

Extract 1

Noreen: “[...] explaining to her and understanding her from where she is coming from that gradually changed her mindset, changed her from being bitter and negative and coming out of that state...she was willing to forgive and tried to handle it amicably so that the relationship will continue” (L.148-151).

Extract 2

Arlen: “But if you make them understand that you are there for them, you can give them listening ear, listening and trying to understand what they are saying... I bet you they will disposed themselves. Through this most of them has been helped”. (L.26-28).

Extract 3

Elis: “Listening to them was very helpful at least they see that they were not being judged rather trying to be understanding” (L.26-28).

The sisters seem to express that for survivors making meaning of their experiences from their perspectives is vital for them. The religious sisters highlight the importance of active listening and empathy when dealing with survivors. Listening to someone illustrates that the person care and that what they are saying is important; this is even more important for survivors who are often silenced and oppressed (Bogard, 2005). Therefore, the sisters in displaying empathy towards survivors show to them that they care about them and they are there to help them in any way pos-

sible. Peters et al. (2009) noted that empathy is a key component that facilitates positive change in survivors of DV. Previous researches highlighted that some survivors may have faced criticism for being part of the causes of their abuse or blamed for still staying in the abusive condition (Stephens & Sinden, 2000). Therefore, experiencing acceptance and understanding from someone may help them to open and disclose their abuse (Peters et al., 2009). Initiating a trusting bond enables the survivors to arrive at making decisions around their feelings. This is because active listening and understanding can send a powerful message of caring and understanding when dealing with survivors as seen in their encounter with the sisters. According to Mel's expression, survivors would value their experiences to be understood from their perspectives. Therefore, trust is necessary to enable positive change in IPV survivors. Battagila, Finley, and Leibschutz (2003), indicated in their findings among patient and care provider relationship's study, that trust had a significant effect on IPV survivors regarding disclosure to care provider. Likewise, Rodriguez et al. (1998) noted that factors like compassion, awareness, and respect could dispose a woman with DV history to accept support.

The following extract illustrates where the religious sister noted that building a good rapport with survivors can initiate the readiness to accept support such as learning to forgive.

Theme 2: Learn to forgive

During the interviews most of the sisters repeatedly underscore forgiveness in their responses. "Forgiveness" is viewed as an essential factor for healing because it came up organically from almost all interviewees. The sisters seemed to consider forgiveness as a crucial subject when interacting with the survivors. Hence, survivors then disposed themselves to forgive based on the nun's reflection as seen in the following extracts. According to the sister's forgiveness for the survivors were not only about forgiving their abusers but minimising the abuse as well.

Extract 5

Pat: [...] there is that readiness to reconcile and forgive him. Some would even give excuses, saying based on our reflection it could be this man is struggling in this aspect of his life and they keep on giving excuse for why the man may be behaving like that. So, from our discussion. I sense that readiness and willingness in them to let go the hurt as it will also make them feel better of themselves (L.63-68).

Extract 6

Elis: [...] making excuses for the man saying oh sister is because he' being smoking, he went clubbing the other day, and he came back so you can see that they want to forgive [...]" (L.166-168).

Survivors' disclosure only came about because they had experienced the desired understanding of their relationship. Some of the survivors no longer see the ill-treatment of the abuser but rather a person who acts under the impulse of something else. Hence, their willingness to make excuses for their abusers or to let go was impacted by the sisters and their belief on forgiveness 'based on our reflection'. Holgrem (1993) posited that the actual forgiveness is when the forgiver recognises the humanity and value of the abuser above their abuse. Elis seems to say, survivor no longer want their abusers to be perceived as a bad person, rather they tend to minimise the abuse. Taylor's (2004) study with African American women revealed that these women offered prayers for their abusers, while other women in Taylor's (2002) study shows empathy and compassion to their abusers. However, the desire to forgive was tied up to the spirituality and religiosity of the women in Taylor study for they believed that forgiveness is linked to self-healing. Unlike the present study where survivor's forgiveness was influenced by the interaction of the religious sisters. No doubt, the religious sisters coming from a Catholic background where

separation is not allowed may have the tendency to talk about forgiveness. Ryrie (1982) commented in his catholic biblical teaching that couples are encouraged to love and forgive each other as necessary and they ought to be faithful to their vows of commitment to each other. Previous studies have found that some religion does believe that it is the religious duty of the woman to stay with her partner irrespective of the abusive situation (Pyles, 2007). The sisters' enabling the survivors to express the willingness to forgive can be very detrimental for the safety of the survivors.

