

# **Interrogating the Role of Language in Clergy Sexual Abuse of Women and Girls in Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

The abuse of women and girls by individuals in authority has been a subject of complex debates in both social and academic discourses. This article analyses the language of deception used by the clergy in winning the trust of women and girls in Christian congregations prior to abusing them. We used Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the language of religious leaders in the narrative of women and abuse as reflected in the media. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzed 17 news articles drawn from the Zimbabwean media landscape. With these analyses, we were interested in the language used by the religious leaders as reported by the victims. Findings indicate that, to entice their victims, religious leaders rely on grooming – a persuasion process that, in the context of the clergy, invariably fuses the language of courtship, spiritual language, and religious language in order to persuade. The clergy also often used their ‘elevated’ religious position to threaten women with evil spirits and the perpetuation of their problems if they would not do as the religious leader instructed, which often led directly to sexual assault. Coupling the threats were assurances that only the pastor could rid them of their problems. This approach left the women and girls, already vulnerable due to all kinds of reasons that have brought them to seek help from the clergy in the first place, devastated and dependent on the

religious leaders. The victims would thus often seek the perpetrator-to-be for his services. We conclude that the vulnerability of women and girls and their trust in the clergy expose them to exploitation, manipulation, and sexual abuse by the same religious leaders supposed to be representing purity. Further, due to the burden of poverty, unemployment, and the worsening economic environment in Zimbabwe, women remain at the risk of falling prey to the deceptive language of the sexually abusive clergy.

**Keywords:** Clergy, sexual abuse, language of deception, courtship language, Christian abuse, women abuse

## **Introduction**

Our study is preoccupied with how the clergy in Zimbabwe use different language apparatuses to persuade and intimidate sexual victims-to-be in the church in Zimbabwe. The sampled articles refer to a number of Christian denominations. We focused on how language is used on some Christian women and girls to lure them into improper sexual relationships with the clergy and into sexual abuse. The major assumption of the study is that the sexual abuse of the women and girls by the clergy in the church must have a basis in some form of deception, which relies heavily on language apparatuses. This kind of abuse differs from other types of abuse, as there are no violent acts of waylaying and secret attacks on women and girls, which are increasingly becoming the ‘norm’ in society. This type of abuse rather originates from the trust that the women and girls have in the clergy. This has motivated our interest in the various language apparatuses that perpetrators of sexual offences in the church employ to court and intimidate their victims before, during, and after sexual abuse.

We engaged with a sample of news articles covering the abuse of Christian women and girls by the clergy. In these, our interest lay with the language used by the perpetrators as reported in the news articles. We focused on the use of language before and after the sexual assault. The study was also interested in those instances where the clergy evoked the supernatural to intimidate women and girls seeking spiritual deliverance, into submission.

We subscribe to the notion that clergy sexual misconduct against women involves situations where the accused is a clergyman and the

complainant is a congregant woman whose power to make independent choices is less than that of the clergyman due to his position in the church. However, we extend this concept by labelling this sexual behaviour as *rape* and calling the actor a *perpetrator*. In other words, we regard this sexual behavior as criminal, more than mere misconduct, as the consequences are dire. We refer to this behavior as ‘sexualized violence’ elsewhere in this article.

The Zimbabwean economic environment, specifically characterized by poverty and unemployment, has been on the downturn for at least the past two decades (Kanyenze 2003:53-80). This has led the populace to, among other pertinent decisions, turn to religion, where promises of redemption and prosperity abound (Landa & Zhou 2018:39-55) and where, unlike the political leadership and governance circles, there are promises of employment (Machingura, Togarasei & Chitando 2018). It would seem that the economic woes have led the masses to seek spiritual intervention where political solutions have failed. UNICEF (2016) indicates that in 2016, only 16% of household heads indicated non-affiliation with any religious grouping. Spiritual interventions have often involved healing and deliverance, which means ‘being freed from demonic influences and curses so that people may enjoy health and wellness’ (Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:157) as well as wealth and prosperity. Deliverance has, thus, been presented as an all-solving mechanism to deal with a myriad of challenges that believers face in different spheres.

