THE CHURCH AND WOMEN PROTECTION: HOW DIFFERENT DENOMINATIONS RESPOND TO ABUSE OF WOMEN BY CHUCH LEADERS IN GHANA.

BY

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DECLARATION

Declaration by Student

I hereby declare that the dissertation is a result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or any other higher education institute. I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR

This Dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervision and formatting of dissertations laid down by the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UNIMAC).

Prof. Godwin Etse Sikanku		8th December, 2025
Supervisor	Signature	Date

DEDICATION

To my husband, Mr Robert Kwame Yeborwo and my children, whose strength, unflinching support, guidance and encouragement carried me through this challenging journey.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates how different Christian denominations in Ghana respond to and protect women from abuse perpetrated by church leaders. Despite the church's foundational role as a sanctuary of moral guidance and spiritual support, religious institutions have increasingly become sites where women experience various forms of abuse, such as sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual often perpetrated by leaders across all hierarchical levels. This paradox between the church's protective mandate and the prevalence of abuse presents a critical institutional failure that undermines both congregant safety and religious leadership's moral authority. Using a qualitative exploratory case study design, the research examines Ghana's diverse denominational landscape, including Catholic, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Mainline Protestant churches. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 participants comprising women congregants and church leaders, the study explores four main objectives: (1) identifying the types and nature of abuse experienced by women, (2) determining the most prevalent forms of abuse, (3) analysing denominational responses and mechanisms when abuse is reported, and (4) assessing existing protection mechanisms.

The study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Institutional Theory, which explains how churches, as formal organisations, develop structures and responses to allegations of abuse while seeking legitimacy, and Feminist Theory, which illuminates gender-based power dynamics that enable and perpetuate abuse in patriarchal religious contexts. Data analysis employed thematic analysis to identify patterns linking denominational characteristics such as theology, governance structures, institutional culture, and resources—to abuse patterns, institutional responses, and protection outcomes.

Key findings reveal that emotional and spiritual abuse were the most pervasive forms of mistreatment, often manifesting through public shaming, manipulation of scripture, and threats of divine punishment. Sexual abuse, though less frequently reported, carried severe psychological consequences. Local leaders (elders, deacons, ministry coordinators) were identified as primary perpetrators due to concentrated operational power and limited oversight. Institutional responses were largely inadequate, characterised by symbolic policies without consistent enforcement, priority given to institutional reputation over victim welfare, and insufficient trauma-informed counselling services. Many denominations exhibited decoupling—maintaining formal policies for legitimacy while failing to implement them meaningfully.

The study concludes that abuse in Ghanaian churches is a systemic issue rooted in hierarchical power structures, patriarchal theological interpretations, and weak accountability mechanisms. Protection of women requires comprehensive reforms, including the institutionalisation and enforcement of anti-abuse policies, mandatory ethical and gender-sensitivity training for leaders, the establishment of independent oversight bodies, the strengthening of survivor support systems, the promotion of congregational participation in safeguarding, and the reform of theological education to emphasise gender equity and pastoral ethics.

This research contributes theoretically by applying institutional and feminist frameworks to African religious contexts, methodologically by demonstrating effective qualitative approaches for sensitive topics in faith communities, and practically by providing evidence-based recommendations for protecting women in religious institutions. The findings have significant implications for church leadership, policymakers, advocacy groups, and scholars working at the intersection of faith, gender justice, and institutional accountability in Ghana and beyond.

Keywords: Church abuse, women's protection, denominational responses, institutional accountability, spiritual abuse, gender-based violence, religious institutions, Ghana, Pentecostal churches, feminist theory, institutional theory.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.0: Introduction

Chapter one begins by highlighting the significant role the church plays in society and the world at large. It also outlines the study's problem statement, research objectives, research questions, and the significance of the study. Additionally, the chapter defines the scope of the research and offers a concise overview of its structure.

1.1: Background of the Study

The Church, which is a foundational institution in society, has been considered as a sanctuary of spiritual nourishment, moral guidance and community support. The church has contributed to shaping societal values, behaviours and norms of people and also contributed to national cohesion and development. However, in recent years, the church, which is supposed to be a sanctuary of moral guidance, healing and a community, has been plagued with disturbing cases of abuse, particularly of women by individuals of ecclesiastical authority, thus from the bottom rung of authority to the top. This phenomenon presents a complex paradox where institutions dedicated to moral leadership and protection become spaces where vulnerable individuals, especially women, experience various forms of abuse, including sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual manipulation.

The issue of abuse within faith communities has gained significant global attention, with high-profile cases emerging across different denominations and geographical contexts. In Ghana, Christianity plays a pivotal role in society, with approximately 71.3% of the population identifying as Christians according to the 2021 census. The church's response to allegations of abuse by religious leaders has become a critical area of concern for both religious communities and broader society.

Women, who constitute a significant portion of the church's membership, are the most vulnerable within religious contexts. The hierarchical nature of many church structures, combined with deeply ingrained cultural and religious notions of submission and obedience, can create environments where abuse is perpetrated, overlooked, and inadequately addressed. The intersection of gender, power dynamics, and religious authority creates complex challenges for protection mechanisms and accountability systems. Different denominations have varying theological perspectives, governance structures, and cultural contexts that influence their approach to addressing abuse allegations. While some denominations have developed comprehensive policies and procedures for handling such cases, others may rely on traditional conflict resolution methods or remain silent on the issue. This discrepancy in denominational responses highlights the need for a systematic exploration of how different denominations address abuse of women by leaders. This will be done by taking into consideration the denominational structure, theological frameworks and institutional cultures and their influence on the responses.

The Church in Ghana: Context and Structure

Christianity was introduced in Ghana in the 15th century by a Portuguese missionary. Since its introduction, Christianity in Ghana has undergone a remarkable transformation. Although these early encounters laid the groundwork for Christian presence, it was not until the 19th century that Christianity experienced substantial growth through the concerted efforts of Basel, Bremen, and Wesleyan missionaries (Pobee, 1991). Consequently, the colonial period witnessed Christianity becoming deeply interwoven with Ghanaian society through the establishment of educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and various social services. This historical foundation has proven instrumental in shaping contemporary church dynamics, as Christianity now represents the dominant religion in Ghana, with approximately 71% of the population identifying as Christian (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012).

The post-independence era has witnessed a particularly significant shift in Ghana's religious landscape, moving from predominantly mission-established mainline churches to a vibrant and rapidly expanding

Pentecostal and Charismatic movement that emerged prominently in the 1970s and 1980s. This transformation, as Gifford (2004) observes, has fundamentally altered religious practice and church-state relations in the country, creating a complex ecclesiastical environment that requires careful examination when considering how churches respond to issues of women's protection and abuse.

The Denominational Landscape and Governance Structures

Understanding the diverse denominational landscape in Ghana is essential for analysing institutional responses to abuse, as different church traditions operate under vastly different governance models and accountability structures. The mainline or orthodox churches, which represent the oldest Christian establishments in Ghana, maintain relatively structured hierarchies and formal doctrines that influence their approach to leadership accountability. Among these, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, originating from Basel Mission work, maintains a strong presence particularly among the Akan people, while the Methodist Church of Ghana, established through Wesleyan missionary efforts, has developed a significant nationwide footprint (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). Furthermore, the Roman Catholic Church represents the largest single Christian denomination in Ghana, operating through established diocesan structures with clear lines of authority extending to the Vatican (Omenyo, 2002).

These mainline churches typically operate with formal constitutions, established protocols for leadership accountability, and active participation in ecumenical bodies such as the Christian Council of Ghana. Moreover, they generally require formal theological training for clergy and maintain disciplinary procedures for addressing misconduct. However, despite these structural advantages, the effectiveness of these mechanisms in protecting women from abuse remains variable and often depends on the willingness of leadership to enforce existing policies (Okyere-Manu, 2020).

In contrast, the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches, which represent the fastest-growing segment of Christianity in Ghana, operate under markedly different governance structures that have significant implications for accountability and response to abuse. The classical Pentecostal churches, including

the Church of Pentecost, Assemblies of God Ghana, and Apostolic Church Ghana, have developed relatively established structures and governance systems over their decades of operation in Ghana (Larbi, 2001). Nevertheless, the newer Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal churches, such as International Central Gospel Church, Lighthouse Chapel International, Action Chapel International, and Perez Chapel, are characterised by contemporary worship styles, emphasis on prosperity theology, and often highly centralised leadership under their founder-pastors (Gifford, 2004).

This centralisation of authority in Charismatic churches creates a particularly challenging environment for addressing abuse allegations. As Asamoah-Gyadu (2013) notes, many of these churches function with the founder-pastor as the primary and often unchallenged authority, supported by boards of directors or trustees whose power is frequently limited in practice. The emphasis on prophetic authority and spiritual leadership means that challenging these leaders is often perceived not merely as questioning human authority but as challenging divine appointment itself. Consequently, this governance model creates significant barriers for women seeking to report abuse or hold leaders accountable for misconduct.

Additionally, African Independent Churches, including the Musama Disco Christo Church, the Church of the Twelve Apostles, and various spiritual churches that blend Christian and traditional African religious elements, add further complexity to Ghana's ecclesiastical landscape. These churches often operate with unique governance structures that reflect their synthesis of Christian and African traditional religious practices, creating yet another set of considerations for understanding institutional responses to abuse (Omenyo and Atiemo, 2006).

1.2: Statement of Problem

Despite the foundational role of the church as a moral sanctuary and haven for vulnerable populations, religious institutions in Ghana have increasingly become sites where women experience various forms

of abuse, that is, sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual. Ironically, all these abuses are mostly perpetrated by ecclesiastical leaders across all hierarchical levels. This contradiction between the church's protective mandate and the prevalence rate of abuse within its confines presents a critical institutional failure that undermines both the safety of congregants and the moral authority of religious leadership. The problem is compounded by the significant variation in how different denominations respond to allegations of abuse against women by their leaders. According to the 2021 census (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022), Christianity represents 71.3% of Ghana's population, which makes churches influential social institutions. However, there is no systematic understanding of how various denominations in Ghana address reported cases of leaders' abuse of women. Ghana's Christian landscape is diverse. It comprises Pentecostals/Charismatics (44%), other Protestants (24%), Roman Catholics (14%), and others (18%) (U.S. Department of State, 2024), yet their varied approaches to addressing abuse remain understudied. Some denominations have developed formal policies and accountability mechanisms, while others rely on informal traditional resolution methods or maintain institutional silence, creating an inconsistent landscape of women's protection across religious communities.

Research indicates that clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse is a documented problem in Ghana, though official data remains limited (Amankwaa et al., 2021). The hierarchical nature of church governance structures, combined with cultural and theological emphases on submission and obedience, creates power dynamics that can facilitate abuse while simultaneously inhibiting reporting and appropriate institutional response. Studies suggest that 90 to 95 per cent of victims of clergy sexual exploitation are women (Benyei, 1998), highlighting the gendered nature of this problem. Women, who constitute a significant portion of church membership, remain particularly vulnerable due to these intersecting factors of gender, religious authority, and institutional power.

Furthermore, research has shown that religious beliefs and cultural norms can sustain women's experiences of violence in Ghana's religious contexts (Stiles-Ocran, 2023), indicating that theological frameworks may inadvertently contribute to vulnerability rather than protection. The intersection of gender, power dynamics, and religious authority creates complex challenges for protection mechanisms and accountability systems within denominational structures.

Currently, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding how denominational theology, governance structures, and institutional cultures influence responses to abuse allegations in Ghana's religious context. This knowledge gap prevents the development of effective, denominationally sensitive interventions and policies that could better protect women within religious communities. Without understanding these denominational variations and their underlying factors, efforts to address abuse within Ghana's churches remain fragmented and potentially ineffective.

