

Evaluating The Role Of Church Programs In Promoting Women Empowerment And Gender Equality: A Case Study Of Chinhoyi Urban

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Abstract:

This study evaluates the role of church programs in promoting women empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi Urban, Zimbabwe. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study reveals that churches have implemented various programs, including internal savings and lending programs, business and entrepreneurship projects, and leadership and human rights awareness programs. These programs have enhanced women empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi. However, the study also highlights the challenges faced by women in patriarchal churches, which can limit their access to economic opportunities and decision-making positions. The study's findings suggest that church programs can play a critical role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality, but there is need for more awareness and education on gender equality and women's rights. The study's recommendations include increasing awareness and education on gender equality and women's rights, strengthening multisectoral collaboration and coordination among churches, government agencies, and stakeholders, and improving resource availability and accessibility for women's empowerment programs. If women empowerment and gender equality are promoted, church programs can contribute to sustainable development and improve the well-being of women and their families in Chinhoyi Urban.

Key Words: Church Programs, Promoting, Women Empowerment, Gender Equality

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I. Introduction

Women empowerment and gender equality have become a global catalyst for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). However, despite years of action towards promoting the empowerment of women and gender equality, women in Chinhoyi have been lagging behind (Chireshe and Chireshe, 2010). The prevalence of gender-based violence, limited access to education and economic opportunities, and patriarchal dominance have contributed to the marginalization of women in Chinhoyi (Makombe, 2015). Churches have been instrumental in providing support to women, but their role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality is underexplored (Manyonganise, 2015). This study seeks to evaluate the role of church programs in promoting women empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi Urban.

II. Related Literature Review

The literature review highlights the complexity of gender equality and women empowerment, and the role of church programs in promoting these phenomena (Chitando and Manyonganise, 2016). Studies have shown that church programs can play a critical role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality by providing women with economic opportunities, promoting their autonomy, and raising awareness on women's rights (Manyonganise, 2015). However, the literature also highlights the challenges faced by women in patriarchal churches, which can limit their access to economic opportunities and decision-making positions (Makombe, 2015). The literature review also highlights the importance of considering the cultural and religious context in which women empowerment and gender equality programs are implemented. In Chinhoyi, the cultural and religious context is characterized by patriarchal dominance, which can limit women's access to economic opportunities and decision-making positions. Church programs play a significant role in shaping social structures and influencing gender dynamics. In Zimbabwe, faith-based organizations have been instrumental in advocating for women's empowerment and gender equality. This literature review critically examines existing research on the role of church programs in promoting gender equity, focusing on Chinhoyi Urban. Studies indicate that churches in Zimbabwe have established various initiatives aimed at empowering women economically, socially, and politically. Faith-Based Initiatives & Gender Equality Studies highlight how religious institutions can be both agents of empowerment and barriers to gender equality. Some faith-based organizations actively promote

women's leadership, education, and economic independence. Church Programs & Women's Empowerment Literature suggests that churches often provide skills training, financial support, and advocacy for women's rights. However, the extent of empowerment depends on the interpretation of religious doctrines and the willingness of church leaders to challenge traditional gender roles.

The Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) has actively worked to address gender disparities by promoting leadership opportunities for women and advocating for gender justice. The establishment of the Gender and Faith Network further highlights efforts to integrate gender-sensitive policies within religious institutions. Despite progress, literature suggests that patriarchal structures within religious institutions often hinder full gender equality. Some church programs focus on economic empowerment but avoid addressing social and political inequalities. Additionally, cultural and religious barriers continue to limit women's participation in leadership roles. Empirical studies show that faith-based initiatives have contributed to increased awareness of gender issues and improved access to education and financial resources for women. However, the long-term impact of these programs remains under-researched, particularly in Chinhoyi Urban.

Theoretical Framework and its Applicability to the Study

The study is guided by the human development theory, which emphasizes the importance of economic emancipation in promoting self-expression values, human choices, and autonomy (Sen, 1999). The theory also highlights the role of religion in shaping gender roles and relationships and provides a useful framework for understanding the role of church programs in promoting women empowerment and gender equality. The theory emphasizes the importance of economic emancipation in promoting self-expression values, human choices, and autonomy (Nussbaum, 2000). In the context of Chinhoyi, the theory suggests that church programs can play a critical role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality by providing women with economic opportunities and promoting their autonomy (Machingura & Chigudu, 2017).

III. Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods (Creswell, 2014). The study population consisted of women from various church denominations in Chinhoyi Urban. A sample of 200 women was selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques (Babbie, 2013). Data was collected using interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires. Conducted semi-structured interviews with church leaders, program coordinators, and women beneficiaries to understand their experiences and perspectives. Used structured questionnaires to gather quantitative data on participation rates, economic benefits, and social impact. Engaged women in discussions to explore collective experiences and challenges. Thematic analysis was used to analyse qualitative data, while descriptive statistics was used analyse survey responses and measure program effectiveness using Microsoft Excel. A case study approach was used to provide an in-depth analysis of church programs in Chinhoyi Urban. This allowed for a detailed exploration of their impact on women's empowerment and gender equality. Reviewed church reports, policy documents, and previous studies on faith-based gender empowerment initiatives. The study analysed scholarly articles on church-led gender equality efforts in Zimbabwe, such as the study on women's empowerment in the post-missionary Church of Christ in Zimbabwe and research on faith-based institutions and women's economic empowerment in Zimbabwe. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who were actively involved in church programs. This ensured that insights come from individuals with direct experience.

IV. Research Findings And Analysis

The study's findings reveal that church programs have played a critical role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi. Based on recent studies, church programs in Zimbabwe have played a significant role in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, though challenges remain. Faith-based institutions have initiated programs that help women develop entrepreneurial skills and financial independence. A study on ZAOGA FIF in Bindura highlights how church-led initiatives have enabled women to engage in both formal and informal businesses, improving household income. Research on women in churches in Bulawayo suggests that churches contribute significantly to community development, with women playing a central role in voluntary activities that enhance social welfare. The transformation of Ladies' Circles into Mothers' Unions in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe has empowered women by providing platforms for leadership and decision-making. The programs have provided women with economic opportunities, promoted their autonomy, and raised awareness on women's rights. However, the study also highlights the challenges faced by women in patriarchal churches, which can limit their access to economic opportunities and decision-making positions. The study's findings also suggest that there is need for more awareness and education on gender equality and women's rights. The study's findings suggest that churches still operate within patriarchal frameworks that limit women's participation in leadership roles. While women have made strides in secular environments, their progress within

church institutions remains slow due to resistance to change and deeply rooted traditions. Studies indicate that incompatible doctrines reinforce male dominance, preventing women from fully engaging in decision-making. The study's participants highlighted the importance of education and awareness-raising in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality. Church programs in Zimbabwe have made strides in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality, but challenges remain. Some church programs focus on economic empowerment but avoid addressing social and political inequalities, limiting the overall impact on gender equality. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these initiatives in Chinhoyi Urban and exploring strategies to enhance their impact.

V. Conclusions And Recommendations

The study concludes that church programs can play a critical role in promoting women empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi. However, there is need for more awareness and education on gender equality and women's rights. The study also highlights the importance of considering the cultural and religious context in which women empowerment and gender equality programs are implemented. Based on the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Church programs should prioritize awareness-raising and education on gender equality and women's rights to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi Urban.
- Churches, government agencies, and stakeholders should work together to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi Urban.
- Church programs should ensure that resources are available and accessible to support women's empowerment and gender equality initiatives in Chinhoyi Urban.
- Churches should promote women's leadership and decision-making positions to challenge patriarchal dominance and promote gender equality.
- Church programs should be tailored to address the specific needs of women in Chinhoyi Urban, taking into account the cultural and religious context.
- Church programs should be regularly monitored and evaluated to assess their impact on women's empowerment and gender equality in Chinhoyi Urban.
- Investigate how church programs in Chinhoyi Urban compare to similar initiatives globally.
- Assess women's perspectives on church-led empowerment programs.
- Explore policy recommendations for strengthening faith-based gender equality efforts.
- Churches should revise doctrines that hinder women's leadership and promote inclusive decision-making structures.
- Future programs should consider factors like class, race, and economic status to ensure holistic empowerment.
- More research is needed to assess the sustainability of church-led gender equality initiatives in Chinhoyi Urban.

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