Prosperity theology has attracted the masses by convincingly associating prosperity with deliverance (Togarasei 2011:336-350; Asamoah-Gyadu 2004:164; Meyer 2004:447-474). Therefore, Pentecostalism has perpetually twinned health (of the soul, body, and mind) with wealth (spiritually and materially). It is our argument in this article that women and girls have lost the most in this twinning of health and wealth by the church, while the clergy, some born out of the economic crisis-religious boom nexus, have benefited the most, financially and otherwise. The biggest major loss accrued to women and girls, is being victims of sexual abuse in the church. Recent trends indicate that there is an increase in the incidence of the clergy preying on women and girls in the church in Zimbabwe and South Africa, among other countries in Southern Africa.

While deliverance (for health and wealth and from demons and curses) has been the major pull factor for the masses in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, it is at these deliverance sessions where women and girls have

suffered abuse. While this abuse can take several forms, like the feminization of the altar call in the church (cf. Zhou & Landa forthcoming), the major form that has attracted the attention of the media and a few researchers, is the sexual abuse of women and girls by the clergy. In the newspapers in Zimbabwe, there have been several headlines in the past few years depicting and detailing sexual offences by the clergy. These, to pick a few from the sample discussed later in this article, include the following: ‘Zimbabwean pastor gets 50 years for rape’ (Anonymous 2017); ‘Magaya charged with rape’ (Mhlanga 2016); ‘Prophet “rapes” sister-in law to cleanse goblins’ (Chiramba 2018); ‘Pastor gets 60 years for preying on congregant’ (Chingarande 2017), and ‘HIV<sup>+</sup> pastor caged 18 years for raping congregant’ (Saunyama 2017).

Seeking counselling services from pastors often expose women and girls to sexual abuse, especially when the counselling is done in the absence of other women (Takaza 2018:72-95). Sindiso Zhou and Nhlanhla Landa (forthcoming) indicate that, due to socialization, more women than men in Zimbabwe are seeking deliverance in the church during the altar call. Collen Takaza (2018) also indicates that patriarchal cultures of leadership have permeated the church, leading to the oppression and abuse of women going unpunished.

The subject of abuse of women and girls has received a lot of attention over the years. However, the abuse of women and girls specifically by the clergy, has not received as much special attention as domestic violence (ONS 2018a; ONS 2018b; Walby, Towers & Francis 2014:187-214; Hester 2013:623-637), intimate partner violence, child abuse, the role of the church in gender justice (Knickmeyer, Levitt & Horne 2010:94-113; Wang, Horne, Levitt & Klesges 2009:224-235), and gender inequality, among other more general subjects. Our study, therefore, interests itself with the abuse of women and girls in the church.

## **Literature**

A literature survey (eg. Jewell 2006:23-24; Clarion 2007; Jackowski 2004; Shupe 2007) indicates that the clergy use their position in the church and their supposed spiritually elevated placement to manipulate women and girls into having sex with them. Anson Shupe (2007) specifically indicates that the culture of trust created in religious groups, implying that the clergy is always

benign and well-meaning, is largely to blame for the abuse of congregants by the clergy. Since they often are deemed to represent the way to eternal life, the clergy hold extreme power in the church (cf. Shupe 2007) and indeed in the community. This power is often intoxicating (cf. Schrock-Shenk 1999), and the religious leader, as the party that wields greater power in this association, should, but does not always, act in the best interest of the congregant (cf. Rutter 1989).

As literature indicates, in African communities, church leaders are the most trusted leaders (cf. Ferret 2005) to whom many congregants turn for solace, counselling, representation in peace talks, and all kinds of negotiations. However, this trust-relationship is often abused by the clergy. On the part of the clergy themselves – they think that they are merely enjoying the spoils of the kingdom (cf. Shupe 2007). The titles that the clergy assume also make the congregants view them, what they say, and all that they do, with awe (cf. Zhou, Pfukwa & Landa 2018:201-224; Poling 2005:55-70).

Researchers like Diana Garland and Christen Argueta (2010:1-27) indicate that the clergy manipulate women and girls by using grooming, which refers to a calculated long-term development of a close relationship with their targeted victims before abusing them. They also use framing, a concept that has been discussed in detail by David Snow and Robert Benford (Snow & Benford 2000:55-60). Framing strongly relates to persuading others to buy into one's belief system, beliefs, and ideological inclinations. In exemplifying framing, Patricia Liberty states: 'You are an answer to my prayer. I asked God for someone who can share my deepest thoughts, prayers, and needs and He sent me you...God brought us together because He knew how much I needed someone like you' (Liberty 2001:81-90). With words like these, many victims are brought closer to the perpetrator before they are victimized; they are made to feel important and they believe that they are serving a God-ordained purpose that has been revealed to the man of God.

