

HIV and AIDS Prevention Programmes in Zimbabwe: A Gendered Terrain

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Abstract

Efforts to curb the HIV and AIDS epidemic have reached a deadlock. This emanates from the manner in which gender has been understood in these programmes. Gender has not been tackled in all its complexities that is to include men and children. It is therefore unfortunate that gender has been epitomised as a women's issue. In these gender discourses men are given two or three lines. The ostracisation of men in the domain of HIV and AIDS related issues have created dangerous gaps that has made it difficult for the epidemic to be combated. The paper observed that for HIV and AIDS to be thoroughly dealt with, there must be concerted efforts from both men and women. Feminist theologians should desist from blatantly attacking men as the perpetrators of HIV and AIDS for within these men lies great potential to fight the HIV and AIDS epidemic. The paper in light of social constructionism, literature review and in-depth analysis contends that proper gender equality is a necessity in the battle against HIV and AIDS.

Keywords: HIV and AIDS, gender, social constructionism, feminist.

Introduction

The global Human Immune Virus (HIV) and Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) epidemic has called for drastic measures from various governments to curb it. In this regard, the Zimbabwean government is not an exception. What has been observed in most discourses on HIV and AIDS is that women and girls have been hit the hardest by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Most African theologians such as Musa Dube, Isabel Phiri and Nyambura

Njoroge have enamoured protracted efforts towards gender and HIV and AIDS issues. These scholars are in unison that women have been affected the most by the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Accordingly, Muyambo (2011) articulates that HIV and AIDS disproportionately affect more women than men. To this effect, Teresa Okure cited by Musa Dube asserts: There are two viruses more dangerous than the HIV virus The first virus is one that assigns women an inferior status than men in society. This can be epitomised as the feminization of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

In related studies two South African theologians, Tinyiko Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar argue that the unholy trinity of religion, culture and gender socialization have formed 'a covenant of death' against women in Africa. They observe that this unholy trinity empower men at the expense of their female counterparts and this has made women to be at the mercy of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. This has compelled a lot of interventionist strategies to focus on women in Zimbabwe to be particular. Furthermore, most of these programs are headed by women and they are for women. This has created a dangerous gap that HIV and AIDS is preying on. What has been done on the male gender is also the same that is being done with the female gender. Unfortunately, the intended results of saving women from the plight of HIV and AIDS becomes a mirage.

The above highlighted gender bias is the one that I intend to fill in this particular study. It is good that the epidemic has brought to surface problems chief amongst them is the vulnerability of women. However, within the problem also lies the solution. It is not my intention in this paper to dismiss the vulnerability of women to HIV and AIDS but rather to offer a spirited analysis of how women's efforts to fight HIV and AIDS can be complemented. It is against this backdrop that I wish to argue that the ostracisation of men in HIV and AIDS prevention programmes can be detrimental as that can be a breeding ground for the spread of HIV and AIDS. Chitando cited in R. Nicolson (2008:45) argues for a reflection of the impact of masculinities in the spread of HIV and AIDS in the region. It is Chitando's strong conviction that this reflection must take into cognisance the fact that the involvement of men in HIV and AIDS awareness programmes is a prerequisite.

The need for the participation of men in HIV and AIDS awareness and prevention programmes is best captured by Gary Baker and Christine Ricardo. Gary Baker and Christine Ricardo envisage that gender mainstreaming requires a comprehensive focus on gender in all its complexities including men

and boys, not marginalizing it as a women's issue (Gary Baker & Ricardo 2005). I submit to the findings by Gary Baker and Christine Ricardo bearing in mind that many at times it is the attitudes of men and boys that contribute to the main problems of greater gender equality. It is in this regard that I contend that a focus on women alone in the face of HIV and AIDS can be dangerous since there are plethora factors that militate against them. It is against this backdrop that I am of the view that HIV and AIDS has bedeviled humanity and efforts to fight it must focus on both men and women, small and great, rich and poor, educated and uneducated.