The absence of comprehensive research examining denominational responses to leader abuse in Ghana's religious landscape represents a critical gap that must be addressed to ensure the safety and protection of women within faith communities and to restore the moral integrity of religious institutions as spaces of sanctuary rather than harm.

1.3: Research Aim

This study seeks to investigate and compare how selected Ghanaian Christian denominations define, respond to, and attempt to prevent the abuse of women by church leaders. The research aims to highlight gaps, identify best practices, and contribute to a broader conversation on accountability and the protection of women in religious spaces. This will be achieved by examining institutional practices, theological interpretations, and support systems across various church traditions.

1.4: Research Objectives

The objectives of the research are;

1. To identify the various types of abuse experienced by women in various church denominations in Ghana.
2. To determine the most prevalent forms of abuse that women encountered from church leaders.
3. To analyse the responses and mechanisms (e.g., disciplinary actions, counselling, support systems) employed by different denominations when such abuse is reported.
4. To find out whether there are any mechanisms in place to protect women in various denominations.

1.5: Research Questions

1. What forms of abuse are women experiencing from church leaders within different Christian denominations in Ghana?
2. Which type of abuse is most prevalent among the types of abuse?
3. What support systems, mechanisms exist within these denominations for affected women?
4. What mechanisms have the various denominations in Ghana put in place to prevent abuse of women in church settings?

1.6: Significance of The Study

The findings of this study would address a Growing Social Concern; There has been a resurgence in the media reports and anecdotal evidence of women suffering various forms of abuse, sexual, emotional and psychological at the hands of church leaders in Ghana. However, limited empirical research exists on how churches respond to such incidents. This study will fill that knowledge gap.

The study also aims to promote Accountability and Transparency in Religious Institutions. This will be done by examining and comparing the policies, procedures, and real-world responses of different

Christian denominations. For example, insights derived from this study may push the various denominations to be more accountable and transparent in handling abuse cases within the church context. Again, understanding the effectiveness and limitations of current church responses can help improve support systems for victims, ensure justice, and discourage further abuse. This is crucial in protecting vulnerable women and restoring faith in religious institutions.

Additionally, the findings of this study will contribute to Policy and Institutional Reforms. For instance**,** the findings can inform church leadership, policymakers, and advocacy groups in developing and revising protocols for choosing leaders and for addressing women's abuse within religious settings.

Moreover, the findings of this research will encourage interdenominational Learning and Best Practices. This will be achieved by comparing how different denominations handle abuse cases, the study allows for cross-learning and the sharing of best practices, which could lead to more unified and effective approaches to tackling abuse cases across the Christian community in Ghana.

Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution to theoretical scholarship by applying institutional theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014) and feminist theory (Hooks, 2000; Walby, 1990) to understand denominational responses to abuse in religious contexts. Through institutional theory, the research illuminates how formal and informal organisational structures, norms, and practices within different church denominations shape their responses to allegations of abuse (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1987), revealing the mechanisms through which religious institutions either enable or prevent accountability (Oliver, 1991). By employing feminist theory, the study critically examines power dynamics, gender hierarchies, and patriarchal structures embedded within religious institutions that contribute to women's vulnerability and silence around abuse (Connell, 1987; Lerner, 1986). The integration of these two theoretical frameworks provides a robust analytical lens for understanding the intersection of institutional dynamics and gender-based oppression within Ghanaian

churches (Mama, 1995; Oyěwùmí, 1997). This dual theoretical approach advances scholarly understanding of how religious institutions function as gendered spaces (Avishai, 2008; Woodhead, 2013) and contributes to broader theoretical discussions on institutional accountability, power relations, and gender justice within faith-based organisations (Chaves, 1997; Nesbitt, 1997), particularly in African contexts where such theoretical applications remain underexplored (Chitando & Chirongoma, 2012; Phiri & Nadar, 2006).

Methodologically, this study contributes to research practice by employing a qualitative approach that captures the nuanced, contextual, and experiential dimensions of abuse and institutional responses within religious settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The qualitative methodology allows for in-depth exploration of sensitive topics that quantitative methods might overlook (Patton, 2015), including the lived experiences of affected women, the complexities of denominational cultures, and the informal practices that shape institutional responses beyond written policies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). By conducting comparative analysis across multiple denominations, including Catholics, Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Mainline Protestant churches, the study demonstrates how qualitative comparative methods can reveal patterns, divergences, and contextual factors that influence institutional behaviour (Ragin, 1987; Yin, 2018). This methodological approach provides a model for future researchers investigating sensitive issues within religious institutions, demonstrating effective strategies for engaging diverse denominational stakeholders, navigating institutional access challenges, and gathering rich data on topics often shrouded in secrecy (Dickson-Swift et al., 2009; Lee, 1993). Furthermore, the study's methodological design contributes to expanding qualitative research techniques in African religious studies (Becker et al., 2013; Chitando, 2007), offering insights into culturally sensitive data collection approaches that respect religious contexts while maintaining scholarly rigour and ethical standards (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Tracy, 2010).

Another significance of the findings is Academic Relevance; thus, the research contributes to the body of literature on gender studies, religion, ethics, and social justice in Africa. It will be useful to scholars, students, clergy, and activists working at the intersection of faith and gender advocacy.

It can also contribute to national and denominational discourse on gender justice and human rights.

1.7: Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining how various denominations address the abuse of women by church leaders in Ghana. It specifically investigates how various churches respond to reported cases of abuse of women by the leaders of the church. Geographically, the study is limited to Ghana, with in-person data collection specifically focused on the Greater Accra region in Ghana, which captures responses from Ghanaian church members nationwide. The denominational scope encompasses these selected Christian denominations in Ghana, including the Catholic Church, Pentecostal Churches, Charismatic Churches and Mainline Protestant Churches. The thematic scope to be looked at is physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and spiritual types of abuses. The research specifically investigates how the churches respond to or address these particular types of abuse incidents and explores women's protection mechanisms within these church structures.

The participation scope encompasses three distinct categories of respondents: Church members (congregants), and Church leaders (pastors, elders, deacons, deaconesses, ministry leaders, bible study leaders, teachers, etc.).

1.8: Limitations of the study

While this study aims to provide comprehensive insights into how various denominations in Ghana respond to reported cases of abuse of women by leaders, it also has some limitations. Firstly, the study is limited to Christian denominations, thereby excluding other religious traditions.

Secondly, despite having sixteen (16) regions in Ghana, the in-person data collection is restricted to only the Greater Accra Region. Again, the study focuses specifically on leader-perpetrated abuse only. This may not cover peer-to-peer or congregant-to-leader abuse.

1.9: Organisation of the Study

This research is organised into five chapters. Chapter One provides a comprehensive introduction to the study, including background information, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations, and the organisation of the study. It sets the tone of the research by elaborating on the contribution of religious institutions, particularly the church in Ghana and the world at large. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature, including theoretical and empirical studies, and discusses key concepts such as the church, women's protection, denominational response, leaders and abuse. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework and highlights the research gap that the study aims to address.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology, including the research design, approach, target population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents and analyses the findings thematically based on the responses of the participants. Finally, Chapter Five provides a summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for stakeholders. The chapter will also suggest areas for further research, ensuring the study contributes both practically and academically to the field of faith and women's protection.

1.10: Chapter Summary

Chapter One establishes the study's foundation, highlighting the paradox of churches as moral sanctuaries becoming sites of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual) against women by leaders. It identifies a research gap in how Ghana's Christian denominations (71.3% of the population, including Pentecostals, Charismatics, Protestants, and Catholics) respond, varying from

formal policies to informal resolutions or silence. The study aims to compare denominational responses and prevention mechanisms through four objectives: identifying abuse types, their prevalence, response mechanisms, and protective systems. Research questions align with these objectives, and the study's significance lies in promoting accountability, policy reform, interdenominational learning, and gender studies contributions.

Theoretically, the study employs institutional theory and feminist theory to examine how organisational structures and gender power dynamics shape denominational responses to abuse, advancing scholarly understanding of religious institutions as gendered spaces in African contexts. Methodologically, the research adopts a qualitative approach that captures nuanced experiences and contextual factors across denominations, providing a comparative framework for investigating sensitive issues within religious institutions while demonstrating culturally sensitive data collection strategies. The scope covers major denominations and abuse types, with in-person data collection in Greater Accra. The chapter sets up a five-chapter structure to enhance women's protection in Ghanaian churches.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.0: Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of existing theories related to the topic under study. The chapter begins with the theoretical framework outlining key theories relevant to the complex dynamics between denominational theology, institutional structures, and protective responses to women's abuse within religious contexts.

It proceeds to analyse the relevance of these theories to the current study. This is followed by a comprehensive review of the related empirical literature, focusing on key variables such as population, methodology, sample size, scope, limitations, and findings. The chapter then presents the conceptual framework that maps out the study's variables and operational definitions of key terms related to the study. The chapter concludes by summarising key insights and identifying gaps in the literature.

2.1: Theoretical Framework: Institutional Theory and Feminist Theory

Understanding how churches respond to abuse against women requires a robust theoretical foundation that addresses both the organisational dynamics of religious institutions and the gendered nature of power relations within these contexts. Consequently, this study is structured around two complementary theoretical frameworks: Institutional Theory and Feminist Theory. While Institutional Theory provides insights into how churches, as formal organisations, develop and maintain structures, norms, and responses to abuse allegations, Feminist Theory illuminates the gender-based power dynamics that enable and perpetuate such abuse. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens through which to examine the mechanisms that various denominations employ to protect women from leaders' abuse in Ghana.

The Institutional Theory

Institutional Theory emerged as a dominant perspective in organisational sociology during the late 1970s and early 1980s, though its roots can be traced to earlier sociological work. The theory was primarily developed and popularised by scholars such as John Meyer and Brian Rowan (1977), Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell (1983), and W. Richard Scott (1995, 2008). These theorists sought to explain why organisations in similar environments tend to adopt similar structures, practices, and procedures over time, a phenomenon they termed "institutional isomorphism."Meyer and Rowan's seminal work, "Institutionalised Organisations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony" (1977), argued that organisations adopt certain structures and practices not necessarily because they are efficient, but because they are considered legitimate within their institutional environment. Subsequently, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) expanded this framework by identifying three mechanisms through which institutional isomorphism occurs: coercive isomorphism (resulting from formal and informal pressures), mimetic isomorphism (imitation of successful organisations under uncertainty), and normative isomorphism (professionalisation and standardisation of practices). Furthermore, Scott's comprehensive work on institutions emphasised the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars that constitute institutional frameworks and shape organisational behaviour.

At its core, Institutional Theory posits several fundamental principles that are particularly relevant to understanding denominational responses to abuse. First, the theory asserts that organisations exist within institutional environments characterised by rules, norms, values, and taken-for-granted assumptions that shape organisational behaviour. Unlike purely technical or market-driven perspectives, Institutional Theory emphasises that organisations seek legitimacy as much as they seek efficiency or profitability. Legitimacy, in this context, refers to the perception that an organisation's actions are desirable, proper, or appropriate within a socially constructed system of norms and values.

Moreover, the theory highlights that organisations adopt institutionalised practices, thus formal structures, policies, and procedures that may become decoupled from actual organisational activities. This decoupling means that what organisations formally claim to do may differ significantly from what they actually do in practice. Additionally, Institutional Theory recognises that organisations face pressures to conform to institutional expectations from various sources, including regulatory bodies, professional associations, public opinion, and other organisations within their field. Consequently, organisations within the same institutional field tend to become increasingly similar over time, a process that shapes their governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and response systems.

