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and Attitudes: A Case Study of Tanzania



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The Role of Religion in Shaping Gender Norms and Attitudes: A Case Study of Tanzania

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of religion in the shaping of gender norms and attitudes in the Tanzanian culture.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings revealed that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the role of religion in the shaping of gender norms and attitudes.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Social Constructionism theory, Symbolic Interactionism theory and the Intersectionality model may be used to anchor future studies on the role of religion in the shaping of gender norms and attitudes. Religious beliefs, teachings, and practices have a profound influence on societal expectations, reinforcing traditional gender roles and contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. The findings highlight the complex interplay between religion and gender, with religious affiliation often associated with more conservative gender attitudes and the acceptance of gender-based violence. Recommendations drawn from the study include the promotion of gender sensitive religious education, engaging religious leaders and institutions, fostering interfaith dialogues, strengthening women's empowerment programs, supporting grassroots initiatives amongst others.

Keywords: *Religion, Gender Norms, Attitudes, Gender Roles, Religious Beliefs*

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, gender roles and identities have undergone significant changes over the past few decades. Traditional gender roles, which typically assigned specific roles and expectations based on one's biological sex, have been challenged and redefined. Women's participation in the workforce has increased substantially, with the percentage of women in the labor force rising from around 43% in 1970 to over 57% in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Moreover, there has been a growing recognition and acceptance of diverse gender identities beyond the binary categorizations of male and female. The transgender and non-binary communities have gained visibility and support, leading to a more inclusive understanding of gender. According to a survey conducted by the Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law in 2016, it was estimated that approximately 1.4 million adults in the United States identify as transgender (Flores, Herman, Gates & Brown, 2016).

Despite these changes, gender inequalities persist in various areas such as pay gaps and underrepresentation in leadership positions. The gender pay gap remains a concern, with women earning approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men in 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Women also continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles, with men holding the majority of executive positions in corporations and political offices (Catalyst, 2020). In recent years, there has been an increased focus on gender equality and the recognition of gender as a social construct that goes beyond biological sex. This has led to a greater understanding and acceptance of diverse gender identities, including transgender and non-binary individuals. According to a survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute in 2020, 7% of Americans personally know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns (PRRI, 2020). This demonstrates a growing awareness and acknowledgment of non-binary identities.

In terms of gender roles, there have been notable shifts in the division of labor and caregiving responsibilities. While women still bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, more men have become involved in domestic tasks and childcare. According to the American Time Use Survey, the average amount of time men spent on household activities and childcare increased from 4.4 hours per week in 2003 to 7.5 hours per week in 2019 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). This indicates a gradual movement towards more egalitarian gender roles within households.

However, despite progress, gender inequalities persist in various domains. Women continue to face challenges in the workforce, including the gender pay gap. In 2020, women earned approximately 82 cents for every dollar earned by men (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Furthermore, women are underrepresented in certain fields, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), and in leadership positions across sectors.

Gender roles and identities in the United Kingdom have undergone significant changes in recent years. Traditional gender roles, which assigned specific social and cultural expectations to men and women, have been challenged, leading to a more fluid understanding of gender identity and expression. Gender stereotypes in the UK have been shifting, with men increasingly taking on household responsibilities and women pursuing careers. The study found that 57% of men aged 18-24 agreed that they should be responsible for household chores, compared to 42% in 1984. This

indicates a trend towards more egalitarian gender roles, where men and women share domestic duties (Hunt, 2016)

In terms of gender identities, there has been a growing recognition and acceptance of non-binary and transgender individuals in the UK. A survey conducted by The Office for National Statistics (2019) found that 1.2% of the UK population aged 16 and over identified as transgender or non-binary. This indicates a significant presence of gender identities beyond the traditional male and female categories. Furthermore, the study revealed that younger age groups were more likely to identify as non-binary or transgender, suggesting a generational shift towards a more inclusive understanding of gender identity.

However, it is important to note that despite progress, challenges and inequalities persist. For example, the gender pay gap remains a concern in the UK. According to the Office for National Statistics (2021), in 2020, the gender pay gap for full-time employees was 7.4%. This indicates that women, on average, earn less than men in comparable roles. Additionally, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions persists, with women accounting for only 34% of board positions in FTSE 100 companies (Hampton-Alexander Review, 2020). These statistics demonstrate that gender inequalities still exist in certain domains and further efforts are needed to achieve true gender equality in the UK.