The inclusion of men in the fight against HIV and AIDS is plausible because the extent to which men have been responsible for the widespread of HIV and AIDS is the same extent to which they can be panacea to the HIV and AIDS. Studies by T. Muyambo and J. Marashe have shown that men can contribute immensely to curb the HIV and AIDS epidemic. This is a truism in light of emerging masculinities that are life affirming. This prompted T. Muyambo (2011) to posit that men and boys cannot afford to do 'business as usual' in the context of HIV and AIDS. They need to do 'business as unusual,' that is, becoming real men by redefining and renegotiating masculinities such that they become liberating rather than oppressive and health threatening.

According to J. Hlatshwayo, the issue of HIV and AIDS is not just a fundamental problem of existence, nor an occasion for imputing blame between men and women, but an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the work of God. If all humanity has been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:28), then there is no justification to treat women as second class citizens, because we are all equal in God's family (Gal. 5ff' Romans 8:28). I subscribe to the notion that regarding men and women to be at par has some positive results as this will ensure efficient involvement in nation building and a realization of health and wellbeing since both genders have got fundamental roles to play (Hlatshwayo 2012:124).

In this study I employed social constructionism as a working philosophy that undercuts this study. I argue that the existence of gender misapprehensions makes effective HIV and AIDS prevention programmes a mammoth task. I structured the paper by firstly giving my hypotheses and theoretical framework. In the second section, I gave an overview of gender discourse in Zimbabwe. In the third section, I highlighted the manner in which gender sensitivity help curb the HIV and AIDS epidemic. In the fourth section, I interrogated the need for a holistic gender approach. I therefore concluded

that the elimination of gender bias has tremendous contributions towards the mitigation of the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Hypotheses

My hypotheses are that 1) the lower position of gender focal points in ministries contribute to the ineffectiveness of the institutional mechanism to mainstream gender; 2) there is a low level of understanding of gender and development issues by policy makers; 3) women alone have failed to successfully mitigate the HIV and AIDS epidemic; 4) the involvement of men in HIV and AIDS prevention programmes can help complement women efforts in combating HIV and AIDS amidst their vulnerability; 5) gender bias remains a stumbling block for energies to alleviate the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Social Constructionism

The paper is highly informed by social constructionism. This is a theory that was popularized by Luckman and Berger in their highly regarded work, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Social constructionism regards individuals as integral with cultural, political and historical evolution, in specific times and places, and so resituates psychological processes cross culturally in social and temporal contexts. Apart from the inherited and developmental aspects of humanity, social constructionism hypothesizes that all other aspects of humanity are created, maintained and destroyed in our interactions with others through time. The theory centers on the notion that human beings rationalize their experience by creating models of the social world and share and reify these models through language (Gergen 1985).

Social constructionism bids us to be suspicious of the manner in which the world and reality around us have been portrayed. It views the world and reality as results of social processes and interactions, the description of which –through power and knowledge–sustain some patterns of social action and exclude others (Burr 2003:4-5). At the heart of social constructionism is the view that reality is constructed by people, in social interaction with others, and that language is a crucial factor. Who we are, how we talk to others about who we are, the concepts, metaphors that we use to refer to ourselves, others and

the world around us, are determined by culture and history. It is not something that we were born with. It is rather something that we over a period of time—maybe even unconsciously—were informed into. This therefore, means that people are at the origin of culture and history, culture and history in turn forms people into who they are and how they perceived themselves and the world around them. This knowledge which is culturally and historically determined and sustained by social processes, is institutionalized and legitimated through language (Freedman & Combs 1996:23).