Furthermore, the theory acknowledges that institutions are characterised by stability and resistance to change, as established practices become deeply embedded and taken for granted. Nevertheless, institutional change can occur through various mechanisms, including external shocks, internal contradictions, or the agency of institutional entrepreneurs who challenge existing arrangements.

Feminist Theory

Feminist Theory encompasses a diverse body of scholarship that has evolved over several waves, each contributing distinct perspectives on gender, power, and oppression. The foundations of modern feminist thought can be traced to liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and later to John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill in the nineteenth century, who advocated for women's equal rights and opportunities. However, the emergence of Feminist Theory as a comprehensive analytical framework gained significant momentum during the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Key proponents who have shaped Feminist Theory include Simone de Beauvoir, whose groundbreaking work "The Second Sex" (1949) examined how women have been constructed as "the Other" in relation to men. Subsequently, Kate Millett's "Sexual Politics" (1970) introduced the concept of patriarchy as a political institution through which men dominate women. Radical feminists such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin further developed theories of male dominance and sexual

violence, while Black feminists, including bell hooks, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins, expanded feminist analysis to address intersectionality—the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class, and gender that create overlapping systems of discrimination.

Parallel to these developments, African feminist scholars have articulated frameworks that challenge the universalising tendencies of Western feminism while addressing the specific realities of African women. Notably, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí's (1997) work has fundamentally questioned the applicability of Western gender categories to African societies, arguing that gender was not necessarily a primary organising principle in pre-colonial African communities. Similarly, Ifi Amadiume's (1987) seminal work "Male Daughters, Female Husbands" demonstrates the fluidity of gender roles in traditional Igbo society, challenging Western binary conceptions of gender. These scholars compel us to approach gender analysis in African contexts with cultural sensitivity and awareness of how colonialism imposed foreign gender ideologies onto indigenous societies (Nzegwu, 2006; Mama, 1997).

Within the Ghanaian context specifically, scholars have made significant contributions to understanding gender, power, and religious institutions. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (2001, 2004), a pioneering Ghanaian theologian and founder of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, has critically examined how Christianity in Africa has both empowered and marginalised women. Her work emphasises the need for African women to reclaim their spiritual agency and challenge patriarchal interpretations of scripture that were often reinforced by missionary Christianity. Furthermore, Akosua Adomako Ampofo's (2008; Ampofo & Boateng, 2007) sociological research on gender and violence in Ghana provides crucial empirical grounding for understanding how gender-based violence operates within Ghanaian institutions, including religious organisations. Additionally, Takyiwaa Manuh's (2007) scholarship on gender and development in Ghana illuminates how women navigate multiple systems of authority—traditional, religious, and legal—that often impose conflicting expectations and limitations on their lives.

In the context of religion and gender more broadly, feminist theologians and scholars such as Mary Daly (1973), Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983), and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) have critically examined how religious institutions perpetuate patriarchal structures and how religious texts and traditions have been interpreted to justify women's subordination. However, African feminist theologians, including Oduyoye (2001) and Rose Mary Amenga-Etego (2011), as well as other members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, have extended this critique by addressing the intersection of colonialism, Christianity, and indigenous African religious practices. These scholars argue that African women face what Amenga-Etego (2011) describes as a "double colonisation", that is, oppression from both Western patriarchal Christianity and certain oppressive aspects of traditional African cultures. Consequently, African feminist theology seeks to recover liberating elements from both Christian and African traditions while rejecting patriarchal interpretations from both sources (Phiri, Govinden & Nadar, 2002; Kanyoro, 2002).

Feminist Theory is characterised by several core principles that provide critical insights into gender-based abuse within religious institutions. Fundamentally, the theory asserts that gender is a primary organising principle of social life that structures power relations, with women systematically disadvantaged relative to men (Connell, 2002; Lorber, 1994). Nevertheless, as Oyěwùmí (1997) cautions, this principle must be applied cautiously in African contexts, recognising that pre-colonial African societies may have organised social relations differently. Therefore, contemporary gender inequality in African churches may reflect not only indigenous patriarchal practices but also the imposition of Victorian gender norms through missionary Christianity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1991). This historical layering of patriarchies creates complex dynamics that require nuanced analysis.

Central to Feminist Theory is the concept of patriarchy—a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1990). Within this framework, feminist scholars emphasise that violence and abuse against women are not merely individual acts but are

manifestations of systemic male power and control (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Kelly, 1988). Building on this foundation, African feminists such as Obioma Nnaemeka (2004) have developed the concept of "nego-feminism," which acknowledges patriarchal oppression while emphasising negotiation, collaboration, and cultural contextualization rather than confrontation. This approach recognises that in many African contexts, including Ghana, women's empowerment is often pursued through strategic engagement with rather than wholesale rejection of existing cultural and religious structures. Moreover, the concept of "African womanism" or "motherism," as articulated by scholars like Catherine Obianuju Acholonu (1995), centres the importance of motherhood, community, and collective well-being in African feminist thought, distinguishing it from Western liberal feminism's emphasis on individual rights and autonomy (Hudson-Weems, 1993; Ogunyemi, 1985).

Understanding abuse within Ghanaian churches therefore requires examining the broader structural and ideological contexts that enable and normalize such behavior, including how religious authority intersects with traditional authority structures, how charismatic and Pentecostal movements have reshaped gender dynamics, and how legal pluralism—the coexistence of customary, religious, and statutory law—creates spaces where abuse can be hidden or minimized (Biakolo, 2003; Manuh, 2007). In Ghana, where charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity has grown exponentially since the 1980s, scholars have noted how prophetic authority and "spiritual warfare" discourses can be manipulated to control women and justify abuse under the guise of spiritual deliverance or submission to anointed leadership (Gifford, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; van Dijk, 2001).

Moreover, Feminist Theory highlights how institutions perpetuate gender inequality through formal rules, informal norms, ideological justifications, and the distribution of resources and authority (Acker, 1990; Martin, 2004). Religious institutions, in particular, have been identified as sites where patriarchal values are often deeply embedded and legitimised through sacred texts, theological interpretations, and hierarchical structures that predominantly position men in leadership roles (Chaves, 1997; Lehman,

2002). However, as Ghanaian scholars like Oduyoye (2001) demonstrate, this institutional patriarchy operates differently across denominational contexts. Traditional mainline churches inherited colonial-era gender hierarchies, while newer Pentecostal and charismatic churches, despite their claims of spiritual egalitarianism, often reinforce gender subordination through teachings on wifely submission, male headship, and women's primary role as spiritual supporters of male leaders (Soothill, 2007; Amoah & Donkor, 2016). Furthermore, the prosperity gospel prevalent in many Ghanaian churches can create additional vulnerabilities for women, as the promise of divine blessing may be used to manipulate women into silence about abuse or to blame them for their own victimisation (Heuser, 2015; Darkwah, 2011).

Additionally, contemporary Feminist Theory, particularly through the concept of intersectionality developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), recognises that women's experiences of oppression are shaped not only by gender but also by the intersection of multiple identities, including race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and religion. This intersectional perspective is especially relevant in the Ghanaian context, where women's experiences may be influenced by ethnic identity, socioeconomic status, educational level, and denominational affiliation (Ampofo et al., 2004). Significantly, Ghana's ethnic diversity means that women from matrilineal groups such as the Akan may have different experiences of gender and authority compared to women from patrilineal groups (Mikell, 1989; Nukunya, 2003). Additionally, women's traditional roles as queen mothers in some Ghanaian societies represent forms of female authority that complicate simplistic narratives of universal female subordination (Stoeltje, 2003; Arhin, 1983). Therefore, as Amina Mama (1997) and other African feminists argue, intersectional analysis in African contexts must include consideration of the ongoing impacts of colonialism, ethnic and linguistic diversity, rural-urban divides, and the particular configurations of religious authority in different communities.

Furthermore, the theory underscores the importance of centring women's voices and experiences in research and practice. It advocates for transformative approaches that challenge existing power

structures and work toward gender justice and equality (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991). This emancipatory orientation distinguishes feminist research from purely descriptive studies by explicitly seeking to understand oppression to address and eliminate it. In alignment with this principle, African feminist methodologies emphasise Ubuntu ethics—the philosophy that "I am because we are"—which prioritises communal well-being and relational approaches to research (Chilisa, 2012; Mkhize, 2008). As such, research on abuse in Ghanaian churches must not only document women's experiences but also engage with communities, religious leaders, and survivors themselves as co-creators of knowledge and solutions. This participatory approach respects African epistemologies that value oral tradition, collective wisdom, and the knowledge held by elders and community leaders, while simultaneously holding institutions accountable for protecting vulnerable members (Smith, 2012; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

In conclusion, while Western Feminist Theory provides valuable analytical tools for understanding gender-based oppression and institutional patriarchy, addressing abuse of women by church leaders in Ghana requires integrating African and Ghanaian feminist perspectives. These perspectives illuminate how colonialism, indigenous cultural practices, and contemporary religious movements interact to shape women's vulnerabilities and resistances (Mama, 2011; Tamale, 2006). Moreover, they offer culturally grounded frameworks for change that emphasise negotiation, community engagement, and the recovery of liberating traditions from both African and Christian heritages (Oduyoye, 2004; Phiri et al., 2002). Therefore, a comprehensive theoretical framework for this research must draw from both Western and African feminist thought, recognising the contributions of each while remaining attentive to the specific historical, cultural, and religious contexts that shape women's experiences in Ghanaian churches.

Integration and Synergy of Institutional Theory and Feminist Theory

While Institutional Theory and Feminist Theory have distinct origins and emphases, their integration provides a comprehensive and powerful framework for this study. Institutional Theory explains the organisational dynamics, structures, and processes through which churches operate and respond to abuse allegations, while Feminist Theory provides the critical gender analysis necessary to understand why abuse occurs and how responses may be shaped by patriarchal values.

Specifically, the combination of these theories enables the research to examine both how churches function as institutions within broader social contexts and how these institutions are fundamentally gendered in ways that affect women's safety and well-being. Institutional Theory helps identify the formal and informal mechanisms that denominations employ (or fail to employ), while Feminist Theory provides the analytical tools to evaluate whether these mechanisms adequately address gender-based power imbalances and serve women's interests.

Moreover, integrating these theories allows for a more nuanced understanding of institutional change or resistance to change regarding women's protection. Feminist Theory identifies the patriarchal norms and power structures that need transformation, while Institutional Theory illuminates the organisational dynamics, pressures, and processes through which such transformation might occur or be blocked. For instance, the research can examine how external pressures from women's rights movements or legal frameworks (institutional factors) interact with internal patriarchal resistance (feminist concerns) to shape denominational policies and practices.

Furthermore, this theoretical integration supports a multi-level analysis that examines macro-level institutional environments, meso-level organisational structures and processes, and micro-level individual experiences. Such a comprehensive analysis is essential for understanding the complex interplay of factors that influence women's safety in religious contexts and for identifying effective intervention points for improving protection.

2.2: Relevance Of The Theories To The Study

Institutional theory

Institutional theory is highly relevant to this study, as it provides a framework for understanding how organisational structures, norms and external pressures shape the behaviour and responses of institutions like Christian denominations in Ghana. The theory emphasises that organisations do not operate in isolation but are influenced by broader institutional environments, including cultural expectations, regulatory frameworks, and isomorphic pressures that lead to conformity or variation in practices. This aligns directly with the study's objectives, which focus on examining denominational responses to abuse, identifying mechanisms for protection, and analysing variations across different church traditions. For instance, **Objective 1 and 2 are to identify types and the most prevalent type of abuse:** Institutional theory helps explain why certain types of abuse (e.g., sexual, emotional, or spiritual) may persist or become normalised within church settings. Through concepts like institutionalisation (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977), the theory illustrates how abusive practices can become "taken-for-granted" behaviours embedded in hierarchical structures, especially where power dynamics favour ecclesiastical leaders. For instance, cultural-cognitive pillars (Scott, 1995) could reveal how shared beliefs about authority and submission enable the prevalence of specific abuses, such as psychological manipulation, which might be more common due to ingrained norms of obedience.