The religious sisters sensing the survivor's openness to forgive now highlights the benefits of forgiveness as a healing tool as seen in the following extract.

Extract 7

Arlen: "I told them the implication of forgiveness that if you forgive somebody, you forgive yourself". [...] bearing grudges, you are not suffering the people you're bearing grudge again, you're suffering yourself but if you let go, you move on well and positively in life" [...] This encouraged most of them to forgive though not all were willing to return to the abuser". "So, so many of them accepted what I have just said and decided to forgive" (L.105-111).

Arlen believes that impacting their understanding of forgiveness on the survivors has enabled them to forgive the perpetrator and themselves as to move on with their lives. Congruent to previous studies (Clark, 2010), survivors participating in forgiveness talks, unlike those who do not are likely to have a better understanding of forgiveness. That is, it increases their propensity to forgive the abuser, reduce their resentment and increase their hope. The act of holding onto past hurts and ill-feelings is only damaging the person emotionally, and until they can forgive the other, they cannot feel relief. Explaining to the survivors that the benefits

of forgiveness as freeing oneself is more like encouraging forgiveness because it comes with the healing of the self and the spirit. Also, survivors spending time ruminating over perpetrator will only impact negative on their present living condition such as the ability to engage in a healthy intimate relationship (Clark, 2010).

Conversely, Gordon, Burton, and Porter (2004) suggested that promoting forgiveness is not the most beneficial approach with women facing DV. This is because the more a woman forgives her partner's malicious act, the more the likelihood of returning to the relationship (Gordon et al., 2004). Considering the vulnerability of this group of population the idea of forgiveness may be quite harmful (Clark, 2010). Although forgiveness is different from reconciliation which is bringing both partners together, but this distinction may not be possible for survivors who are faced with pressure to forgive and return to the abuser (Freedman, Enright & Knutson, 2005).

Extract 8

Arlen: "I allow the woman to come to term with whatever she has been through or she is still passing through. [...] when I observe that she can take in the word forgiveness that is when I bring in forgiveness and that approach so far has helped them so far" (L.242-245)

In addition, Arlen expressed that survivors who benefit from forgiveness are those who dispose themselves for it after several interventions. This is consistent with the findings of Gordon et al. (2009) which suggested that before promoting forgiveness among IPV survivors it is important to consider how beneficial it will be for them.

The following theme illustrates the impact of religious sister's mediation between couple.

Theme 3: Encouraging couple intervention

Couple intervention is having a dialogue with the both couples as to ascertain how they could be helped which may aid to reduce the abuse and improve the couple's relationship. The sister's faith manifesting through prayers and other religious activities was able to help survivors see the essence of dialogue. The inability to initiate a meaningful conversation appears to hinder reconciliation among some of the survivors. The following extract from Noreen explains the latter.

Extract 9

Arlen: "One of them allowed me to bring the man into the session [...] praying and reflecting together, and that made a huge change okay (L.75-76). They could both see where they have wronged each other. In fact, there was a big reconciliation between them (smiling). Now, they are happily living with their two kids today" (L.83-85).

Extract 10

Mel [...] My encounter with these ladies has been very help to them, [...] enabling them with ways of handling their issues, such as if the man is not understanding, they would have to explain and create a forum for dialogue so as to avoid arguments" (L.61 & 62-64).

Mel seems to teach survivors of different ways of resolving issues without raising a conflict. She suggested the importance of dialogue between partners as it would enable them to discuss their values and maintain communication. The Sisters felt that would reduce the likelihood of violence. The participants express the importance of initiating a mediated intervention between the couple. The sisters seem to highlight the essence of exploring the needs of both partners by enabling them to discuss their issues together. Mel encourages the couple to evaluate the situation as this would help to reduce conflicts. Karakurt et al. (2016) noted that couple

therapy is very beneficial as it helps in reducing violence and physical aggressiveness in the relationship; also, that it seems to offer a better treatment approach than the standard treatment when supporting violent couples. In contrast, some studies have argued that couple intervention in IPV is likely to aggravate future aggression and retaliation from the abusive partner (Stith et al., 2004). However, the outcomes may vary among couple depending on the cultural background as noted in the findings of Karakurt et al. (2016).