Methodology

This research falls under the qualitative paradigm. There are plethora methods that can be used in data collection. I engaged interviews. Miller and Selter (1992:70) describe interviews as an indispensable tool for social research. It is a face to face conversation meant to solicit information by the interviewer from the interviewee. Despite the fact that there are multifarious interviews that can be used in this particular study, I employed unstructured interviews because it gives room for probing. Since in a qualitative research numbers do not matter much as compared to quantitative research, I had to apply snowball sampling. Snowball or chain sampling (Patton 1990:110) is a method of selecting interviewees by looking for those who can give information on what one is looking for. This is regarded as looking for information-rich cases. I therefore chose to interview teachers and lecturers most of who were females. This was propelled by the need to have an idea of gender conception from the females' viewpoint.

Again to avoid bias of looking at a subject that is purported to have affected women more, I had to employ the phenomenological approach. It uses two main principles derived from Husserl, namely, *epoche* and eidetic intuition. *Epoche* comes from the Greek term *epecho*, which means, 'I hold back'. This requires the scholar or researcher to remove or to suspend any preconceived ideas or previous judgment or knowledge one has on the specific subject of research (Mapuranga, Chitando & Gunda 2013:313). In this particular case, *epoche* helps to suspend all previous judgment on AIDS since I am a man who is writing about issues that concern women. By employing the phenomenological method, I sought to have a balanced and unbiased research.

Gender Discourse in Zimbabwe: An Overview

Before I progress with my journey on gender, it is imperative to define the term gender as it has been subject to a lot of misrepresentation, misconception and misunderstanding. Gender is not a physiological but a social concept that refers to sets of culturally defined character traits labelled as ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ (Peterson & Runyan 1999:257). Similarly, Riches in Chibaya (2007) refer to the term gender as the cultural interpretation of maleness and femaleness as masculinity and femininity. In other words, gender refers to socially learned behavior and expectations that distinguish masculinity and femininity. Copper (1993:94) says, ‘gender is socially constructed, describes the characteristics we ascribe to people because of their sex, the ways we believe they have, based on our cultural expectation of what is male and what is female’. This is also buttressed by Butler when he argues that gender is a show that we put on.

It is noteworthy that gender is a social construct that is neither fixed, permanent nor static. This entails that gender is an idea that is socially constructed in our everyday life. This socialization is engendered in individuals at an early age to the extent that these constructs are consciously or unconsciously embraced. Accordingly, Tomeh (1975) postulates that from a young age, boys are taught to perform proper masculinity. The criteria they must allegedly meet to achieve manhood are taught to them through their most important institution, the family unit. The family is the most important because it is the family that instils the expectations of society in the young boy, and defines masculinity. Within the family, the parents generally teach young girls that they are expected to be obedient, nurturing, and responsible, while the young boys are taught the importance of success and self-reliance. I concur with Tomeh’s submission, cognizant these are the gender ideologies that have been inextricably embedded within the heart, the minds and the souls of most Zimbabweans. It is surprising to note that despite the efforts to emancipate women, most women in Zimbabwe still subscribe to these gender ideologies. This becomes a mammoth task for women alone to successfully wage a campaign against the HIV and AIDS campaign.

In Zimbabwe, meaningful gender discourses are traced to the Beijing Conference of 1995. The Beijing Conference brought together almost 50000 men and women focused on the cross cutting issues of equality and development and peace, and analyzed them from a gender perspective. It

emphasized the crucial links between the advancement of women and the progress for society as a whole. It reaffirmed clearly that societal issues must be addressed from a gender perspective in order to ensure sustainable development. The role of the Beijing Conference in trying to address gender disparities is quite ambivalent in Zimbabwe. This has been viewed with a pinch of salt by most men. This is captured in a song by one Zimbabwean artist Taso, *Akanga abva kuBeijing kwaakanga andodzidza zvema equal rights* (She had come back from Beijing where she learnt about equal rights).