Also, Objective 3 to analyse responses and mechanisms: The theory's tenets of isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), coercive (e.g., pressures from laws or societal scandals), mimetic (e.g., imitating policies from international churches), and normative (e.g., professional standards in theology) are particularly pertinent. They can elucidate why some denominations adopt formal disciplinary actions or counselling systems while others rely on informal methods or exhibit decoupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), where policies exist ceremonially for legitimacy but are not

effectively implemented. This framework enables the study to compare how denominational governance and institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991) influence responses, such as those in Pentecostal/Charismatic versus Roman Catholic contexts, thereby highlighting gaps in accountability.

Further, Objective 4 is to ascertain the mechanisms for protection: Institutional Entrepreneurship (DiMaggio, 1988) and Organisational Fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) offer insights into how actors within denominations can drive change, such as developing preventive policies or support systems. The three pillars (Scott, 1995), regulative (e.g., internal rules or sanctions), normative (e.g., ethical standards), and cultural-cognitive (e.g., shared assumptions about gender roles), can assess the effectiveness of protection mechanisms, explaining why some denominations might lack robust systems due to competing logics or resistance to external pressures.

Moreso, Institutional theory provides a framework for understanding how organisations, including churches, operate within a web of social norms, rules, and expectations to gain legitimacy (acceptance by stakeholders) and ensure stability (long-term survival). It emphasises that organisations like churches do not just act rationally to achieve goals like efficiency but sometimes succumb to external and internal pressures to align with cultural norms, societal values, or peer practices. These pressures shape their structures, policies, and behaviours, often beyond practical necessity. For example, a Ghanaian Church facing public criticism over a leader's abuse scandal might adopt a formal safeguarding policy to restore moral legitimacy. Even if the policy isn't fully implemented (a practice called decoupling), its existence signals to congregants and society that the church takes abuse seriously.

Another relevance of this theory is that it offers a robust theoretical lens for analysing the denominational responses to leaders' abuse in Ghanaian churches; for instance, it explains denominational differences in responding to reported cases of abuse. It helps us understand why

different denominations respond the way they do. For example, structures, policies, etc., may differ from one denomination to another.

Another relevance of the Institutional Theory to this study is that it addresses formal vs. informal responses by examining both official policies and actual practices, revealing gaps between stated protections and real outcomes. Formal responses are the written, documented procedures that the church officially adopts. Some of the formal responses are background check requirements, screening and vetting of proposed leaders and ministers. Another example is the Zero-tolerance statements, for example, public declarations that abuse will not be tolerated in the church.

Overall, institutional theory is essential for dissecting the "institutional failure" mentioned in the problem statement, as it shifts focus from individual perpetrators to systemic factors, enabling recommendations for denominationally sensitive interventions.

Relevance of Feminist Theory to the Study

Feminist theory is equally relevant and complementary, offering a critical lens on gender inequalities, power imbalances, and patriarchal structures that promote violence against women. Being rooted in perspectives like liberal feminism (advocating for equal rights), radical feminism (challenging patriarchy), and intersectional feminism (considering overlaps with race, class, and culture), it prioritises women's experiences and critiques systems that marginalise them. In the context of this study, which centres on the abuse of women in male-dominated religious hierarchies, feminist theory illuminates the gendered dimensions of abuse, vulnerability, and institutional responses in Ghana's Christian denominations.

Again, Objectives 1 and 2 are to identify types and the most prevalent forms of abuse: Feminist theory underscores the gendered nature of abuse, as evidenced by statistics like 90-95% of clergy exploitation victims being women (Benyei, 1998). It can analyse how abuses such as sexual or spiritual

manipulation stem from patriarchal interpretations of theology, where notions of female submission (e.g., rooted in cultural norms or biblical texts) create environments conducive to exploitation. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) is key here, as it considers how Ghanaian women's vulnerabilities are compounded by factors like socioeconomic status or ethnicity, helping identify why certain abuses (e.g., emotional or psychological) might be more prevalent in specific denominational contexts.

Moreso, Objective 3 is to analyse responses and mechanisms: The theory critiques how power dynamics inhibit effective responses, such as through victim-blaming or silencing, often justified by religious doctrines. It can evaluate support systems such as counselling or legal assistance from a feminist standpoint, assessing whether they empower women or reinforce inequality. For example, radical feminist views might highlight how hierarchical governance in denominations (e.g., male-led authority) leads to inadequate disciplinary actions, whilst postcolonial feminism could address how colonial legacies in Ghanaian Christianity intersect with local cultural norms to sustain violence (Stiles-Ocran, 2023).

Lastly, **Objective 4 is to ascertain the mechanisms for protection:** Feminist theory advocates for transformative mechanisms that challenge patriarchy, such as gender-sensitive policies or empowerment programs. It can reveal gaps in preventive measures, like the absence of women in leadership roles, and propose ways to integrate feminist principles into denominational structures for better protection. This aligns with the study's aim to highlight best practices, emphasizing agency and advocacy for women in religious spaces.

In essence, feminist theory humanises the study by centring women's voices and experiences, addressing the "complex paradox" of churches as sites of harm rather than sanctuary, and pushing for structural changes to dismantle gender-based vulnerabilities.

Therefore, integrating both institutional and feminist theories provides a robust theoretical framework for the study. Institutional theory explains the organisational and systemic mechanisms behind denominational variations, while feminist theory adds a critical gender analysis to uncover the root causes of abuse and advocate for equity. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive examination of the objectives, bridging structural insights with emancipatory goals, and ultimately contributing to policy recommendations that enhance women's safety and restore institutional integrity in Ghana's faith communities.

2.3: Review of Related and Relevant Literature

2.3.1 Objective 1) Types of Abuse Experienced by Women in Church Denominations

Creating efficient safeguards requires an understanding of the different types of abuse that women experience in religious settings. The literature reveals a complex landscape of abuse types, each with distinct characteristics and impacts on survivors. This section examines scholarly work that has classified and analysed various forms of abuse perpetrated by religious leaders in faith settings.

Amankwaa, Logie, Lacombe-Duncan, Newman, Levermore, Marshall, and Laing (2021) conducted a crucial study on the topic “clergy-perpetrated sexual abuse in Ghana” to understand the nature and prevalence of this phenomenon within religious contexts. The researchers employed a qualitative methodology in which in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 survivors of clergy sexual abuse to explore their experiences. Their findings revealed that clergy sexual abuse in Ghana operates through complex power dynamics, with perpetrators exploiting their spiritual authority to manipulate victims. The study concluded that religious authority creates unique vulnerabilities that facilitate sexual exploitation, particularly when combined with cultural norms of deference to religious leaders. However, there was a gap in their research that is; they focused exclusively on sexual abuse, leaving a significant gap in understanding other forms of abuse, such as emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual manipulation. Consequently, this current study intends to fill this gap by adopting a

comprehensive approach that identifies and examines various types of abuse, including sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual experiences by women across different denominational contexts in Ghana, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of the abuse landscape.

Furthermore, Drumm, Popescu, and Riggs (2019) investigated clergy sexual misconduct in the United States, intending to understand patterns and typologies of sexual abuse by religious leaders. Their mixed-methods approach combined quantitative analysis of 328 reported cases with qualitative interviews with survivors and church officials. The findings revealed distinct patterns of sexual abuse, including grooming behaviours, exploitation of counselling relationships, and abuse of positional authority. The study concluded that clergy sexual misconduct follows predictable patterns that can be identified and prevented through appropriate safeguards. While this research provided important insights into sexual abuse mechanisms, it remained limited to the American context and focused predominantly on sexual misconduct, thereby neglecting other abuse forms such as emotional manipulation, financial exploitation, and spiritual abuse that may be equally prevalent in religious settings. Additionally, the study did not adequately address how different denominational structures might influence abuse patterns or responses. The current study seeks to overcome these limitations by investigating multiple abuse types and their nature within Ghana's diverse denominational landscape, recognising that abuse manifests in various forms beyond sexual misconduct and that understanding these variations is essential for developing comprehensive protection strategies.

Similarly, Starke (2019) examined institutional betrayal in cases of clergy sexual abuse within Catholic contexts, aiming to understand how institutional responses compound the trauma experienced by survivors. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach with 15 survivors, Starke found that institutional protection of perpetrators and dismissal of victims' experiences constituted a secondary form of abuse that often proved more damaging than the initial violation. The research concluded that

institutional betrayal significantly impacts survivors' healing processes and trust in religious institutions. However, Starke's exclusive focus on Catholic institutional responses and sexual abuse meant that other denominational structures and abuse types and their nature remained unexplored. Furthermore, the study did not adequately address prevention mechanisms or the range of abusive behaviours beyond sexual misconduct. This gap is particularly significant given that different governance structures may produce varying patterns of institutional response and accountability. Accordingly, the present research extends beyond these limitations by examining institutional responses across multiple denominational structures in Ghana while simultaneously investigating various abuse types and their nature, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of both the abuse landscape and institutional accountability mechanisms.

Transitioning to more recent scholarly investigations, Blythe, Wilkes, and Halcomb (2020) conducted research on spiritual abuse in Christian communities in Australia, with the specific purpose of defining and characterising this often-overlooked form of abuse. Their study employed a qualitative descriptive methodology using focus groups with 32 participants who had experienced or witnessed spiritual abuse. The findings identified spiritual abuse as the misuse of religious authority to control, manipulate, or harm others, manifesting through coercive religious practices, enforced isolation from questioning members, and the weaponisation of scripture. The research concluded that spiritual abuse is a distinct and serious form of harm that requires recognition alongside other abuse types. Nonetheless, while Blythe et al. made significant contributions to understanding spiritual abuse, their research did not systematically examine how this form of abuse intersects with other abuse types, such as sexual, emotional, or physical abuse, within religious contexts. Moreover, the Australian context and the study's focus on predominantly Pentecostal communities limit its applicability to Ghana's broader denominational diversity. The current study addresses these gaps by investigating spiritual abuse alongside other abuse forms within Ghana's varied denominational landscape, examining how

these different types of abuse may co-occur and compound each other's effects, particularly in contexts where religious authority carries significant cultural weight.

Finally, Sekioka and colleagues (2023) investigated psychological abuse in Japanese Christian communities, aiming to identify the mechanisms through which religious leaders exploit psychological vulnerabilities. Their qualitative study employed narrative analysis of 18 survivors' accounts, revealing that psychological abuse in religious contexts often involves gaslighting, isolation from support networks, inducement of guilt and shame, and destruction of self-worth through distorted religious teachings. The research concluded that psychological abuse in religious settings is particularly insidious because it exploits individuals' spiritual beliefs and faith commitments. While this study made important contributions to understanding psychological dimensions of religious abuse, it was limited to Japanese cultural contexts where religious dynamics differ significantly from African settings. Moreover, the study did not examine how psychological abuse intersects with other abuse forms or how different denominational structures might enable or prevent such abuse. The present research extends this work by investigating psychological abuse alongside other abuse types within Ghana's unique cultural and religious context, examining how the intersection of African cultural values, Christian theology, and denominational structures creates specific patterns of abuse that require contextualised understanding and intervention strategies.