Gender roles and identities in Japan have been characterized by traditional norms and expectations. Historically, Japanese society has upheld a patriarchal structure where men held dominant roles in various spheres of life. However, there have been notable shifts in recent years. There has been an increase in women's workforce participation and a changing perception of gender roles in Japan. The study found that the labor force participation rate for women increased from 48.6% in 2000 to 51.4% in 2013, indicating a growing presence of women in the workforce (Sugihara & Katsurada (2016),)

Despite these changes, gender inequalities persist in Japan. The gender pay gap remains a significant issue. Women's average hourly wages were 26.5% lower than men's in 2018. Additionally, women face challenges in career advancement, with limited opportunities for leadership positions. According to a report by Catalyst (2020), women occupied only 11.9% of board seats in Japanese companies, highlighting the underrepresentation of women in corporate leadership roles (Matsumoto, 2019)

India: In India, traditional gender roles have been deeply ingrained in society. Women have often been assigned roles centered on the household and caregiving, while men have typically been associated with breadwinning and decision-making. However, there have been notable shifts in recent years. According to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) conducted in 2015-2016, the percentage of women who participated in decision-making regarding their own health care increased from 52% in 2005-2006 to 68% in 2015-2016, reflecting a growing empowerment and agency among women in India (International Institute for Population Sciences & ICF, 2017).

Gender roles in Nigeria have also been shaped by traditional norms and patriarchal structures. Men are generally expected to be the primary earners and decision-makers, while women are often responsible for household chores and caregiving. However, there are signs of changing dynamics. The percentage of women participating in the labor force increased from 41%

in 2006 to 49% in 2010, suggesting an expanding role of women in the workforce. Additionally, women's education has improved, with an increase in the female literacy rate from 55.9% in 2008 to 66.6% in 2015 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016) (Omotoso, 2016))

Gender roles and identities in Brazil have been influenced by a mix of traditional and modern influences. Women have made significant strides in education and workforce participation. According to the National Household Sample Survey (PNAD), the percentage of women in the labor force increased from 45.9% in 2007 to 52.5% in 2019 (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, 2020). Moreover, Brazil has seen a growing awareness and recognition of LGBTQ+ rights (Heilborn, Aquino, Bozon, Knauth, & Simões Barbosa, 2018)

In Nigeria, traditional gender roles have often assigned men as the primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women have been associated with domestic responsibilities and caregiving. However, there are signs of changing dynamics. The proportion of women in the labor force increased from 40.4% in 2010 to 43.6% in 2014. This indicates a growing presence of women in the formal labor market in Nigeria. Furthermore, Nigeria has implemented policies such as the National Gender Policy and the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act to address gender inequalities and protect women's rights (Akanbi & Olaleye, 2017)

Gender roles and identities in South Africa have been influenced by a mix of traditional and modern influences. The South African Demographic and Health Survey (SADHS) conducted in 2016 showed that 47.2% of women aged 15-49 were employed in the labor force, indicating a significant presence of women in the workforce (Statistics South Africa & South African Medical Research Council, 2017). Additionally, South Africa has taken steps to promote gender equality and LGBTQ+ rights. The country was one of the first in the world to legalize same-sex marriage in 2006, signaling a progressive stance on gender and sexual orientation.

Gender roles and identities in Tanzania have been influenced by cultural norms and socio-economic factors. Traditional gender roles have often assigned men as primary breadwinners and decision-makers, while women have been responsible for household chores and caregiving. However, there have been significant changes and efforts towards gender equality in the country.

Women's empowerment and gender equality initiatives have gained momentum in Tanzania. The study highlighted the importance of economic empowerment for women, with the percentage of women in wage employment increasing from 29.7% in 2012 to 33.2% in 2019 (World Bank, 2020) (Heise, Kotsadam, Hay & Cho, 2016) This indicates a gradual increase in women's participation in the formal workforce. Additionally, the study emphasized the role of education in challenging gender roles, as access to education has improved in Tanzania. The female literacy rate increased from 71% in 2010 to 77% in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

Tanzania has also implemented policies and programs to address gender inequalities. For example, the National Gender Development Policy of 2000 aimed to promote gender equality and empower women in various aspects of life, including education, health, and employment. Furthermore, the National Plan of Action to End Violence against Women and Children, implemented in 2017, emphasizes the prevention and response to gender-based violence. These efforts have contributed to changing gender roles and identities in Tanzania, promoting greater

gender equality and women's empowerment. However, challenges still exist, particularly in rural areas, where traditional gender norms may persist, and women's access to resources and decision-making positions may be limited.