Taso laments bitterly, the effects of the Beijing Conference to the societal concepts of gender in Zimbabwe. The Beijing Conference has fostered an attitude in women that is not in tandem with cultural mores. As such, men who are the gatekeepers of culture feel threatened. It is against this backdrop that most men in Zimbabwe feel that gender discourse is a foreign concept/imposition that had negative repercussions to the societal setup. It is interesting to note that gender discourse is not being denigrated by men alone but also by some women. One of the interviewees, Rebecca (not real name) echoes that whenever she stands up to speak about gender and equal rights she is constantly labelled by some women *Ndiwoka ma Beijing*.

To make matters worse, men might be present in these gender fora but would not be giving a listening ear especially when women are on the vanguard. In this regard Lubunga Ewusha (2012:85) rightly observes when he says, 'The involvement of men in the response to HIV and AIDS does not only depend on men being valued and comfortable in their manhood but, for the most part on the one who is calling them. In Bembe culture to summon a meeting in which men should participate is solely a male prerogative'. Though writing from Bembe culture, Lubunga Ewusha's submission resonates with what is happening in most societies and Zimbabwe is not an exception. I concur with Lubunga Ewusha, cognisant that most HIV and AIDS programmes are not fruitful because they teach women with an assumption that they will empower their male counterparts, which is not always the case. It is a mammoth task for men to adopt practices initiated by women as they feel that their masculinity would be on the verge of disintegration.

Paradoxically, there is need for a call to men so that they become partners with women in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. In this call it would be noble for men to call one another. This view point is well expressed in Oliver Mtukudzi's song, *Tototsiurana pachedu vakomana tapera* (We have to rebuke one another because our lives have been endangered). It appears at the

back of Oliver Mtukudzi's minds that it is no longer ideal for men to brag about life threatening versions of masculinity. Group work is also a powerful means to engage men in discussions of the connection between men and gender issues (Shoko 2012:10). This has some lasting solution as in other countries actions of groups for men have been established and these provide a platform through which to challenge and critique male stereotypes (Shoko 2012:10). In this section I have highlighted the challenges that have ostracized men in participating in HIV and AIDS programmes. I therefore proceed to look at the benefits of male inclusion in HIV and AIDS prevention strategies.

Celebrating Positive Masculinity in the HIV and AIDS Context

Scholars are not in unison whether masculinity should be spoken about in singular or in plural. However, this raging debate is beyond the scope of this study, conversely I will try by all means to show awareness of scholarly permutations pertaining masculinity. For the purpose of this discussion, I propose to adopt Edley and Witherell's definition of masculinity as a gendered category that feeds on the differences in what women and men within a particular culture can or cannot do. It can also be seen as the sum of men's socially produced and gendered characteristic practices at work, within their families, in their communities, in groups and institutions (Edley & Witherell 1995:95). Because of its association to culture, masculinity is allergic to universalistic categorizations. There are, therefore, as many masculinities as there are cultures, classes, times and places, and their contours change over time (Morrell 1998:607).

The notion of masculinity is susceptible to power and this power finds expression in what I would term hegemonic masculinity. Morell identified it as the form of masculinity that is dominant in society. It is against this backdrop that it is revered and desired in society (Pitones 2004:3). Accordingly, Morell asserts that it is renowned for its predilection for the oppression of women, as well as subordination of other versions of masculinity while bestowing power and privilege on men who embrace it. This is the kind of masculinity that most people have in mind leading many especially feminist theologians to regard male contributions as trivial to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. There is another version of masculinity that I call redemptive or liberative masculinity which is well defined by Gerald West.

Gerald West (2012) arguing from the biblical story of Tamar's rape

defined redemptive masculinity when he postulates that ‘Tamar summons forth, anticipates, hopes for, a man who is able to resist from using force, who respects the sociocultural traditions of his community, who is able to discern and desist from doing what is disgraceful, who considers the situation of the other, who considers the consequences of his action for himself, who is willing to listen to rational argument’ (West 2012:184). The kind of masculinity presented by Gerald West is the one that needs to be embraced in the context of HIV and AIDS. Over the past years, there has been a paradigm shift from hegemonic to redemptive masculinity. Redemptive masculinity has envisaged gender in a manner that is life affirming. It is against this backdrop that there would exist a dangerous gap if men’s participation in HIV and AIDS prevention strategies is undermined.