The feelings of importance, and being made to believe that they occupy a special place in the fulfilment of the goals of the kingdom, often lead to the victims being isolated from their family, friends, and the rest of the congregation (cf. Grenz & Bell 2001). This makes it difficult for them to report or confide in somebody else. It also makes it significantly difficult for family and others to see what is happening to the victim. When they realize that they have actually been violated, which is usually after a long time (Fortune 2009), victims often find it difficult to seek help, due to fear of

reprisal, condemnation, and being blamed (cf. Gravelin, Biernat & Bucher 2019; Garland and Argueta 2010; Benyei 1998). Mark Chaves and Diana Garland (2009:817-824) found that one in every 40 women congregants in America has been a target of sexual abuse by the clergy.

Studies indicate that, while sexual abuse is very prevalent in the church (cf. Flynn 2003), only a few cases are reported (cf. Shupe, Stacey & Darnell 2000). This culture of not reporting, we argue, perpetuates the abuse of women and girls, and opens up avenues of victimization of other and more women and girls in the church and elsewhere. We hold the view that, as long as women do not report abuse cases, perpetrators will not stop. However, we also acknowledge that this culture stems from the presence of abuse of women everywhere in the communities that they live: In their home, by the police, and in the larger society. Besides, they are used to having issues resolved locally, in the families and in the clans. Therefore, taking an issue outside the inner circles is strange to them (cf. Peacock-Taylor 2003), leading them to report such cases only to other members of the clergy, whom they consider as part of the inner circle.

## **Theoretical Approach**

This study utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). We chose CDA because it analyzes ‘the dialectical relationships between discourse [including language but also other forms of semiosis, e.g. body language or visual images] and other elements of social practices’ (Fairclough 2001:3). Norman Fairclough also insists that social actors from different disciplines and different social levels see and represent life in different discourses. Our interest, therefore, was in the specific ways that religious leaders used discourse in interaction with the women and girls that they sexually abused. Our aim was to establish a pattern in the language apparatus employed by the different church leaders who are the subjects of the news articles sampled for this study. What makes CDA relevant for this study is its multi-disciplinary approach to the relations between discourse and society (Van Dijk 1995:7-27). CDA also concerns itself with how social actors exercise power, for ‘CDA always aims at exploring the way social power abuse and dominance are enacted in society’ (Bilal, Tariq, Zahra, Ashraf & Sibtain 2012:1). CDA ‘is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way that

social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context' (Van Dijk 2001:352). We were interested in the imbalance of power between the clergy perpetrators of sexual abuse and the women and girls in the church who are their victims.

Due to the focus on the abuse of women and girls by church leaders, the study specifically benefited from insights from Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) (cf. Lazar 2007:141-164). As a unique branch of CDA, FCDA represents 'a form of analytical activism, which focuses on critical feminists' efforts at radical social change' (Lazar 2007:160). FCDA advances the argument that the problems that women face, as well as their accomplishments, are not a personal matter (the *me*), but are social, collective, and group challenges and accomplishments (the *we*) (Lazar 2007:160). Central to FCDA is gender relationality (cf. Lazar 2000:373-400), entailing 'discursive co-constructions of ways of doing and being a woman and a man in particular communities of practice [and how men talk] and are textually represented' (Lazar 2007:150). We subscribe to the notion that the abuse of women and girls in the church in Zimbabwe is not a matter of isolated cases. Rather, women and girls in the church are falling victim to a systematized form of abuse that follows certain patterns of discursal encounters between the clergy perpetrators of sexualized violence and the women and girls who are eventually victimized.

## **Methods**

The study employed a qualitative approach. Our sample includes a collection of 17 news articles drawn from several news providers in Zimbabwe. These are either fully online newspapers or online versions of the printed newspapers, which are easy to access. The specific articles were selected using a keyword search on the Internet. The keywords included rape; Zimbabwe; sexual abuse; pastor; and prophet. There was no specific criterion for selecting the newspapers, as the process started by identifying the news articles on the Internet before getting the details of the newspapers in which they were published, which were only relevant as far as they informed us on the credibility of the content as well as for purposes of sourcing.