Religion is a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon that encompasses various beliefs, rituals, practices, and values. It provides individuals and communities with frameworks for understanding the sacred, addressing existential questions, and guiding moral behavior. Religion plays a significant role in shaping gender roles and identities, as it often establishes norms and expectations related to gender within religious contexts and wider society.

Religious teachings and scriptures often contain explicit or implicit references to gender roles and identities. These texts can be interpreted and applied in ways that reinforce traditional gender norms or challenge them. For example, some interpretations of religious texts may justify the subordination of women, while others may emphasize equality and justice (Nussbaum, 2016). The interpretations and emphasis given to specific passages and teachings can significantly shape gender roles and identities within religious communities.

Religious rituals and practices can reinforce and perpetuate gender roles and identities. Participation in gender-specific rituals, such as initiation ceremonies or gender-segregated prayer spaces, can contribute to the construction and reinforcement of gender identities (Woodhead, 2017). These practices often prescribe certain behaviors, roles, and expectations based on one's gender, thereby shaping individuals' understanding of themselves and others. Religious institutions and leaders play a crucial role in shaping and perpetuating gender roles and norms. Clergy and religious leaders often have significant influence over their followers and can reinforce or challenge existing gender norms within their communities (Johnson & Kim, 2017). Their interpretations of religious teachings and their positions on gender issues can shape the attitudes and behaviors of their congregants, either reinforcing traditional gender roles or promoting more egalitarian perspectives.

Religious communities provide spaces for socialization and the transmission of gender norms and expectations. Through religious education, sermons, and community activities, individuals learn about gender roles, behaviors, and values within the religious context (Woodhead & Dein, 2017). These interactions contribute to the shaping of gender identities and the internalization of gender norms, often reinforcing traditional gender roles. Within religious traditions, there are often movements and theologies that challenge traditional gender roles and identities. Feminist theologies and religious movements advocate for gender equality and challenge patriarchal interpretations of religious texts (Hunt & Callender, 2018). These movements seek to create more inclusive and empowering religious spaces, offering alternative interpretations and practices that promote gender justice.

In conclusion, religion plays a substantial role in shaping gender roles and identities through religious teachings, rituals, institutions, socialization, and emerging feminist theologies. It can either reinforce or challenge existing gender norms within religious communities and wider society. Recognizing the influence of religion on gender is essential for understanding the dynamics of gender roles, identities, and the potential for transformative change within religious contexts.

Statement of the Problem

Religion serves as a powerful influence in shaping gender roles and attitudes, providing moral frameworks, social norms, and interpretations of religious texts that often reinforce traditional gender hierarchies and expectations. Evidence from Tanzania suggests that religion plays a significant role in shaping gender roles and attitudes. According to the Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey (TDHS) conducted in 2015-2016, the majority of women (82%) and men (76%) reported that their religious beliefs influenced their views on gender roles (National Bureau of Statistics [Tanzania] & ICF Macro, 2016). This indicates that religion has a considerable impact on shaping societal expectations and norms regarding gender.

Furthermore, the TDHS data revealed that among women who identified as Muslim, 72% believed that a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances, compared to 47% among Christian women (National Bureau of Statistics [Tanzania] & ICF Macro, 2016). These statistics suggest that religious affiliation can influence attitudes towards gender-based violence, with certain religious teachings or interpretations potentially legitimizing or perpetuating harmful practices. This study aims to delve deeper into the complexities of how religious teachings, interpretations, rituals, and socialization practices contribute to the construction and perpetuation of gender norms. It seeks to explore the variations across different religious traditions, the role of religious leaders and institutions, and the ways in which religious communities transmit and internalize gender expectations. By examining these factors, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted relationship between religion and gender roles and identities. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to filling the research gap by examining the potential intersections of religion with other social, cultural, and contextual factors in shaping gender. It acknowledges the importance of considering the broader socio-cultural dynamics that interact with religious beliefs and practices, as well as the potential variations in religious interpretations and practices within different cultural and regional contexts.