In arguing my case, I am heavily inspired by the findings made by the Christian Aid (2008). According to the Christian Aid, even when AIDS interventions address gender issues, they often fail to address men’s gender roles. Only when programmes are designed to directly address men’s sexual activity can there be a significant reduction in the rate at which the epidemic is spreading. The main mode of transmission is through sexual intercourse. Men are usually the ones who make decisions with whom, where and how to have sex. We need to involve men as partners in social change in particular in terms of challenging gender stereotypes that disempower women (Christian Aid *et al.* 2008:5). What can be inferred from the Christian Aid’s submission is that there are cultural constraints that impact negatively on women making it difficult for them to successfully campaign against HIV and AIDS.

The cultural constraints that hinder women in their effort to curb HIV and AIDS are well expressed by Lubunga Ewusha when he articulates that in some instances women were taught about testing and means of protection against HIV and AIDS infection but could not convince their husbands to do the same because in their culturally conscripted script, women are not supposed to teach men anything related to sex (Ewusha 2012:85). It is against this backdrop that the success of all programmes and treatment is gravitated on benevolence of men to cooperate with each other with love and compassion in their response to HIV and AIDS. It is therefore unfitting to read the conclusions of some disparaging images of men that have been fabricated in some feminist writing which can only result in restraining men’s potential.

In the Zimbabwean context, positive masculinity has actually complemented women’s strenuous efforts to fight HIV and AIDS. Writing

about the role of traditional leaders which is a replica of what is transpiring in redemptive masculinity in most Zimbabwean societies, Marashe (2014) posits that male leaders have got a role to play in fighting HIV and AIDS cognisant of their influential position. He argues that most male traditional leaders have contributed immensely in curbing HIV and AIDS. For instance, Chief Mapuranga in Chipinge, South East Zimbabwe indicated that using his government donated vehicle, he personally drives rape victims in his community to the hospital as soon as he receives a report of the crime so that the victim can receive medical treatment immediately. He subsequently ensures that his policemen arrest the culprit with the assistance of the whole community before handing him over to the state police for incarceration. (Marashe 2014).

The case of Chief Mapuranga is one amongst many cases of men who are being actively involved in the fight against HIV and AIDS. There has been a serious level of deconstruction in the context of HIV and AIDS. Whereas over the decade macho attitudes have been eulogized, most men have now realized it is high time to deconstruct life denying attitudes. Muyambo (2011) in his study among the Ndau people has noted that plethora practices that used to define patriarchy have undergone cultural renegotiation. There are multifarious practices that have been redefined. Chief amongst them is the idea of *kugara nhaka* (widow inheritance). The Ndau men have come to the realization that widow inheritance is not a question of having sex with the wife of the deceased but rather taking care of the family that he left behind. Accordingly, Oliver Mtukudzi sang a song, *Kugara nhaka sandibonde* (widow inheritance is not a matter of having sex with the wife of the deceased.) The deconstruction of widow inheritance rituals can be seen as a mile stone in curbing HIV and AIDS cognisant that daggers were drawn against widow inheritance as one of the perpetrators of HIV and AIDS.

The contribution by Chief Makoni of Rusape in Zimbabwe also speaks powerfully on the role of men in fighting the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Chief Makoni reversed the most controversial practice of using a girl child to pay for an avenging spirit. He devised a plan that instead of giving a girl child to the family of the one who would have been murdered, the family of the accused should provide *lobola* (bride price) when the one member of the deceased family is set to marry. The initiative of Chief Makoni is a subtle way of paying avenging spirits in such a way that resonates with human rights discourse as well as being gender sensitive. He has proved beyond any reasonable doubt

that men can also be passionate about the emancipation of the girl child. It is against this backdrop that I argue that men's involvement in HIV and AIDS prevention programmes should not be treated as trivial. Some men are willing to forego the patriarchal dividend and identify with women and children. By identifying and promoting the progressive virtues of masculinities, African men are returning to their roots, while also laying the foundations for safer, healthier, and more peaceful and productive African communities, since the characteristic negative self-concepts and low self-esteem that breed violence against women will be virtually non-existent (Dobash & Dobash 1977).