In synthesis, the reviewed literature has made substantial contributions to understanding various types of abuse in religious contexts, particularly sexual and spiritual abuse. However, significant gaps remain regarding the comprehensive categorisation of multiple abuse types within specific denominational contexts, especially in African settings like Ghana. Most studies focus on single abuse types or specific denominational traditions, leaving unexplored how multiple forms of abuse co-occur and manifest differently across varied church structures. Furthermore, the predominance of Western-context research limits understanding of how cultural factors unique to Ghana intersect with religious dynamics to shape abuse experiences. The current study addresses these gaps by systematically

identifying and examining sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse across Ghana's diverse denominational landscape, providing a comprehensive, culturally-grounded understanding of the abuse types that women experience in religious contexts.

2.3.2: Objective 2) The Most Prevalent Abuse Experienced by Women from Church Leaders

While understanding the range of abuse types is essential, identifying which forms of abuse are most prevalent provides crucial information for prioritising prevention and response efforts. This section examines research that has investigated the frequency and prevalence of different abuse types in religious contexts, revealing patterns that inform effective protective strategies.

Benyei's seminal research (1998) established foundational knowledge that continues to influence contemporary understanding. Benyei aimed to document the prevalence of clergy sexual misconduct in North American Christian contexts. Through analysis of denominational records and survivor reports across multiple denominations, Benyei found that 90 to 95 percent of victims of clergy sexual exploitation are women, establishing the profoundly gendered nature of religious abuse. The research concluded that sexual abuse by clergy represents a systematic problem rooted in power imbalances rather than isolated incidents. However, while Benyei's work established the prevalence of sexual abuse, it did not comparatively examine the relative frequency of other abuse types, such as emotional, psychological, or spiritual abuse, which may occur even more frequently but receive less attention due to their less visible nature. Additionally, the North American context and the study's age limit its current applicability to contemporary African settings. The present research builds upon Benyei's foundational work by examining not only sexual abuse but also comparing the prevalence of multiple types in Ghana's current religious landscape, thereby identifying which forms of abuse are most common and require urgent attention in contemporary intervention efforts.

Transitioning to African contexts, Stiles-Ocran (2023) conducted research examining how religious beliefs sustain women's experiences of violence in Ghana, aiming to understand the intersection of faith and abuse. The study employed a qualitative methodology with in-depth interviews of 25 Ghanaian women who had experienced violence within religious contexts. Stiles-Ocran found that spiritual and emotional abuse were frequently reported alongside physical and sexual abuse, with participants describing manipulation of biblical texts and religious guilt as common control mechanisms. The research concluded that religious and cultural norms in Ghana create environments where multiple forms of abuse co-occur and are sustained by theological justifications. While this study provided valuable insights into Ghana's specific context, it did not quantitatively compare the prevalence rates of different types of abuse, making it difficult to determine which forms are most common. Moreover, the study's focus on violence generally rather than specifically on abuse by church leaders leaves questions about leader-perpetrated abuse patterns. The present research extends Stiles-Ocran's work by systematically examining and comparing the prevalence of different abuse types specifically perpetrated by church leaders across various denominations in Ghana, providing both qualitative depth and quantitative measurement to identify the most common forms of leader abuse.

Furthermore, Kira, Shuwiekh, Ashby, Elwakeel, Alhuwailah, Sous, Baali, Azdaou, Oliemat, and Jamil (2021) conducted a comprehensive study on religious/spiritual abuse and mental health outcomes across multiple countries to understand the prevalence and impact of spiritual abuse compared to other trauma types. Their quantitative study surveyed 2,196 participants across seven countries using validated trauma and mental health measures. The findings revealed that 45% of participants reported experiencing some form of spiritual abuse, making it one of the most commonly reported abuse types in religious contexts, even surpassing reports of sexual abuse. The research concluded that spiritual abuse is far more prevalent than previously recognised and carries significant mental health consequences comparable to other severe trauma types. However, while Kira et al. provided important prevalence data, their broad international sample may obscure regional and denominational variations

in abuse patterns. Additionally, the study did not specifically examine abuse by religious leaders versus other forms of religious trauma, potentially conflating different phenomena. The current study addresses these limitations by focusing specifically on leader-perpetrated abuse within Ghana's denominational contexts, examining whether spiritual abuse is indeed most common or whether other abuse types predominate in specific church structures, thereby providing a nuanced understanding of prevalence patterns relevant to developing targeted interventions.

Finally, Adjei (2024) conducted groundbreaking research examining gender-based violence in Ghanaian Pentecostal churches, to understand prevalence patterns in this rapidly growing segment of Ghana's religious landscape. The study employed mixed methods, combining survey data from 342 women across 15 Pentecostal churches with qualitative interviews with 20 survivors. Adjei's findings revealed that emotional and spiritual abuse were most commonly reported (72% and 68% respectively), followed by sexual harassment (41%), physical abuse (28%), and sexual assault (19%). The research concluded that in Ghanaian Pentecostal contexts, emotionally and spiritually manipulative behaviours by leaders represent the most prevalent forms of abuse, though these often create vulnerability to subsequent sexual exploitation. While Adjei's research provided crucial Ghana-specific data, its limitation to Pentecostal contexts means that prevalence patterns in other denominational traditions—including mainline Protestant, Catholic, and other groups—remain unknown. Given that denominational structures and theological frameworks vary significantly, abuse prevalence patterns may differ substantially across traditions. The current study extends Adjei's important work by examining abuse prevalence across Ghana's full denominational spectrum, including Pentecostal, Charismatic, Protestant, Catholic, and other traditions, thereby enabling comparative analysis to determine whether abuse type prevalence varies by denominational structure or remains consistent across religious contexts.

In summary, the reviewed literature suggests that while sexual abuse has historically received the most attention and documentation, emotional, psychological, and spiritual abuse may actually be more prevalent in religious contexts. However, significant gaps remain in understanding prevalence patterns within specific cultural contexts, particularly in Ghana, and across different denominational structures. Most studies focus on single denominational traditions or Western contexts, limiting understanding of how prevalence patterns may vary across Ghana's diverse religious landscape. The current study addresses these gaps by systematically comparing the prevalence of multiple abuse types and their nature specifically in leader-to-congregant relationships across various Ghanaian denominations, utilising qualitative methods.

2.3.3: Objective 3) Denominational Responses and Mechanisms to Reported Abuse

Understanding how religious institutions respond when abuse is reported is critical for assessing accountability and developing improved protection systems. This section examines research investigating denominational mechanisms for handling abuse allegations, revealing significant variations in institutional responses.

Terry and Ackerman (2008), though predating the review period, established a foundational understanding through their comprehensive examination of the Catholic Church's response to sexual abuse in the United States. Their purpose was to analyse institutional response patterns and identify systemic failures. Through analysis of diocesan records and interviews with church officials, the researchers found that institutional responses prioritised organisational reputation over victim welfare, often involving perpetrator transfers rather than removal and silencing of victims through confidentiality agreements. While this research provided crucial insights into Catholic institutional failures, it did not examine other denominational structures or contemporary reforms, nor did it address responses to non-sexual forms of abuse. The present study builds upon this foundation by examining current responses across multiple denominational structures in Ghana, investigating how different

governance models influence institutional accountability and whether lessons from historical Catholic failures have informed contemporary practices across denominations.

Subsequently, Whitehead and Perry (2020) investigated how Protestant churches in the United States handle allegations of pastoral misconduct, intending to understand denominational variation in response mechanisms. Their mixed-methods study combined surveys of 423 Protestant church leaders with an analysis of denominational policies across 12 Protestant traditions. The findings revealed significant variation: hierarchical denominations (e.g., Episcopal, Methodist) typically had formal investigative procedures and disciplinary structures, while congregational governance models (e.g., Baptist, independent churches) often lacked systematic response mechanisms, leaving decisions to individual congregations. The research concluded that governance structure significantly influences accountability, with hierarchical systems providing more consistent (though not necessarily more effective) responses than congregational models. However, Whitehead and Perry's focus on formal policies rather than implementation practices means the gap between policy and practice remained unexplored. Moreover, the American context limits applicability to Ghana, where denominational structures may function differently due to cultural factors and resource constraints. The current study addresses these limitations by examining not only formal policies but also actual implementation practices across Ghana's denominational structures, investigating how both hierarchical and congregational models respond to abuse allegations in practice, thereby revealing whether formal structures translate into effective protection.

Transitioning to more recent scholarship, Borg, Garbarino, and Määttä (2020) explored institutional responses to clergy sexual abuse in Scandinavian Lutheran churches, aiming to understand how state-church relationships influence accountability mechanisms. Their qualitative study employed document analysis and interviews with 18 church officials and victims' advocates across Denmark, Sweden, and Norway. The findings revealed that even within the same Lutheran tradition, response mechanisms varied significantly based on national contexts, legal frameworks, and cultural attitudes toward

institutional accountability. The research concluded that effective responses require alignment between church policies, civil legal frameworks, and cultural expectations for transparency. Nevertheless, the Scandinavian context—characterised by strong state oversight of churches and robust legal protections—differs dramatically from Ghana's context, where churches operate with significant autonomy and legal enforcement of accountability may be limited. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on sexual abuse responses, leaving responses to other abuse types unexplored. The present research extends this work by examining denominational responses within Ghana's specific legal and cultural context, investigating how the relative absence of external oversight influences denominational accountability and exploring responses to multiple abuse types beyond sexual misconduct.

Additionally, Balboni and Crossman (2020) investigated mandatory reporting compliance among religious leaders in abuse cases, with the purpose of understanding barriers to reporting even when legal obligations exist. Their mixed-methods study in Massachusetts combined surveys of 156 clergy members with interviews exploring reporting decisions. The findings revealed that only 42% of clergy who encountered suspected abuse made formal reports, with barriers including theological concerns about confidentiality, fear of false accusations, loyalty to fellow clergy, and uncertainty about reporting procedures. The research concluded that legal mandates alone are insufficient to ensure reporting; religious leaders require training, clear procedures, and cultural shifts prioritising victim protection over institutional loyalty. While Balboni and Crossman provided important insights into reporting failures, their study occurred in a context with mandatory reporting laws, which do not exist in Ghana, potentially limiting applicability. Furthermore, the study focused on reporting rather than the broader spectrum of institutional responses once reports are made. The present research extends this work by examining reporting practices and barriers in Ghana's context, where legal mandates may be absent or unenforced, investigating not only whether abuse is reported but also how denominations respond once

reports are received, including investigative procedures, support for victims, and accountability for perpetrators.

Finally, Chikwendu and Uzuegbu (2023) investigated denominational accountability mechanisms in Nigerian Pentecostal churches, aiming to understand how rapidly growing charismatic movements address leadership misconduct. Their mixed-methods study combined surveys of 284 Pentecostal church members with interviews of 15 denominational leaders and document analysis of church policies. The findings revealed that most Pentecostal denominations lacked formal accountability structures, instead relying on the founding leader's authority to address misconduct, which created significant accountability gaps when leaders themselves were accused. The research concluded that Pentecostal governance structures, often centered on charismatic authority rather than institutional procedures, present unique challenges for accountability. However, the Nigerian context and the study's focus exclusively on Pentecostal denominations limit generalizability. Furthermore, the research did not adequately examine victims' experiences of these response mechanisms or compare Pentecostal responses with other denominational approaches. The current study extends this work by examining accountability mechanisms across Ghana's diverse denominations, including Pentecostal, mainline Protestant, Catholic, and other traditions, comparing how different governance structures influence responses and incorporating both institutional and victim perspectives to assess response effectiveness.

In synthesis, the reviewed literature reveals significant variation in denominational responses to abuse, strongly influenced by governance structures, theological frameworks, and cultural contexts. However, substantial gaps remain regarding contemporary responses in African contexts, particularly Ghana, and across diverse denominational traditions. Most research focuses on single denominations or abuse types, lacks a victim-centered assessment of response effectiveness, and occurs in Western contexts with different legal and cultural frameworks. The current study addresses these gaps by systematically examining and comparing actual response mechanisms and their implementation across Ghana's

diverse denominational landscape, incorporating both institutional and survivor perspectives to assess how effectively different denominations respond to multiple types of abuse allegations, thereby identifying both failures and best practices for improving protection systems.