Therefore, based on this information the sisters ought to be aware of how the environment may be unsafe for the women since she is one that who disclosed the abused. On the other hand, the settings for the reconciliation may bias the outcome. For example, the sisters due to religious beliefs may use certain phrases or reflections which might not be in favour of the woman. Pyles (2007) found that some faith leaders tend to use certain passages in the scripture to illustrate to the woman the importance of keeping her wedding vows to lure her to stay in an abusive marriage. This is also another area where the sisters may need to be mindful of how dangerous it could be for the survivors.

Theme 4: Learned religious coping skills

This theme follows from the previous themes. The sisters believe that the IPV survivors who are engaging with them and participating in their religious activities tend to learn different ways of handling their issues. The language they use is explicit, relieving, and consoling. According to the sisters, some of the survivors seem to experience a significant positive change in their lives as they participate in the sisters' religious activities. The following extract encapsulate this:

Extract 11

Pat: "Some will say when they pray, they get the feeling that God is answering their prayers because things are much better and are never the same after that encounter with God, I feel so relieved" (smile) (L.84-86).

According to a sister's view, this extract reflects how the survivors describe the strength and healing they experienced from prayers. All the sisters mentioned about the importance of prayers in the life of the survivors. Pat remarks that survivors' encounter of God in prayer is like experiencing a change in their lives. This change reflects in their responses; they seem to have developed a coping ability which they never had before. Prayer was seen to be like a resource where they can go when they need help. The studies of Gillum et al. (2008) of 151 survivors of DV revealed that most of the survivors consider God as their source of strength and comfort. The feeling that God is answering their prayers illustrates the extent to which they are engaging in religious activities, which leaves them with maximum benefits. There was a strong indication among the sisters that for the survivors any improvement in circumstance was because of God's intervention.

Extract 12

Noreen: "She felt that God is answering her prayers so, she developed a very intimate relationship with God in prayers. She made several requests such as my immigration status, getting a job and so many other things to God in prayer and behold all her request was answered. So, she felt it was God that has done it and this no man can do for her" (L.193-197).

According to Noreen the survivors seem to experience some changes as the fruit of their participation in the sister's activities. From the sister's

perspectives the survivors realised the importance of engaging in the nun's religious activities, through which they have discovered the importance of having a relationship with God. For the survivors, God remains the one to call upon at difficult moments. Thus, survivors form a special bond with God in prayers and that enables them to entrust their worries unto Him. Also, this leaves them with the impression that prayer is necessary since it is the only way to communicate with God. God answering their prayers has enabled them to experience a sense of relief and strength to endure their abuse. Arlen's use of the expressions like 'it was God and ...this no man can do' illustrates that survivors seem to attribute any form of amelioration in their circumstances to the power of God. The religious sisters' background of prayer may have had a significant influence on how the survivors relate to God in prayer. Furthermore, the sisters said that, survivors participating in their prayer sessions, and seeing its benefits confirm that prayer has the answer to everything.

Extract 13

Pat: I have learnt from my encounter with you how to initiate a conversation with God as I would with to a friend. Sometimes when I remember my stress, I would go into a quiet place in my house [sigh] and would tell God how I feel, and after that, I feel like a big burden has just left me [a smile]. I have learned how to make my own prayers by just presenting God what I am going at that moment, my aches and pains. I think it has helped me (L.156-161).