Gender-based Violence: Getting the Facts Right

In Zimbabwe, gender-based violence (G.B.V.) has been a topical issue. However, G.B.V has been subjected to a lot of misrepresentation and misunderstanding. As such, it is very unfortunate that gender-based violence has been envisaged as an issue that affects women only which might be a serious fallacy cognisant that there are a lot of unreported cases of male victims though their number would obviously not match that of their female counterparts. According to Philomena Mwaura (2001), gender-based violence and violence against women are terms that are often used interchangeably as most gender-based violence is inflicted by men on women and girls. However, it is important to retain the 'gender-based concept' as this highlights the fact that violence against women is an expression of power inequalities between men and women.

There is a growing awareness that the epidemics of gender-based violence and HIV and AIDS are linked (Musasa Project 2003). Women who are exposed to gender-based violence are more vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. In this regard, addressing gender-based violence is an effective HIV and AIDS prevention strategy. The nexus between sexual and gender-based violence is well expounded in the following words, 'Sexual and gender-based violence (S.G.B.V) is linked to HIV transmission. Coerced sex in all its forms-from rape to age-disparate sex to transactional sex- is usually perpetrated by men. It facilitates inter alia, transmission of sexually transmitted infections including HIV. Sexual violence may cause damage to avoid infection by sex with younger, possibly virgin, partners might be already HIV positive and infect the women (Agadh *et al.* 2007:12-13). It is with this in mind that one can argue that gender-based violence has been identified as a significant driver of HIV

and AIDS infection in women. This means that there is need for protracted efforts to be enamoured to battle against the spread of the epidemic.

A study focusing on the Zimbabwean male psyche with respect to reproductive health, HIV, and gender issues (Chiroro *et al.* 2002) established that most men regard having many sexual partners as normal. This has prompted a growing awareness of the need to rethink masculinities, violence, and AIDS (Gibson & Hardon 2005). It is in light of men's strategic positioning in the struggle against HIV and AIDS that the call for greater focus on men has been gaining momentum. Men tend to have multiple partners and perpetrate gender-based violence. There is therefore an urgent need to tackle inequitable gender norms, especially those associated with masculinity, in the overall response to HIV and AIDS. Sonja Weinrich and Christopher Benn (2004) have observed that conventional male-role stereotypes relating to multiple sexual partners, sexual violence, unprotected sexual intercourse as signs of manhood must be corrected. They challenge men to be involved in the provision of care, and to visit counselling centres more often. They also discourage the use of alcohol and drugs, as they increase the vulnerability of men.

While history is replete with facts that points to men as the major perpetrators of violence, it would be foolhardy to confine the spread of HIV infection to men alone. I remember vividly asking one of my uncles who was a sex maniac why he has contemplated promiscuity. He retorted that, 'You will never realise the excruciating pain that some men are facing from their female counterparts'. I later discovered that he was being denied conjugal rights by his wife. It is only because of cultural barriers that my uncle including many other men are not coming into the open to explain the ordeals that they are going through. This emanates from the fact that it is ill omen in the world of men to be seen as being superintended by their wives. This would see one being labelled as living under the 'petticoat government.'