2.3.4: Objective 4) Prevention Mechanisms for Women's Protection in Denominational Contexts

While responding appropriately to abuse when it occurs is essential, preventing abuse through proactive protection mechanisms represents the most effective strategy for safeguarding women. This section examines research investigating denominational prevention approaches, revealing significant gaps between ideal practices and actual implementation.

Holcomb and Holcomb (2018) conducted research examining abuse prevention policies in American evangelical churches, to assess the prevalence and effectiveness of safeguarding measures. Their quantitative study surveyed 512 evangelical churches across the United States regarding prevention policies, screening procedures, and training programs. The findings revealed that only 35% of churches had written abuse prevention policies, 48% conducted background checks on leaders, and merely 22% provided regular abuse awareness training. The research concluded that despite growing awareness of clergy abuse, most evangelical churches lacked systematic prevention mechanisms. However, Holcomb and Holcomb's focus on policy existence rather than implementation effectiveness limits understanding of whether existing policies actually prevent abuse. Moreover, the American evangelical context may not reflect prevention approaches or challenges in Ghanaian denominational settings. The current study addresses these limitations by examining not only whether prevention mechanisms exist across Ghana's denominations but also how they are implemented and perceived as effective by church members and leaders, thereby assessing the gap between policy and practice in abuse prevention.

Subsequently, Yoder and Ferreira (2020) investigated the role of theological education in abuse prevention, with the aim of understanding whether ministerial training programs adequately prepare leaders to maintain ethical boundaries and recognize abuse dynamics. Their mixed-methods study examined curricula at 24 theological seminaries across Africa and conducted interviews with 42 seminary leaders and recent graduates. The findings revealed that most theological programs included minimal content on professional ethics, power dynamics, or abuse prevention, with only 29% requiring courses addressing these topics. The research concluded that theological education represents a critical but underutilized prevention opportunity. However, Yoder and Ferreira's broad African scope meant that Ghana-specific patterns remained unexplored, and the study focused on formal theological education rather than examining how denominations with less formal training pathways (common in Pentecostal and independent churches) approach prevention. The current study extends this work by examining prevention mechanisms across Ghana's diverse denominations, including those relying on formal theological education and those using alternative training models, investigating how different approaches to leadership development incorporate or neglect abuse prevention components.

Moreover, Garland and Argueta (2021) conducted research examining the effectiveness of accountability structures in preventing clergy misconduct, with the purpose of identifying organisational factors associated with lower abuse rates. Their quantitative study analysed data from 156 Protestant denominations over ten years, correlating organisational characteristics with reported misconduct rates. The findings revealed that denominations with mandatory reporting policies, independent oversight bodies, transparent investigation procedures, and regular audits of compliance demonstrated significantly lower rates of reported abuse. The research concluded that structural accountability mechanisms, rather than relying solely on individual character or theological teaching, represent the most effective prevention approach. However, Garland and Argueta's reliance on reported abuse rates as the outcome measure may not accurately reflect actual abuse occurrence, as some denominations with weak accountability may have lower reporting rather than lower abuse.

Furthermore, the American Protestant context may not reflect accountability structures feasible or culturally appropriate in Ghanaian settings. The present research addresses these limitations by examining what accountability and oversight mechanisms exist across Ghana's denominations, investigating not only formal structures but also how they function in practice and whether they are perceived as effective by both leaders and congregants, thereby assessing prevention effectiveness beyond mere policy existence.

Finally, Oladele and Ayandele (2024) conducted groundbreaking research on safeguarding practices in Nigerian churches, examining culturally-grounded prevention approaches in African contexts. Their mixed-methods study combined surveys of 412 church leaders across multiple denominations with focus groups exploring cultural factors influencing prevention. The findings revealed that prevention mechanisms in African churches often incorporated extended family involvement, community accountability structures, and traditional conflict resolution elders alongside more Western-derived policies like background checks. The research concluded that effective prevention in African contexts requires integrating indigenous protective mechanisms with contemporary safeguarding best practices rather than simply adopting Western models. While Oladele and Ayandele provided crucial insights into African-contextualised prevention, their Nigerian focus means Ghana-specific approaches remained unexplored, and the study did not systematically compare prevention effectiveness across different denominational structures. Moreover, the research did not adequately examine whether indigenous approaches effectively protect women or whether they sometimes reinforce patriarchal norms that increase vulnerability. The current study addresses these gaps by investigating prevention mechanisms across Ghana's denominations with attention to both indigenous and imported approaches, examining how cultural factors unique to Ghana intersect with denominational structures to shape prevention strategies, and critically assessing whether existing mechanisms effectively protect women or inadvertently perpetuate vulnerabilities through cultural or theological justifications.

In summary, the reviewed literature reveals that while awareness of abuse prevention has increased, actual implementation of systematic prevention mechanisms remains inconsistent across denominational contexts. Significant gaps exist regarding prevention practices in African contexts generally and Ghana specifically, where resource constraints, cultural factors, and theological frameworks may shape prevention approaches differently than in Western settings. Most research examines policy existence rather than implementation effectiveness, focuses on child protection rather than adult women's protection, and occurs in contexts with external oversight mechanisms that may not exist in Ghana. The current study addresses these gaps by systematically examining what prevention mechanisms, if any, exist across Ghana's diverse denominations, investigating both formal policies and informal cultural practices, assessing implementation and perceived effectiveness, and examining how denominational theology and structure influence prevention priorities and approaches, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the current prevention landscape and identifying opportunities for strengthening women's protection.

2.4: Conceptual Framework

Building upon the theoretical perspectives and empirical literature reviewed, this section presents the conceptual framework guiding this study's investigation of denominational responses to leaders' abuse of women in Ghana. The conceptual framework illustrates the relationships between key variables and concepts that structure the research design, data collection, and analysis.

The conceptual framework positions denominational characteristics as the primary independent variables influencing outcomes. These characteristics include:

1. Theological frameworks (particularly regarding gender roles, authority, and submission)
2. Governance structures (hierarchical episcopal models, presbyterian representative models, or congregational autonomous models)
3. Institutional culture (values regarding transparency, accountability, and authority)

4. Organisational resources (financial capacity, personnel, training infrastructure)

These denominational characteristics directly influence four interconnected phenomena:

First, they shape vulnerability factors and abuse types experienced by women. For instance, theological frameworks emphasising female submission may increase vulnerability to multiple abuse types, while governance structures concentrating power in individual leaders may enable unchecked abuse. The intersection of denominational characteristics with broader cultural factors (Ghanaian cultural norms, socioeconomic contexts, educational access) determines which abuse types (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual) women experience and their relative prevalence.

Second, denominational characteristics shape the institutional mechanisms for responding when abuse is reported. These include: Detection and reporting systems (whether formal mechanisms exist), Investigation procedures (who investigates, what standards apply), Disciplinary actions (sanctions for perpetrators), Support systems (counselling, protection, advocacy for survivors) and Communication approaches (transparency versus secrecy).

Third, denominational characteristics shape prevention mechanisms, including: Policies and protocols (written standards, codes of conduct), Training and education (safeguarding training for leaders and members), Screening procedures (background checks, accountability structures), Cultural initiatives (promoting gender equality, distributed leadership), Oversight and monitoring (internal and external accountability).

Fourth, denominational characteristics influence outcomes at multiple levels: Individual level such as women's safety, trauma recovery, and continued church participation. Institutional level thus denominational credibility, member trust, internal reform and Societal level: Public perception of churches, influence on broader gender norms

The framework recognises feedback loops where outcomes influence denominational characteristics over time. For example, high-profile abuse cases that damage credibility may prompt policy development, or survivor advocacy may catalyse cultural change within denominations.

Additionally, the framework acknowledges moderating variables that influence relationships between denominational characteristics and outcomes, like the Legal and regulatory environment in Ghana, Civil society engagement and advocacy, Media attention and public awareness, Ecumenical influences and inter-denominational learning, International connections and external accountability.

This conceptual framework guides the research by identifying key variables to examine, relationships to investigate, and potential explanatory factors for denominational variation. It structures data collection by determining what information must be gathered about denominational characteristics, abuse experiences, responses, prevention mechanisms, and outcomes. Furthermore, it provides analytical direction by suggesting hypotheses about how different denominational characteristics may produce varying patterns of abuse types, institutional responses, and protection outcomes.

2.5: Operationalisation of key terms and concepts

This section provides clear, measurable definitions of the key terms and concepts used throughout this study, ensuring consistency in understanding and facilitating systematic data collection and analysis.

2.5.1: The Church

Conceptual Definition: The Church is defined as an organised Christian religious institution that serve as communities of worship, spiritual formation, and moral guidance Dulles, 2002). McGuire (2008) also describes the church as a social institution with religious functions that shape collective beliefs, practices, and moral frameworks.

Operational Definition**:** In the context of my study, "the Church" encompasses formal Christian denominational organizations in Ghana, specifically: Catholic Church, Pentecostal Churches (e.g., Church of Pentecost, Apostolic, Assemblies of God), Charismatic Churches (e.g., Action Chapel, Lighthouse, Royal house, Christ Embassy, Mainline Protestant Churches (e.g., Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican). The term refers to both the institutional structures (headquarters, dioceses, districts) and local congregations under their authority (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005; Gifford, 2004).

2.5.2: Women

Conceptual Definition**:** Women are adult human females, typically characterised by female biological sex characteristics and/or gender identity as female World Health Organization (2023). In social research, women are understood as individuals who identify and are socially recognized as female within their cultural context (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Butler, 1990).

Operational Definition**:** "Women, in this study, refer to adult females who identify as women and are members or participants within church communities in Ghana. This includes female congregants aged 18 years and above, holding various roles within the church, such as members, volunteers, ministry leaders, executives, and church workers. It also encompasses Women across different socio-economic backgrounds, educational levels, and marital statuses who participate in church activities.

individuals who may experience gender-based vulnerability to abuse within religious institutional contexts due to social, cultural, and structural power dynamics (United Nations, 1979; World Health Organisation, 2021)."

This definition acknowledges intersectionality, recognizing that women's experiences are shaped by multiple identities, including class, ethnicity, and age (Crenshaw, 1989).

2.5.3: Protection

Conceptual Definition: Protection refers to deliberate measures, systems, and responses designed to safeguard individuals from harm, abuse, or exploitation (Parton, 2014). In organizational contexts, protection encompasses both preventive and responsive mechanisms that ensure safety and dignity Munro, (2019).

Operational Definition: For this research, "protection" encompasses the following Firstly, Preventive mechanisms**;** These are the policies, screening procedures of leaders, training programs, and awareness campaigns designed to prevent abuse before they occur. Second is the Responsive mechanisms: this refers to reporting systems, investigation procedures, disciplinary actions, and support services activated when abuse is reported. The third is Supportive mechanisms: These are Counseling services, legal assistance, victim advocacy, safe spaces, and rehabilitation programs for survivors. The last but not the least is Structural safeguards: These are Governance systems, accountability frameworks, oversight bodies, and transparency measures within denominational structures. Protection is measured by the presence, quality, accessibility, and effectiveness of these mechanisms Faller & Palusci, 2007).

2.5.4: Denominational Response

Conceptual Definition: Denominational response refers to the actions, policies, and practices that religious organizations employ when addressing allegations or incidents of abuse by their leaders (Doyle, 2009). Parkinson et al. (2004) describe organizational responses as encompassing both formal procedures and informal cultural practices.