Without interviewing the victims of sexual abuse, court proceedings were considered a rich source of information on what actually transpired between the perpetrator and the victim. We relied on news articles that emanated from the court and which were recordings of live court proceedings. Generally, in news articles, court reporters cannot report on anything said in the absence of the jury, until after the case has been concluded (Landa & Zhou forthcoming). Our reliance on news articles as near accurate recordings of the narratives of victims and their abusers, was informed by two key functionalities of court news reporting: First, hard news reporting is a restricted and ethically constrained news media genre that rides on objectivity and fact stating; second, court reporting has strict guidelines that the news media often find difficult to flout as this has legal consequences. However, with all these in place, the factuality of the narratives by the victims can never be guaranteed by the news articles, which are mere recordings of the statements of the people involved. We also acknowledge potential subjectivities in reporters' paraphrasing of the narratives by victims.

Patterns were drawn from the themes that emerged in the initial stages of the critical discourse analyses of the sampled articles. These patterns guided the analysis of the data and discussion of results. Three key thematic strands are used in the discussion below, namely *trust* as an extra-linguistic device, *fear-inducing language and indoctrination*, as well as *deliverance*.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

While there has been a fair distribution of research on the abuse of women in the church and by the clergy, very little research has focused on what role, if any, language plays in the abuse of women and girls in the church discourse. Language, as Derek Hook (2004) insists when citing Steve Biko, is a weapon in the hands of the oppressor. As Fairclough (1993:133-168) indicates in his theorization of CDA, social agents, in our case the clergy, rely on social structures (including language) to produce texts.

Research on the abuse of women in the church has often depicted it as spontaneous and not premeditated. However, as we argue in this article, the abuse of women in the church seems to be premeditated, intentional, and to follow set-out procedures. The section below discusses how the clergy in the

sampled articles used linguistic and extra-linguistic apparatuses (devices and strategies) to manipulate congregants, leading to the sexual abuse of women and girls in the church.

### **Trust as an Extra-Linguistic Device**

An analysis of the news articles covering the court cases on the abuse of women and girls by clergy, reveals that there was a relationship of trust created between them and the clergy. This, in some instances, was created through the pastor or prophet praying for a congregant and not doing or saying anything inappropriate to them. The situation created an atmosphere of trust, such that when, for example, a congregant was told to return for further deliverance they would easily return. An example is the court story covered by the NewsDay on 3 November 2017 (Chingarande 2017):

[T]he woman went to Maurukira's place of residence to be delivered from spiritual attacks, but the man-of-the-cloth prayed for the woman and instructed her to return and collect some anointing oil which had run out of stock. The court was told that after a week, Maurukira called the woman's father advising him that he had sourced the anointing oil and he could collect it on his daughter's behalf. However, the victim's father then asked his daughter to go and collect the oil on her own. Upon arrival at Maurukira's residence, the court heard that the pastor prayed for her after which they left the house together and headed for St Mary's where the pastor is said to have another house.

In this way, the congregants grant the clergy 'extraordinary trust, power and authority' (Parent 2005:1). By calling the father and insinuating that anyone could collect the oil on behalf of the congregant, the pastor attracted the trust of the father, who then willingly sent his daughter to him. It would seem that he also earned the trust of the congregant, who apparently did not see anything wrong with her going to collect the oil after her father had told her that she could collect the oil by herself. Further, even when she was prayed for and asked to accompany the pastor and his friend to another house, she seemingly did not suspect any ulterior motives. This was due to both the trust relationship already created and the fact that there was somebody else.

However, as the story further indicates, the third person turned out to be an accomplice when, on arrival at the other house, he locked the door from outside and went away, leading to the sexual assault of the congregant.

In the first place, to bunch all unexplainable ailments, diseases, and circumstances of congregants as spiritual attacks, has the effect of cornering congregants into putting trust in the clergy. All things spiritual are, therefore, supposed to be dealt with by a spiritual leader. The moment a challenge or problem was described as spiritual, the power to deal with it was taken away from the bearer of the challenge as it called for a higher order spiritual intervention, which was the job of the pastor, priest, or prophet. A reading of the victims' accounts, as told to the court by the prosecutor and as reported by the newspapers, would suggest that the description of the congregants' problems as spiritual is a deliberate linguistic strategy to force those looking for help to put all their trust in the perceived helper.

In another case, the victim said that she had not reported multiple cases of being abused by her pastor, because of the trust relationship between the pastor and herself and between the pastor and her parents (Taruvinga 2016):

The girl left and did not tell anyone of the alleged sexual attack because of the trust she had in her pastor and because of the relationship which was between her parents and Makomo...Makomo called the girl to his house during the same year. She found the pastor and his family at home and there were some visitors. Prosecutors allege that he then left with the visitors, but told the complainant not to leave in his absence. The girl complied and slept over, but during the night, Makomo allegedly sneaked into the spare bedroom where she was sleeping and raped her once.