The faith of the religious sisters seems to have empowered the survivors with a coping skill 'intimacy with God' to use at a certain moment when they are in a desperate need. The support the survivors got from the sisters is what Geisbrecht and Sevcik (2000) described as the kind of assistance from the faith community that helps survivors to rebuild their lives and that of their families. For the survivors at those moments when

they desire to have someone that loves and cares for them, they resort to God in prayer in a quiet mood. The study with adult protestant by Fiala et al. (2002) revealed that 'God support' predicts less depression and more life satisfaction. The experience of the relief by the survivors seem to bring 'smiles' out of sister's as she speaks. This may illustrate how the survivors would express their feelings of relief when God answers their prayers as they interact with the sisters. Thus, the survivors' religious involvement with the sisters has enabled some of them to rely on God as their support. This supports the emphasis that for survivors God is their strength and comfort according to Gillum et al. (2008). Most of the survivors according to the sisters, viewed God as their stronghold and depending on Him promotes great relief. In congruence with the findings of Davis's (2015), African American women opined that their faith empowers them to believe in God's protection. However, they also indicated that it can make them vulnerable to those who might want to take advantage on them because of their relationship with God (Davis, 2015). However, they also indicated that it can make them vulnerable to those who might want to take advantage on them because of their relationship with God (Davis, 2015). Though prayers can empower the survivors, it may also disempower the survivors by not allowing them to process their resentment fully. Therefore, the sisters ought to be careful as not to allow the survivors to use prayers to suppress their unprocessed hurts and bitterness as this may be detrimental to their emotional and psychological well-being.

Theme 5: Enhancing self-discovery

This theme captures how the sisters helped the survivors to transition into self-exploration of who they are and how they can help themselves. This is because their experience of abuse fragmented their identity and self-awareness. According to the Sisters, the survivors through encountering them has rediscovered a new person.

Extract 14

Mel: "So, encountering the sisters, some of the survivors have been helped to discover personal coping... building their low self-esteem and gaining confidence in themselves...has helped them to calm down and reduces their bitterness and resentment towards their abuser" (L.145-148).

Extract 15

Elis: you know when these ladies come around to us and join in our spiritual exercises like scripture readings, vespers, and meditation...some of the reflections cause them to evaluate their situation and is like it touches their very nature... it exposes them to things around and other people as well (L.260-264).

Elis seems to highlight that the sisters' encounter with the survivors made a significant effect in their lives in so many aspects. The sisters helped the survivors to have a better understanding of their inner strength, which enhances healing and a different perspective of the self. As part of their journey, it helped them to experience a different person in themselves, one that is no longer full of anger and resentment. Recovering of the self and spirit involve things like learning personal skills and self-awareness, and developing one's boundaries (Geisbrecht & Sevick, 2000). Senter and Caldwell's (2002) study revealed that self-discovery for survivors of IPV helped in rebuilding their fragmented identity and enhanced a sense of peace. Elis illustrated that the survivors in the process of participating in their spiritual exercises seem to experience some form of transformation in relation to their past or current histories of abuse. Scripture readings from the bible, and certain passages very often helped people to find positive meaning in their difficult situation.

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will summarise the findings of this study in relation to previous literature as outlined in chapter 2. Also, this section will discuss the limitations and implications of the findings concerning the sisters and their work.

Research aims

The present study seeks to understand how the religious sisters' faith impacted on the IPV survivors and to illustrate how this will inform the sisters' interaction with survivors and make possible suggestions for future practice.

Summary of Findings

The findings revealed that the sisters seem to have a unique way of interacting and relating with the survivors such as attentive listening which is so powerful, in that it enables the survivor to experience a positive change in their lives. The sisters make the survivors experience a

sense of belonging and being heard. Thus, it is making a significant impact on them that some tend to build trust in the sisters to the extent of disclosing their abuse. The current findings explain why some religious men and women in Nason-Clark's (2009) study seek practical assistance and guidance from their faith leader when dealing with the trauma of IPV. Similarly, Boehm et al., (1999) and Geisbrecht and Sevcik (2003), underscored that some survivors in search of how to deal with their abuse tend to seek assistance from their faith leaders. Francis and Crea's (2015) study reiterated that religious institute for sisters is a place where people who are facing difficulties go in search of emotional support and solace.

Furthermore, the findings indicated that survivors' participation in the sisters' religious activities such as prayers, reading of scriptures, spiritual books, and meditation has enhanced their spiritual life; thus, becoming a source of strength and resilience towards their abusive circumstances. Many of them were able to learn how to read the Scripture; they developed a personal relationship with God in prayer and built their self-confidence. According to the sisters, survivors experienced peace and remained stable in the face of their situation. The findings of the current study provide further evidence that God and religious involvement aid survivors to build coping strategies (Gillum et al., 2006). In contrast, certain biblical passages such as that of female subordination to male tend to increase violence against women as revealed by itimil et al. (2014).