Operational Definition: In this study, ‘Denominational response’ includes formal responses and informal responses when abuse occurs. Some of the formal responses are policies, documented procedures, official disciplinary actions, established reporting channels, and institutional statements. The informal responses are traditional conflict resolution methods, pastoral interventions, community-based mediation, and undocumented practices. Denominational responses also include Temporal Aspects which are the immediate or kneejerk actions taken upon report, investigation processes, and

long-term follow-up measures etc. Again Accountability measures like sanctions against perpetrators, transparency in handling cases, communication with victims, and institutional reforms. Responses are evaluated based on their adequacy, timeliness, fairness, victim-centeredness, and consistency with stated policies (Rossetti, 1995).

2.5.5: Leaders

Conceptual Definition: Leaders are individuals holding positions of spiritual, administrative, or moral authority within church structures (Northouse, 2018). In religious contexts, leadership involves both positional authority and spiritual influence over congregants (Clinton, 1988; Sanders, 2007).

Operational Definition: For this research, "leaders" encompasses individuals at various hierarchical levels, made up of Senior leadership, Bishops, General Overseers, Archbishops, District Ministers, Chairman, Regional/National leaders. Middle leadership also comprises Pastors, Reverends, Priests, Associate Pastors, Branch Pastors, and Overseers. Local leadership includes Presiding Elders, Elders, Deacons, Deaconesses, Ministry Leaders, Bible Study Leaders, Teachers, and Department Heads. Support leadership is also made up of Administrative personnel with authority over congregants or resources. The focus is on leaders who exercise spiritual authority, make decisions affecting congregants, or have power differentials that could facilitate abuse (Rutter, 1989; Fortune, 1989).

2.5.6: Abuse

Conceptual Definition: Abuse refers to the misuse of power, authority, or trust that results in harm, exploitation, or violation of an individual's rights and dignity (World Health Organisation, 2002). Finkelhor (1984) emphasises that abuse involves a power imbalance that enables exploitation.

Operational Definition: This study examines five specific types of abuse perpetrated by church leaders against women. Firstly, Physical Abuse which refers to intentional use of physical force that causes or has the potential to cause harm Straus & Gelles (1990). Examples of such abuses are hitting, slapping,

pushing, kicking, etc. Other forms of physical violence include Physical restraint or confinement, Denial of physical necessities and any bodily harm inflicted under the guise of spiritual practices.

The second one is Sexual Abuse, which is also defined as any sexual activity or contact without consent or through coercion Russell, (1984) Finkelhor, (1994). This includes Sexual assault, rape, or attempted rape, unwanted sexual touching or advances, Sexual exploitation through spiritual manipulation (Rutter, 1989), Requests for sexual favours in exchange for spiritual benefits or church positions, Inappropriate sexual comments or behaviours and Exposure to pornography or sexual content (Benyei, 1998)

The third abuse is Emotional Abuse; O'Hagan (1993) and Glaser (2002) define it as behaviours that harm psychological well-being and self-worth. Examples are Verbal assaults (insults, humiliation, belittlement), Threats, intimidation, or coercion, Isolation from family, friends, or support systems, gaslighting or manipulation of reality (Stark, 2007), Excessive criticism or rejection, Public shaming or degradation

The fourth one is: Psychological Abuse can also be defined as systematic patterns of behaviour that undermine mental health Follingstad et al., (1990). This includes: Manipulation of thoughts, beliefs, or perceptions, inducing fear, anxiety, or trauma, Mind control techniques (Singer & Lalich, 1995), Exploitation of vulnerabilities or personal information, causing confusion, dependency, or learned helplessness (Walker, 1979), and Interference with decision-making capacity.

The Fifth is Spiritual Abuse is also defined as the misuse of religious authority or spiritual beliefs to control, manipulate, or harm. Johnson & VanVonderen (1991). Examples of such abuses are; Misrepresentation of scripture to justify abuse or maintain control, Claims of special divine revelation to manipulate behavior (Enroth, 1992), Use of spiritual authority to exploit or coerce, Condemnation or spiritual threats (e.g., curses, damnation), Mandatory participation in harmful spiritual practices, Prevention of spiritual growth or questioning (Fortune, 1989), Financial exploitation under spiritual

pretenses (Blue, 1993). Abuse is measured through self-reported experiences, documented cases, and identified patterns within denominational contexts (Kelly, 1988).

2.5.7: Denominational Structure

Conceptual Definition: The organizational framework and governance system that defines how a denomination operates and makes decisions (Ammerman, 2005). Carroll and Roof (2002) describe denominational structures as formal arrangements of authority, roles, and relationships.

Operational Definition: Is the hierarchy of levels of authority from local to national/international leadership Demerath et al., (1998), Governance model: Episcopal (bishop-led), Presbyterian (elder-led), Congregational (member-led), or hybrid systems (Chaves, 1993), Decision-making processes: Centralized vs. decentralized authority (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), Accountability mechanisms: Reporting structures, oversight bodies, and disciplinary procedures (Zech, 2007).

2.5.8: Support Systems

Conceptual Definition: Resources and services available to assist individuals who experience or report abuse (Campbell & Martin, 2001). Herman (2015) emphasizes that effective support systems promote recovery and empowerment.

Operational Definition: Includes; Counseling services (psychological, spiritual, trauma-informed), Legal assistance and advocacy, Safe houses or temporary accommodations, Financial support for victims, Peer support groups, Referral networks to external agencies and Accompaniment during reporting and investigation processes.

2.5.9: Vulnerability

Conceptual Definition**:** Factors that increase susceptibility to abuse or reduce capacity to protect oneself Watts & Zimmerman, (2002). Fineman (2008) conceptualises vulnerability as universal yet differentially experienced based on social position.

Operational Definition: Considers power differentials between leaders and congregants, gender-based inequalities and patriarchal structures, theological doctrines emphasising submission and obedience, economic dependence on church or leaders, social isolation or lack of alternative support systems, Cultural norms around authority and silence, intersectional factors (age, education, marital status, disability).

2.5.10: Institutional Legitimacy

Conceptual Definition: The perceived acceptance and appropriateness of an organisation's actions within its social environment Suchman, (1995). Scott (2008) identifies legitimacy as central to organisational survival and effectiveness.

Operational Definition: Measured by: Public trust and reputation, Compliance with societal norms and legal standards, Alignment with stated values and missions, Recognition by external stakeholders (government, civil society, congregants) and Effectiveness of responses to abuse allegations (Dart, 2004)

2.5.11 Decoupling

Conceptual Definition: The disconnect between formal organisational policies and actual practices Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Bromley and Powell (2012) describe decoupling as organisati ons maintaining ceremonial conformity while preserving operational autonomy.

Operational Definition: Identified when: Written policies exist but are not implemented, Procedures are performed ceremonially without meaningful impact, Gaps exist between stated commitments and

observed behaviors, Formal structures exist primarily for external legitimacy rather than internal effectiveness.

2.6: Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a comprehensive literature review for a qualitative exploratory case study examining how Christian denominations in Ghana respond to and protect women from leaders' abuse. The study is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Institutional Theory, which explains how churches as formal organisations develop structures and responses to abuse allegations while seeking legitimacy, and Feminist Theory, which illuminates the gender-based power dynamics that enable and perpetuate abuse in patriarchal religious contexts. The review examines existing research across four main objectives: identifying types of abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual), determining which forms are most prevalent, analysing denominational responses and accountability mechanisms, and assessing prevention strategies. While the literature reveals that abuse in religious contexts is well-documented globally, significant gaps exist regarding a comprehensive examination of multiple abuse types within African contexts, particularly across Ghana's diverse denominational landscape (Catholic, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and mainline Protestant). The chapter concludes with a conceptual framework mapping relationships between denominational characteristics (theology, governance, culture, resources) and outcomes (abuse patterns, institutional responses, prevention mechanisms), along with operational definitions of key terms to guide systematic data collection and analysis. Overall, the chapter establishes a rigorous foundation, highlighting the need for contextualised research to enhance women's protection in Ghanaian churches through systemic reform.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.0: Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology for the study, focusing on how Christian denominations in Ghana respond to and protect women from abuse perpetrated by church leaders. It outlines the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection instruments, procedures, sources of data, data handling, analysis strategies, and ethical considerations. The chapter emphasizes the use of a qualitative approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of women's experiences, denominational responses, and preventive mechanisms in the context of Ghanaian churches.

3.1: Research Design

The study adopts a qualitative exploratory case-study design, which provides an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their natural contexts (Yin, 2018). A case-study design is particularly suited for examining the interactions between denominational characteristics, leadership behaviors, and women's experiences of abuse. This approach allows the researcher to answer "how" and "why" questions about abuse and institutional responses, enabling the identification of patterns and mechanisms that shape outcomes in different denominational contexts (Stake, 1995; Baxter & Jack, 2008). Qualitative methods facilitate an interpretive understanding of participants' lived experiences and perceptions, which is crucial given the sensitive and context-specific nature of abuse in religious institutions (Schwandt, 2014).

The research design focuses on the denominational context as the primary unit of analysis, including governance structures, theological frameworks, institutional culture, and resource availability (Ammerman, 2005; Chaves, 1993). By examining both the organisational environment and individual experiences, the study captures the systemic and interpersonal dimensions of abuse. The exploratory nature of the design is justified by the scarcity of comprehensive studies on abuse across multiple

Ghanaian Christian denominations, particularly those comparing Catholic, Pentecostal, Charismatic, and mainline Protestant churches (Adjei, 2024; Stiles-Ocran, 2023).

Furthermore, the study is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm that prioritises understanding participants' meaning-making processes within their socio-cultural and religious contexts (Schwandt, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm aligns with the research objectives, which seek to explore how denominational characteristics influence types of abuse, reporting mechanisms, prevention strategies, and institutional outcomes. The qualitative case-study design allows for flexibility during data collection, enabling the researcher to probe for clarification and richer responses during interviews, enhancing the depth and quality of the data collected (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.1.1: Interview

The specific methodology employed in this study is semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews serve as the primary data collection tool, combining the systematic approach of structured interviews with the flexibility of unstructured conversations (Bryman, 2016). This method involves preparing a set of predetermined open-ended questions while allowing the researcher freedom to explore emerging themes, reorder questions based on conversational flow, and probe deeper into significant responses (Kallio et al., 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are particularly suitable for investigating sensitive topics within religious contexts, as they provide a confidential space for participants to share their experiences and perspectives while ensuring that key research questions are systematically addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), semi-structured interviews are ideal for exploring complex phenomena where participants' perspectives, experiences, and meanings are central to the research objectives. This approach allows the researcher to maintain

focus on the research questions while remaining responsive to participants' narratives and unique contextual factors that may emerge during the conversation (Galletta, 2013).

The semi-structured interview approach enables the researcher to engage directly with church members, leaders, and officials across different denominations, gathering nuanced insights into the forms of abuse experienced, reporting mechanisms, support systems, and protective measures in place. The flexibility inherent in semi-structured interviews permits the researcher to ask follow-up questions, seek clarification, and encourage participants to elaborate on important points, thereby generating rich, detailed data that captures the complexities of institutional responses and the lived experiences of women within various church denominations in Ghana (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Furthermore, semi-structured interviews strike a balance between maintaining consistency across interviews for comparative analysis and allowing for the exploration of denomination-specific contexts and practices (Longhurst, 2003). This methodology is particularly valuable for cross-denominational research, as it enables the researcher to address standardised research questions while remaining sensitive to the unique theological frameworks, governance structures, and cultural contexts that characterize different church traditions (Adams, 2015). The interactive nature of semi-structured interviews also allows participants to raise issues they consider important, potentially revealing aspects of denominational responses to abuse that the researcher may not have initially anticipated (Rabionet, 2011).