She told the court that she did not report the cases because of the trust she and her parents had in the pastor. The trust relationship between the pastor and the victim's parents was such that the girl could even sleep at the pastor's house in the presence of the pastor's family, not knowing that she could still be raped under these circumstances. Following this incident, it is said that the pastor got his maid to call her for a sleepover. As Shupe (2007) indicates, it is the trust that the clergy are always well-meaning that makes women congregants vulnerable to sexual abuse. The intentions of the clergy are

apparently not always in the best interests of the women and girls (cf. Rutter 1989).

### **Fear-inducing Language and Indoctrination**

Threatening victims with punishment from some supernatural power, such as God, the devil, demons, or evil spirits seems to permeate the cases involving the abuse of women and girls by the clergy. This, of course, is accompanied by threats of poverty, misfortune, and humiliation. For example, in the case relating to Pastor Robert Gumbura in 2013, who was convicted for sexually abusing several women in his church, the pastor was recorded to have told the victims that, by right, all the women in the church belonged to him. They ‘were given away to their husbands as a “loan”, but Gumbura could still exercise certain rights over them’ (Samukange 2013). In other words, by presiding over the marriages in his church, the pastor loaned out women to men and claimed them back whenever he felt he wanted, because he owned all of them ‘regardless of their marital status’ (Samukange 2013). The article also reports that a former congregant told the court that ‘Gumbura was viewed as God in the church and indoctrinated his followers into believing that God directly communicated with him and gave him authority to do as he pleased...the church had songs composed in praise of Gumbura (Samukange 2013).

Congregants were brainwashed and indoctrinated. They were made to believe that the pastor spoke directly to God and therefore spoke the words *of* God and *on behalf of* God. In other words, who were they to go against, or not listen to the one who spoke on behalf of God – the one who could speak to God directly about their problems and bring back direct instructions? These discourses in the church had the effect of congregants not questioning the authority of the clergy, putting the women and girls in a very compromising situation as they were often the victims of such scheming. Anybody who did not agree with the pastor was cast out as a rebel. The above falls within what Fairclough (1989:85) describes as ‘linguistic manipulation’, which involves the deliberate and deceptive use of language to have control over other social actors.

## **Deliverance**

Deliverance sessions have presented the clergy with a way of exploiting and manipulating women and girls in the church. In many of the reported cases, the women and girls sought the clergy's help to get healing. Such healing sessions often ended in their being sexually abused. For example, in a story entitled "'Sexual healing' pastor up for rape', The Herald reported that the woman was invited for a healing session by the pastor after she had witnessed several miracles in the church. After agreeing to healing, which was done in private because it involved complicated processes like applying holy lotion on the woman's body and womb, The Herald reports that

Mapfumo informed her there was a spirit causing her to be not prosperous and to bear many children and that needed to be prayed against...after praying for the lotion, Mapfumo applied it on the woman's body and indicated that some of it was to be applied on her womb. 'He told me to lie down, applied the lotion on my privates and inserted his manhood intending to use it to apply the lotion in my womb', she said. The woman alleged that Mapfumo demanded a cow after the alleged rape for the sacrifice he had done to deliver her (Mapani 2017).

The perpetrator made the victim believe that bearing many children was spiritual, and as long as the spirit causing her to bear many children was not cast out, she would not be delivered from poverty. In other words, the fact that the woman was bearing many children had nothing to do with unprotected sex or family planning methods but had everything to do with demonic possession. Therefore, the woman needed deliverance from bearing too many children, otherwise she would continue to have more children and sink deeper into poverty.

It made sense to the victim that if the other people had received miraculous deliverance and their problems went away, the pastor's methods would be fool proof and authentic. According to The Herald, she told the court that '[t]he pastor delivered my friend, who was HIV-positive and after he prayed for her she tested negative...He also helped one of the church members to secure a job through his prayers, while she did not have any qualification' (Mapani 2017).

## *Interrogating the Role of Language in Clergy Sexual Abuse*

If the pastor did this for her friend, then she could also receive her deliverance, no matter what the methods were that God revealed to his servant, the pastor. It seems to make sense that, since the pastor was not a medical doctor, and some of the holy lotion needed to be applied on the victim's womb, the readily available instrument that could reach the woman's womb would be the pastor's manhood.