Besides, some of the sisters centred more on forgiveness since it allowed the survivors to experience relief from their bitterness towards their abuser. The sisters through engaging some of the survivors in their faith-based programme seemed to encourage them to learn forgiveness. This finding is congruent with Yick's (2008) study, which noted forgiveness as a self-healing tool for survivors of intimate partner violence. Chang et al.'s (2014) study suggested that forgiveness helps to reduce depression and aid in fostering psychological well-being in survivors after their negative life experiences. Also, Ware et al. (2003) indicated that faith leaders

often encourage survivors to forgive their perpetrators and themselves, so that they can move on with their lives. Besides, some studies have argued that forgiveness may be more than just letting go of the past. Instead, it might create an opportunity for the survivor to develop a better understanding of what causes the abuse (Gordon & Baucom, 1998).

Although forgiveness is a healing tool, it can equally perpetuate IPV. Gordon, Burton, and Porter (2014) argued that survivors who tend to forgive their abusers and worry less about the abuse are more likely to return to the abusive relationship. Although there is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation, a victim may forgive and not return to live with the abuser. Clarke (2010) noted that this distinction might not be possible for IPV survivors' who, due to social effect would want to keep the status quo by forgiving and return to the unsafe environment.

The religious sisters live together in a religious community and at different occasions invite the survivors to share in their religious events such as Easter, Christmas, and other special celebrations. These gatherings congregate many who are associated with them through their charity work. Through these events, survivors have developed a relationship with other survivors and other people who may help them in traumatic situations. Consistent with previous researches (Choi, 2018), the church and the clergy significantly impacted on the lives of the survivors by providing them with social and other community activities. Likewise, Gregory et al. (2017) showed that support from relatives, friends, and colleagues can provide a safeguard against the effects of abuse on survivors' well-being. This study further suggested that survivors who actively engage with religious communities tend to create a supportive network. The current study futures with some limitations and implications for practice.

Limitations

First, all the participants of this study are from the same religious institute as the researcher. Here the researcher is acting from an insider position. Perry, Thurston, and Green (2004) indicated that an insider in research have an advantage when conducting qualitative research especially if their participants are aware of this information. However, it has some disadvantages which may have affected the findings of the present study. The researcher and the participants sharing the same position may impose a high expectation on the researcher. Thus, the researcher is likely to treat the data and knowledge that come out in certain ways (Kanuba, 2000; Kitzinger & Wilkinson, 1997). Also, not adhering to the research and researcher boundaries may lead to ethical issues if participants relate with the researcher as a friend or counsellor, this is likely to cause the participants to disclose more than they would have done (Birch & Miller, 2000; Watts, 2008). Therefore, the researcher being an insider to the research may have affected the findings of the present study. Future research would benefit from data collated by an outsider in exploring this same topic.

Second, the findings of the current study are mainly from the review of the religious sisters belonging to the Holy Family Sisters Congregation. Because of the difficulty in recruiting participants from different religious institute. It is important to note that this study does not highlight information about religious sisters belonging to other religious congregations. Therefore, it may be beneficial for further research to assess other religious institutes when exploring the impact of the faith of religious sister on survivors of IPV.

Also, the study used a semi-structured interview with a thematic analysis which provided a rich data and a detailed account of the religious sisters' experiences which they deemed important in their encounter with the survivors of IPV. However, in trying to achieve depth into the themes during the analytic process, some of the data were discarded. Thus, the

findings represent the researcher's interpretation of the sisters' accounts which may have been influenced by her preferences and idiosyncrasies (Anderson, 2010) especially with areas relevant to the research topic. Also, using a thematic methodology, which provides a highly flexible approach and modified for the need of many studies (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This flexibility may lead to discrepancy, and incoherence in the processes of constructing the themes (Halloway & Todres, 2003). Hence, feature research may want to explore this topic using a different methodology.

Furthermore, the current study uses only sisters. It is possible that the significant positive impacts they identified were due to lack of experience working with survivors of IPV. For example, most of them have had few encounters with survivors before this present research; even after asking for skills that were not helpful during their encounter with the survivors. Further research could include a focus on IPV survivors to determine if the study will reveal the same results as current findings.