The case of my uncle that I highlighted above challenges the traditional understanding that men can have sexual escapades any time they feel like. It is clear that my uncle clearly acknowledged that in order for a sexual encounter to transpire, there is need for the consent of the female counterpart. Unfortunately, he was being deprived of his conjugal rights which then forced him to engage in extra marital sex. This argument is reinforced by Baumeister when he writes, 'women constitute the refraining force on sex. That is, they refuse many offers or chances for sexual activity. When sex happens it is because the woman has changed from no to yes' (2013). It is Baumeister's

strong conviction that in sexual affairs, women's position matters the most despite the fact that they are being presented as inferior to men. This argument was buttressed by one of the interviewees who argued that 'women having been ruling men in private, the real challenge they have now is that they want to rule in public and this has seen a stumbling block of men's adherence to biblical and cultural mores' (Rwizi, interview 2016).

The fact that women can also pose a threat to men's reproductive health is echoed in Charles Charamba's song, *Kune vakadzi vakatendeka vakatisiya mhosva ndeya baba. Kune vana baba vakatendeka vakatisiya mhosva ndeya mai* (There are many faithful wives who died because of their husbands. There are also faithful husbands who died because of their wives.) This is also supported in Kireni Zulu's song, *Nyaya yekuzvibata iyi inotonetsa* (The concept of faithfulness is a mammoth task). What can be deciphered in Charamba's song and Kireni Zulu's song is that the tables have been turned. Whereas history is replete with men being involved in promiscuous behavior, some women have also joined the bandwagon. In this regard, to look at the causes of HIV and AIDS with patriarchal lenses is to admit to play according to the divide and rule policy which has been proliferate to the spread of HIV and AIDS. This becomes a gendered terrain that need not be dismissed only but be dismissed with scorn.

Henrietta Mgovo, a theologian and lecturer at Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University who purports to be a liberal feminist is one of the few women who has chosen not to discuss HIV and AIDS with masculine tendentiousness. Her point of departure is that both women and men are involved in the spread of HIV and AIDS cognisant that sexual intercourse takes place between two people. It follows that when men are accused with having many sexual partners it means that a lot of women are also involved. Confining the consequences of sexual escapades to one gender is one of the fallacy that has also been committed in biblical times. In the Bible tradition, the Jews went to Jesus with a woman who had been caught in adultery. This opens a Pandora box of plethora questions, did the woman commit the sin in solitude? If a man was involved why it that the man was not brought to Jesus? Why did the Jews choose to bring the woman alone? These questions depict how gender construction has impacted negatively on people's perceptions on evils bedevilling humanity.

From the above stated scenario, the Jews would attribute the folly of prostitution to women alone where as in a Zimbabwean context, daggers have been drawn against men as the chief culprits in the spread of HIV infections.

This has created malicious gaps that has been fertile to the growth of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Henrietta Mgovo made some meaningful insights pertaining gender disparities in the context of HIV and AIDS. According to Henrietta Mgovo people are majoring on the manner. The issue at stake is not to look at who is responsible for the spread of HIV and AIDS or who is more vulnerable but to look at effective ways of combating HIV and AIDS that has wreaked havoc in Zimbabwean societies. She gave an illustration of a leopard attack. She says, 'When an individual is being attacked by a leopard it is foolhardy to look at whether the leopard is male or female but what is need is to offer immediate rescue to the victim' (Mgovo, interview 2016). Henrietta Mgovo's argument is that there is no need to concentrate on certain discourse like men's promotion of the spread of HIV and AIDS but instead to come up with a combined effort for women and men to deal with the HIV and AIDS epidemic.

Towards a Holistic Gendered Approach

Linda Mabwe a lecturer at Zimbabwe Ezekiel Guti University envisages that there is need for a holistic gender approach if policy makers are seriously concerned about combating HIV and AIDS. (Mabwe, interview 2016) In concurrence to Linda Mabwe, Mwaura (2001:178) writes, 'Theology on gender concern should be a task for both men and women and not women alone. Women's or men's concerns are the concerns of everybody'. It is a moribund that gender perspective and gender mainstreaming from most feminist writings has ignored the gender of men and boys. It is against this background that Musa Dube in Muyambo (2011) calls upon theologians and others to be actively involved in transforming the terrible twins of culture and gender. She articulates, 'Any theologian, leader, lecturer or worker who lives in the human-rights era-who believes in democracy, and wants to contribute to the fight against HIV and AIDS, which is turning our dark-peopled continent into a red fire-inflamed continent of death-must not seek to understand fully how gender is socially and culturally constructed, how it fuels the spread of HIV and AIDS, but also to change gender' (Muyambo 2011:25).