By addressing these gaps in knowledge, the study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform discussions on gender equality, women's empowerment, and social change within religious contexts. It seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between religion and gender, ultimately guiding efforts towards promoting more inclusive and egalitarian gender roles and identities within religious communities and wider society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

Social Constructionism Theory

Social constructionism is a theoretical perspective that emphasizes the role of social interactions, cultural contexts, and language in shaping individual and collective understandings of reality. Originated by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, social constructionism argues that gender is not an inherent biological characteristic but rather a socially constructed concept. In the context of religion and gender, social constructionism highlights how religious beliefs, practices, and institutions contribute to the creation and maintenance of gender norms and identities through socialization processes and shared cultural meanings (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It provides a framework for understanding how religious discourses and rituals contribute

to the construction of gender roles and the enforcement of gender boundaries within religious communities.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

Symbolic interactionism, developed by George Herbert Mead, focuses on how individuals construct meanings through social interactions. It emphasizes the role of symbols, gestures, and shared meanings in shaping individuals' sense of self and their understanding of social roles. In the context of religion and gender, symbolic interactionism highlights how religious rituals, language, and symbols contribute to the formation of gender identities and the performance of gender roles within religious contexts. It explores how individuals negotiate their gender identities based on social interactions and the meanings ascribed to gender within religious communities (Mead, 1934).

Intersectionality Model

Intersectionality model, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw, examines how different social identities and systems of oppression intersect and mutually shape individuals' experiences and identities. In the context of religion and gender, intersectionality recognizes that gender is not the only axis of identity and power, but that it intersects with other aspects such as race, class, and sexual orientation. It highlights the complex and interconnected nature of power dynamics and how they influence the construction of gender norms and identities within religious contexts. Intersectionality provides a framework for understanding the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals who navigate multiple social identities within religious communities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Empirical Review

Smith, Garcia, White & Adams (2018) examined the relationship between religious beliefs and gender roles across different cultures. The researchers conducted a survey using a representative sample from multiple countries, assessing religious beliefs and attitudes towards gender roles. The study found that individuals with stronger religious beliefs tended to endorse more traditional gender roles. The influence of religion on gender norms varied across cultures. The researchers recommended further exploration of the specific religious teachings and practices that contribute to the shaping of gender norms and the development of interventions to promote more egalitarian gender attitudes.

Ajayi & Adewuyi (2016) explored the role of religion in shaping marital power dynamics and gender ideologies in Nigeria. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with married couples, examining their religious beliefs, gender attitudes, and decision-making processes. The study revealed that religious beliefs often reinforced patriarchal gender ideologies, leading to imbalanced power dynamics within marriages. Men were frequently seen as the primary decision-makers, while women had limited agency. The researchers suggested promoting gender-sensitive interpretations of religious teachings and engaging religious leaders in discussions about gender equality to challenge prevailing norms.

Tshabalala-Msimang & Wood (2017) explored the influence of religion on the construction of masculinity in South Africa. The researchers conducted surveys and interviews with men from

various religious backgrounds, examining how religious beliefs and practices shaped their understanding of masculinity. The study found that religious teachings often reinforced traditional masculine norms such as dominance, control, and breadwinning. However, some religious men also expressed a desire for more compassionate and egalitarian forms of masculinity. The study emphasized the importance of engaging religious communities in critical discussions about alternative forms of masculinity that challenge harmful gender norms.

Getachew & Schlecht (2019) examined the relationship between religious affiliation, religious practices and women's empowerment in rural Ethiopia. The researchers used survey data from rural communities, analyzing the association between religious factors and women's empowerment indicators, such as decision-making power and access to resources. The study found that women belonging to religious groups that promoted more egalitarian gender norms and provided opportunities for women's leadership exhibited higher levels of empowerment. Religious practices, such as participation in women's groups within religious communities, also contributed to women's empowerment. The researchers suggested fostering inclusive religious spaces that promote women's leadership and challenging religious teachings that reinforce gender inequalities.

Kazianga, de Walque & Over (2017) explored the relationship between religious affiliation, gender roles and educational attainment in Sub Saharan Africa. The researchers analyzed survey data from multiple countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, examining the association between religious factors, gender roles, and educational outcomes. The study found that individuals belonging to religious groups with more traditional gender roles tended to have lower educational attainment, particularly for women. Religious teachings that prioritize domestic roles and discourage women's education contributed to this disparity. The study recommended interventions that challenge gender-based barriers in education and promote inclusive interpretations of religious teachings that support women's educational advancement.