In similar fashion, the Chronicle reported a case of a woman who was raped after she was told by her brother-in-law, who was a prophet, that 'her private parts needed to be cleansed as goblins were bedding her' (Chiramba 2018). The paper reported that the woman sought the services of the prophet and

[d]uring consultation, the accused told complainant that there were evil spirits and goblins which were having sexual intercourse with her. The prophet suggested that the complainant be cleansed on her private parts. The following day his wife performed the cleansing by cutting and rubbing herbs on the complainant's privates. Later on, the accused suggested that the complainant's house should be cleansed as well so that the goblins would not return. Two days later accused person visited the complainant's place of residence and started sprinkling water once he got inside the house. When they got in the bedroom, he pushed the complainant onto the bed before raping her once without protection (Chiramba 2018).

While these instances would ordinarily be dismissed as gullibility on the part on the victims, it is worth noting that for some believers, spiritual things, including the words of the man of God when he speaks of heavenly revelations, are often not disputed and are taken with reverence and awe. It is very difficult for believers to detect deception in the church as the clergy often claim to speak on behalf of God. This is why some congregants have even disowned their own families and taken up spiritual fathers (cf. Mwandayi 2017). If congregants can be persuaded to eat snakes or hair and drink petrol (Nemakonde 2015) or anointed sewage (Machakaire & Kamhungira 2017), eat dog meat and drink blood (Levitt 2018), or attack a police station (Ngcukana 2018), it would be hard to refuse when they are told that there were demonic spirits that could only be removed using the pastor's penis (Mapani 2017). After all, this 'man of God' phenomenon is a titular naming

that, on its own, has created problems in Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe (Zhou, Pfukwa & Landa 2018:211). A question to ponder would be, Do the men of God heal men the same way that they do women?

Further, reference to the deity is religiously done to intimidate victims into compliance. Thus, victims are driven into a state of fear for both the man of God and the God of man that he speaks on behalf of and on whose revelations and even instructions some of the clergy purport to be acting on. Fear-inducing discourse is expertly employed to make victims surrender their will to give in to the will of the perpetrator. As indicated in most of the sampled articles, some women and girls are driven into helplessness, where they are repeatedly victimized by the same person and threatened into not disclosing their ordeals. An example is the excerpt below from the NewsDay:

Maurukira then took out a bottle of anointing oil and instructed the woman to comply with his orders, claiming her spiritual attacks would return if she did not. After the act, the court heard, the woman was given another bottle of anointing oil and warned not to divulge the ordeal to anyone or her spiritual attacks would return. Maurukira is said to have used the same modus operandi and raped the woman on three more occasions in January this year (Chingarande 2017).

This particular woman was raped five times by the same pastor. With knowledge of previous abuses by the same man, the woman agreed to go with him to a house without the company of anybody else. This shows the effect of the language of deception on the victims.

The intimidation, we argue, has kept many women and girls under persistent victimization where sexual abuse by the clergy is concerned. Where rape by relatives and strangers involves threats of physical harm and violence, sexual abuse by the clergy involves threats with spiritual elements: Demons, perpetuation of problems, evil spirits, God's fury, and some other threats that include the mention of God or the devil. They use spiritual language to cow the women. In several instances, scripture was quoted to align the actions of the perpetrators of abuse with 'God's will'. The result has been the perpetuation of the abuse of women and girls in the church as cases go on unreported because of the fear of the fury of the supernatural on whose instruction the clergy often claim to be operating. Where there might be no

fear, victims have been brainwashed into believing that there is nothing wrong with what the man of God is doing to them.

## **Conclusion**

We conclude that clergy perpetrators of sexual abuse of women and girls expertly use language to exploit and manipulate their victims, to make them trust in the ‘man of God’ and get into sexual contact with them. These perpetrators used several courtship strategies, including grooming and their elevated spiritual positions to persuade women into abusive sexual relationships. The clergy also threatened their victims with evil spirits and the perpetuation of their problems. Therefore, unsuspecting Christian women seeking deliverance remain at the risk of falling prey to the deceptive language of sexually abusive clergy.

We recommend governmental and non-governmental programming to raise awareness in the church on the criminal nature of sexualized violence in the church. Raising awareness on how language can be used as a weapon of exploitation in discursal encounters is a critical aspect in equipping women and girls with practical armor against sexual abuse.

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*Nhlanhla Landa, Sindiso Zhou, and Baba Tshotsho*

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