What is emerging is that some faulty gender misconceptions need to be demystified in the context of HIV and AIDS. In Zimbabwe, Carol Nteletsha, a peer educator in Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa, Hatfield District is ready to admit that Betty Makoni did a splendid job when she inaugurated the

Girl Child Network (G.C.N). The Girl Child Network in Zimbabwe had contributed immensely towards the emancipation of the girl child through the leadership of Betty Makoni. However, since the organization is focusing on girls alone it can be deciphered that the Girl Child Network has achieved half of what it could have done had it offered a holistic gendered approach. The argument by Nteletsha Carol is that the organisation should have preoccupied itself in dealing with the throbbing of both girls and boys so that instead of it being a 'girl child's network,' it would have been a 'children's network' (Nteletsha, interview 2016).

The premise behind the above supposition is that whilst it is a prerequisite to educate the girl child, educating the girl child alone is tantamount to being dishonesty as this is offering a half solution. This is compelled by the fact that even an educated girl can be preyed upon by even an uneducated man. In Zimbabwe, it cannot be disputed that many young girls have sex with older men (sugar daddies) for money, gifts, or status. It is imperative for one to bear in mind that most of these girls will be even studying at universities. This leaves one to question the role of education to the girl child in a bid to mitigate HIV and AIDS. It is against this background that I argue that men should also be taught at an early age to do away with macho attitudes that are risky. As Martin Foreman cited by Muyambo rightly observes, 'Boys grew up believing that it is natural for men to have frequent sex and having many sexual partner is a sign of virility' (Muyambo 2010:25).

This entails that there is need for boys to epitomize girls as equal partners. Accordingly, Mapuranga argues that, '...the roles of women should not be looked down upon'. It is Mapuranga's strong conviction that assigning women an inferior status than men in the society is quite lethal. This is the feminization of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. According to Dingu Caroline (interview 2016), the feminization of HIV and AIDS is best portrayed in the concept of male circumcision. For Dingu, at the heart of male circumcision is the idea that male circumcision reduces the risk of HIV and AIDS by 60%. It follows that by so doing, men would be protecting themselves against their female counterparts. This demonstrates a misapprehension that women are the oasis of HIV infections. What is ideal is to have a protective measure that protects both women and women. There is need for the elimination of gender bias.

Conclusion

In conclusion, one can state that gender misconceptions, misrepresentation and misunderstanding have been the fertile ground for the spread of HIV and AIDS. The perception of gender as a women's issue should be interrogated. The success of HIV and AIDS prevention programmes does not solely depend on women alone. Just as in the Bible God rightly noted that it is not good for a man to be alone, by the same token, in the context of HIV and AIDS, it must be acknowledged that it is not ideal for women alone to deal with the HIV and AIDS epidemic. This emanates from the fact that strategies of HIV prevention like change in sexual behavior cannot be effective when women are the protagonists of HIV and AIDS awareness campaigns.

There has been a growing awareness that there is need for men to identify with women as equal partners in areas like education, employment and in economic opportunities. However, culture that has given men comparative advantage over women remains a stumbling block cognisant that the deconstruction that men are willing to embark on is only to a certain extent. What is needed therefore is to come up with the positives out of the negatives. This entails that the same manner in which male predilections have endangered humanity is the same way in which they can offer solutions to the HIV and AIDS epidemic. It is against this backdrop that broadly speaking I argue that there is need for men to partner with women in the struggle against HIV and AIDS. The elimination of gender bias is therefore a window to mirror effective HIV and AIDS prevention programmes.

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