Implications

Although the current study has some limitations, however, it also provides some potential implications which reveal an essential contribution to the literature.

The findings of the current study revealed further evidence that faith and religion play a significant role in the lives of survivors of IPV (Gillum et al., 2006). Findings support why some religious survivors stated that their faith supports them during their abusive conditions; it endowed them with spirituality and other resources to seek for their safety (Nason-Clark, 1996). Also, participating in religious activities can foster social support. Both spirituality and religious involvements have been found to protect African American DV survivors against depression and psychiatric disorders (Watlington & Murphy, 2006). This study highlighted that for some

of the survivors' faith, and belief in God played a significant positive impact on their survival from their abusive situation. Hopefully, this will encourage continued research in this area of faith/religion that may influence a more positive impact on IPV survivors.

Furthermore, present findings suggest that survivors' ability to sustain and gain strength can come from their encounter with religious sisters and a faith community. This may lend support to why some survivors who are in search of coping with their abusive situation will turn to their religious organisations and family for strength, support, and solace (Boehm et al., 1999; Giesbrecht & Sevick, 2000). Moreover, some survivors of DV will visit their faith leaders such as the clergy and pastor in seek of counselling, practical, emotional and spiritual needs because of their faith (Nason-Clarke & Kröger, 2004). Therefore, religious sisters and faith leaders' understanding of IPV is essential for better intervention and prevention (Beaman-Hall & Nason-Clark, 1997). These findings suggest the need for sisters in this area of work to acquire further training on IPV intervention. For instance, the sisters highlighting the importance of forgiveness, which then disposed some survivor to change their mind and returned to their abusive home, this may not have been the right approach. Some clergy's inability to manage abused women's issues adequately can lead to clergy's silence and neglect as echoed in Fortune's (1991) study. Therefore, the sisters undergoing training for IPV may be beneficial in their attempt to support the survivors of IPV.

These findings also imply that sisters and faith leaders who are supporting survivors by encouraging forgiveness for the abuse and the abusers, ought to consider if forgiveness does influence healing to the extent they think. Hence, it is vital for faith leaders and sisters to consider whether forgiveness is beneficial and safe for IPV survivors before promoting it (Gordon et al., 2009). Thus, saying 'I forgive' without going through any emotional or cognitive process of hurt, only leaves the survi-

vors holding unto bitterness and resentment (Clark, 2010). Further research may need to determine why sisters would consider forgiveness as paramount to IPV survivors.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the findings of this study supported previous evidence on the influence of faith and spirituality on IPV survivors. The faith of the religious sisters indicates a positive impact on the survivors; it enabled them to rebuild their self-esteem and fortitude to endure their abusive situation. Besides, most of them were able to forgive themselves and their abusers to move on well with their lives. Moreover, they had to let go of their bitterness and build positive recouping strategic methods by engaging in the sister's spiritual exercises. This is contrary to the previous study which argues that the church's way of addressing violence against women encourages them to stay in their abusive situation (Gnanadason, 1993). Therefore, the sisters should be careful and cautious in their attempt to support IPV survivors. Future research should seek to explore how the faith of the sisters will impact on IPV survivors if they are to incorporate both religious and professional intervention in their attempt to support these women.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

Reviewer: Mary-Jane Budd

Supervisor: Stephanie Davis

Student: Ruth Maduforo

Course: BSc Clinical and Community Psychology

Title of proposed study: An Exploration of the Religious Sisters understanding of the impact of their faith on Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above-named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES**

(see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

- 3. NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED with minor amendment

Minor amendments required (*for reviewer*):

IPV should be defined in the Invitation letter.

Major amendments required (*for reviewer*):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (*for students*):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name: Ruth Maduforo

Student number: U1616701

Date: 11th November 2019

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER (*for reviewer*)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

HIGH

MEDIUM

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*): M-J Budd

Date: 9/1/19

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UEL's Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder

Appendix B

The Interview Schedule

1. How are you and how has your week been so far?
2. In your work with survivors how would you describe intimate partner violence (IPV)?
 - With specific reference to violence against women, meaning very close relationship (romantic relationship)
3. How would you (sisters) describe your experience with these women since they approached you for support?
 - Is there any typical example? dialogue
4. Could you tell me more about the attitude of these women towards their abuse since you encountered with them?
5. Could you explain how ready or willing are the survivors about forgiving the abuser since they met you?
 - Any specific example?
6. How would you explain the extent to which prayer has helped survivors to alleviate their trauma to some degree?