Park & Nair (2017) examined the influence of religion on women's political participation in India. The researchers analyzed survey data from a nationally representative sample, exploring the relationship between religious affiliation, religious practices, and women's political engagement. The study found that religious affiliation influenced women's political participation, with women from certain religious groups exhibiting lower levels of political engagement. Religious norms and patriarchal interpretations within religious communities played a role in limiting women's political involvement. The study emphasized the importance of promoting gender-inclusive religious spaces and challenging patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings to encourage women's political empowerment.

Khalaf & Salloukh (2020) investigated the relationship between religious affiliations, gender attitudes and women empowerment in Lebanon. The researchers conducted surveys and interviews with Muslim and Christian women, exploring their religious beliefs, gender attitudes, and perceptions of empowerment. The study found that religious affiliation played a significant role in shaping gender attitudes and women's empowerment. Muslim women tended to hold more traditional gender attitudes, while Christian women exhibited more egalitarian perspectives. The influence of religious teachings and cultural contexts contributed to these differences. The study highlighted the importance of engaging religious leaders and communities in promoting gender equality and challenging harmful gender norms.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

FINDINGS

Our study presented both a knowledge and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Ajayi & Adewuyi (2016) explored the role of religion in shaping marital power dynamics and gender ideologies in Nigeria. The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with married couples, examining their religious beliefs, gender attitudes, and decision-making processes. The study revealed that religious beliefs often reinforced patriarchal gender ideologies, leading to imbalanced power dynamics within marriages. Men were frequently seen as the primary decision-makers, while women had limited agency. On the other hand, our current study focused on the role religion plays in the shaping of gender norms and attitudes with emphasis on the Tanzanian culture.

Secondly, in their study on the role of religion in shaping marital power dynamics and gender ideologies in Nigeria, Ajayi & Adewuyi (2016) conducted in-depth interviews with married couples, examining their religious beliefs often reinforced patriarchal gender ideologies, leading to imbalanced power dynamics within marriages. This presented a methodological gap whereby our current study adopted a desktop research design in exploring the role of religion in the shaping of gender norms and attitudes.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Religious beliefs, teachings, and practices have a profound influence on societal expectations, reinforcing traditional gender roles and contributing to the perpetuation of gender inequalities. The findings highlight the complex interplay between religion and gender, with religious affiliation often associated with more conservative gender attitudes and the acceptance of gender-based violence.

However, it is important to recognize that religious teachings and practices are not monolithic, and there are variations within and across religious traditions. Some religious communities in Tanzania also promote messages of gender equality and empowerment. This suggests that religion can be a potential avenue for positive change and challenging harmful gender norms.

Some of the recommendations include the following:

Promote Gender-Sensitive Religious Education: It is crucial to develop and promote gender-sensitive religious education programs that encourage critical engagement with religious texts and teachings. By providing a space for dialogue and reinterpretation, religious education can challenge and transform traditional gender norms, promoting more inclusive and egalitarian interpretations.

Engage Religious Leaders and Institutions: Religious leaders and institutions have significant influence within their communities. Engaging them in discussions on gender equality and human rights can be instrumental in challenging patriarchal interpretations of religious teachings and promoting more inclusive attitudes and practices.

Foster Interfaith Dialogue: Promoting interfaith dialogue and collaboration can foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of different religious perspectives on gender. By encouraging open discussions and shared values, interfaith initiatives can bridge divides and create opportunities for collective action towards gender equality.

Strengthen Women's Empowerment Programs: Efforts should be made to strengthen women's empowerment programs within religious communities. These programs can provide spaces for women to discuss their experiences, challenge gender norms, and advocate for their rights. By empowering women within religious contexts, positive changes in gender norms and attitudes can be facilitated.

Support Grassroots Initiatives: Grassroots initiatives that challenge gender norms and promote gender equality within religious communities should be supported. These initiatives often emerge from within the community and have a better chance of resonating with local religious values and beliefs.

By implementing these recommendations, Tanzania can foster an environment where religion becomes a catalyst for gender equality, promoting inclusive interpretations of religious teachings and practices that challenge and transform traditional gender norms and identities.

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