7. What specific skills or method do you think was more effective in helping survivors (girls/women) to cope better with their trauma?
 - feeling or attitude among the Sisters you think that has given these survivors more strength? (please be specific).
8. In your experience how would explain factors that have not been helpful to the survivors?
9. In your experience how would you describe whether the survivors have learned ways of coping that they did not think of earlier? (can you name them?)

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT INVITATION LETTER

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Before you agree it is important that you understand what your participation would involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?

I am an undergraduate student in the School of Psychology at the University of East London and am studying for a Bsc in Clinical and Community psychology. As part of my studies I am conducting the research you are being invited to participate in.

What is the research?

I am conducting research to explore an understanding of the impact Religious Sisters faith has on survivors of Intimate Partner violence (IPV). Partner Violence (IPV) is common violence of either physical, sexual, or psychological which occurs in a current or former sexual relationship (Womenshealth.gov/relationship and safety).

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that my research follows the standard of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who fits the kind of people I am looking for to help me explore my research topic. I am looking to involve 5 to 7 Religious Sisters working with survivors of intimate partner violence.

I emphasise that I am not looking for ‘experts’ on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate you will be asked questions about the understanding of the impact of your faith on survivors of Intimate Partner Violence in relation to your apostolate. The questions are not about your own

experiences but rather about the impact of your faith as religious leaders on survivors of DV. The interview will be held in one of the offices for an hour; and it will be recorded. The interview is going to be in a form of an informal conversation between of us.

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of my research topic.

Your taking part will be anonymised and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected always. For example, all the information collated would be recorded anonymously without any mention of your personal data. Any identifying data will be removed from the transcript. You will be given a pseudonym to anonymise the data. Again, you are not obliged to answer all the questions and do feel free to stop the interview if you no longer wish to continue

What will happen to the information that you provide?

The interview will be audio recorded with my phone device, which will later be transferred to a PC with a protected password. The recording will later be transcribed on a word document for analysis. The information collected will be stored in a secure cupboard under lock and key for data protection. Equally, you will be given a pseudonym, real names will not be linked to data materials, the real name will be changed during the data analysis. However, the anonymised data can be kept for time of up to 5 years. However, it can also be accessed by my supervisor, examiner or maybe published in academic journals. In addition, every information

gathered before and during the interview such as personal details, interviews recordings and transcript will be destroyed immediately after the submission or a time up to 5 years.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study during the interview and up to two weeks after the interview without explanation, disadvantage or consequence.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. My name is Ruth Maduforo, or you can email: U1616701@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Stephanie Davis School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: Stephanie.Davis@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.

(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix D

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON



Consent to participate in a research study

Exploration of Religious Sisters understanding of the impact of their faith on Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

I have read the information sheet relating to the above research study and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and data from this research will remain anonymous, because I will be given a pseudonym. It has been explained to me what will happen once the research study has been completed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up to two weeks after the studies without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Researcher's Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix E

Debriefing Form

A Qualitative exploration of the Religious Sisters understanding of the impact of their faith on Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV).

Thank you very much for taking the time to participating in this study. This information is for you to learn more about this research project, and how important is your participation in this study. This study was designed to explore of Sisters understanding of the impact of their faith on survivors of IPV.

However, in the event of feeling distress during the interview, I suggest you seek professional support by contacting “The Good Counsel Network” (<https://www.goodcounselnet.co.uk/>; or Tel: 0207 723 1740) or with your spiritual director.

You have up to two-weeks period from the day of the interview to decide whether you would want to withdraw from the study. Hence, you are free to withdraw without any explanation, disadvantage or penalty. However, if you do request, your data will be destroyed.

Thank you again for your participation

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Ruth Dymphna Maduforo is a member of the Holy Family Sisters of the Needy, a religious Institute founded in Nigeria. She is graduate of the University of East London and obtained in 2019 a Bachelor's Degree in Science (BSc) with First Class Honours in Clinical and Community Psychology.

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