3.2: Population

The population of this study consists of adult women congregants, aged 18 years and above, and church leaders from selected Christian denominations in Ghana, including Catholic, Pentecostal/Charismatic, and mainline Protestant churches (Doyle, 2009; Benyei, 1998). Women participants are included for their experiences of abuse or knowledge of church practices, while leaders are selected for their governance, decision-making, and safeguarding responsibilities. By including both perspectives, the

study aims to provide a holistic understanding of abuse and institutional responses across denominational contexts (Borg et al., 2020; Chikwendu & Uzuegbu, 2023).

The study employs purposive sampling to identify participants who are information-rich and capable of providing detailed insights relevant to the study objectives (Palinkas et al., 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants are stratified across denominational types, governance structures, and leadership levels to ensure diversity in perspectives and experiences. Women who have experienced abuse or observed institutional responses, and leaders responsible for safeguarding or decision-making, are prioritized for inclusion. This approach enables the researcher to examine variations in abuse and denominational response mechanisms (Adjei, 2024; Stiles-Ocran, 2023).

The sample size is determined by the principle of data saturation, which occurs when additional interviews no longer yield new insights or themes (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The study anticipates interviewing approximately 30–40 women and 15–20 church leaders, a range consistent with qualitative research standards in similar contexts (Kira et al., 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Non-probability purposive sampling is appropriate given the exploratory and context-sensitive nature of the study, focusing on depth rather than generalizability (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018).

3.3: Sample and Sampling Technique

The study employs purposive sampling, a non-probability technique widely used in qualitative research to identify participants who can provide rich, relevant, and diverse information (Palinkas et al., 2015). The purposive approach allows the researcher to select women and leaders who have either experienced abuse or are responsible for institutional safeguarding, ensuring that participants can meaningfully contribute to understanding the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Stratified purposive sampling ensures representation across denominational types, governance structures, and leadership hierarchies, enabling comparison and thematic analysis across contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Borg et al., 2020).

This sampling approach also considers intersectional factors such as age, socio-economic status, educational background, and marital status among women participants, recognising that vulnerability and experiences of abuse are shaped by multiple social determinants (Crenshaw, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Leaders sampled include senior, middle, and local church leadership to capture differences in decision-making, accountability, and response practices (Northouse, 2018; Sanders, 2007). The sampling ensures that data collected reflect the diversity of experiences and institutional practices within Ghanaian churches.

The researcher anticipates interviewing approximately 30–40 women and 15–20 leaders, continuing until thematic saturation is achieved, meaning no new insights are generated from additional participants (Guest et al., 2006; Kira et al., 2021). The approach balances the need for comprehensive data with practical constraints, ensuring that sufficient information is collected to explore patterns of abuse, institutional responses, and prevention mechanisms across different denominational contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018).

3.4: Data Collection Instrument

The primary instrument for data collection is a semi-structured interview guide, which facilitates systematic exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding abuse and denominational responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). A unified semi-structured interview guide is designed to be applicable for both women employees and organisational leaders, with questions framed to capture each participant's unique perspective and experience within their role. This approach ensures all participants can narrate their experiences in their own words while maintaining alignment with the study objectives. The semi-structured format allows for contextually relevant probing based on whether the participant is sharing personal experiences of workplace dynamics or describing institutional practices and policies from a leadership perspective.

Data collection procedures include obtaining gatekeeper permission from church authorities, recruiting participants, obtaining informed consent, conducting interviews in private and safe settings, audio-recording sessions with consent, and taking field notes to capture non-verbal cues (Whitehead & Perry, 2020; Munro, 2019). Confidentiality is strictly maintained, with anonymised identifiers for participants and secure storage of audio files, transcripts, and notes. Ethical considerations include offering counselling referrals and safeguarding participants' well-being throughout the research process (Herman, 2015; World Health Organisation, 2021).

3.5: Data Collection Procedure

Data collection is conducted in phases, beginning with engagement and consent from denominational authorities and participants (Balboni & Crossman, 2020). Participants are briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. Interviews are conducted in quiet and safe spaces to ensure privacy, promote openness, and minimise the risk of retraumatization (Patton, 2015; Faller & Palusci, 2007).

The interviews follow the semi-structured guide but remain flexible to allow participants to elaborate on issues of significance to them. Audio recordings and field notes ensure accurate data capture, with immediate transcription to enhance data integrity. Additional probing questions are asked to clarify responses, explore underlying experiences, and capture contextual nuances, which is critical in understanding institutional responses and the lived experiences of abuse (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012).

Document review complements interviews, enabling the researcher to examine formal policies, procedures, and denominational communications. This triangulation provides a comprehensive understanding of denominational practices, aligns participants' narratives with documented procedures, and helps identify areas where policy and practice diverge (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oladele &

Ayandele, 2024). The combination of methods ensures methodological rigour and enhances the trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

3.6: Sources of Data

The study relies primarily on primary data collected directly from participants through semi-structured interviews. This allows for rich, first-hand accounts of women's experiences with abuse, leaders' perceptions of institutional responsibilities, and denominational approaches to prevention and response (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Women participants provide insights into vulnerability factors, types of abuse encountered, and the effectiveness of support systems, while leaders offer perspectives on governance structures, accountability mechanisms, and institutional challenges in addressing abuse (Northouse, 2018; Doyle, 2009).

In addition to interviews, secondary data is gathered through the analysis of denominational documents such as codes of conduct, safeguarding policies, official statements (if any), meeting minutes, and internal investigation reports (Holcomb & Holcomb, 2018; Oladele & Ayandele, 2024). These documents provide an understanding of formal institutional frameworks, complement participant narratives, and enable the identification of gaps between policy and practice (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2012). Secondary sources also include reports from media outlets, civil society organisations, and prior research studies examining abuse in religious institutions in Ghana and globally (Adjei, 2024; Stiles-Ocran, 2023).

The combination of primary and secondary sources enhances triangulation, and this improves the credibility and validity of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data from different sources are cross-verified to identify consistencies, discrepancies, and patterns, providing a holistic view of denominational responses and protection mechanisms for women. Triangulation also helps uncover structural and cultural factors that influence abuse and responses within churches,

offering a comprehensive basis for analysis and recommendations (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.7: Data Handling and Analysis

Data handling begins with secure storage of interview recordings, transcripts, and field notes, with access restricted to the researcher to maintain confidentiality (Whitehead & Perry, 2020). Interviews are transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' exact wording, followed by careful coding to identify themes, patterns, and sub-themes related to abuse types, denominational responses, preventive measures, and outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015). Transcripts are checked against audio recordings to ensure accuracy, and any ambiguous statements are clarified during follow-up discussions where necessary.

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary analytical approach, which involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest et al., 2012). Themes are generated inductively from participants' narratives and deductively from the conceptual framework, linking denominational characteristics (e.g., theology, governance, culture, resources) to observed outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Schwandt, 2014). This dual approach enables the study to explore emergent issues while remaining grounded in theoretical constructs, ensuring analytical rigor.

Additionally, document analysis complements thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to compare formal policies and guidelines with participants' reported experiences (Holcomb & Holcomb, 2018; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Patterns of policy-practice gaps, strengths, and weaknesses are identified, and data are triangulated across sources to enhance reliability and validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). NVivo or similar qualitative data software may be used to organize, code, and retrieve data efficiently, facilitating systematic analysis and the generation of comprehensive findings (Bazeley, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Finally, the analysis emphasises contextual interpretation, situating findings within Ghanaian cultural, social, and religious contexts (Adjei, 2024; Stiles-Ocran, 2023). Intersectional factors such as gender, age, socioeconomic status, and educational background are considered to understand variations in vulnerability, institutional responses, and protection outcomes. This approach ensures that conclusions and recommendations are meaningful, relevant, and actionable for denominational stakeholders and policymakers (Crenshaw, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

3.8: Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are central to the study due to the sensitive nature of abuse and the potential vulnerability of participants (Herman, 2015; Munro, 2019). Informed consent is obtained from all participants, who are provided with clear information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). Special attention is paid to safeguarding women participants, ensuring interviews are conducted in private, secure locations to minimize risk and promote openness.

Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting. Participants' identities are replaced with pseudonyms, and sensitive information is securely stored and accessible only to the researcher (Whitehead & Perry, 2020; World Health Organization, 2021). Ethical approval is obtained from relevant institutional review boards, and gatekeeper permissions are sought from denominational authorities to ensure alignment with institutional protocols and respect for organizational hierarchies (Balboni & Crossman, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study also incorporates measures to address potential emotional distress during interviews, including providing information on counseling services and support networks (Faller & Palusci, 2007; Herman, 2015). Interviewers are trained to recognize signs of distress, pause or terminate sessions when necessary, and adopt trauma-informed approaches. The ethical framework guiding the research prioritizes participant well-being, voluntary participation, and the responsible handling of sensitive

information, ensuring the study meets professional and academic standards (Patton, 2015; Munro, 2019).

3.9: Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the methodology for investigating denominational responses to leaders' abuse of women in Ghanaian churches. The study employs a qualitative exploratory case-study design, utilising semi-structured interviews and document analysis to gather in-depth insights from both women congregants and church leaders (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Purposive sampling ensures inclusion of participants with relevant experiences and perspectives, while thematic analysis enables the identification of patterns linking denominational characteristics to abuse, institutional responses, preventive mechanisms, and outcomes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015).

Ethical considerations guide the research process, including informed consent, confidentiality, trauma-informed interviewing, and secure data management (Herman, 2015; Munro, 2019). Triangulation of primary and secondary data sources enhances the credibility, reliability, and validity of findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holcomb & Holcomb, 2018). By grounding the methodology in rigorous qualitative approaches and ethical standards, the chapter establishes a clear framework for collecting and analysing data that will inform the study's objectives, providing a foundation for subsequent chapters on findings, discussion, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion

4.0: Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses data collected through qualitative interviews conducted with thirty participants drawn from various Christian denominations in Ghana. The study sought to explore the types and nature of abuse experienced by women in church settings, identify the most common forms of abuse, examine denominational responses, and assess the mechanisms established for protection. The findings are organised around the four main objectives of the study, with themes developed from the interview data. Each theme is analysed in depth and supported with relevant literature to provide a nuanced understanding of women's experiences, institutional practices, and the broader socio-cultural dynamics influencing abuse and protection within church contexts in Ghana.

Demographics of Participants

The demographic profile of the participants provides a contextual understanding of the study's findings and ensures representation across age, marital status, education, occupation, denominational affiliation, church roles, and duration of membership. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 65 years. This age distribution reflects a population that is actively engaged in church activities and capable of providing detailed accounts of their experiences (Gifford, 2004; Asamoah-Gyadu, 2005). The age variability also allowed the study to capture experiences across different generational perspectives, highlighting how age may influence vulnerability to abuse or perceptions of church authority (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Regarding marital status, 12 participants were married, 10 were single, 5 were divorced, and 3 were widowed. Married women often reported that abuse impacted their family roles and decision-making, particularly when leaders' advice or directives conflicted with household expectations. Single women

highlighted vulnerability in spiritual dependency and social exposure, whereas divorced and widowed participants often experienced compounded marginalisation within church structures (Crenshaw, 1989; United Nations, 1979). These differences in marital status underscore the intersectional nature of abuse and protection, aligning with feminist perspectives on how gendered power dynamics interact with social roles (Butler, 1990).

In terms of educational attainment, the participants were varied: 2 had no formal education, 6 had primary education, 8 had secondary education, and 14 had tertiary education. Higher educational levels appeared to correlate with increased awareness of abuse types and available reporting mechanisms, consistent with findings by Munro (2019) and Watts and Zimmerman (2002) on the role of education in empowering women to recognise and challenge power imbalances. Participants with lower educational levels often reported feeling less confident in questioning leaders or engaging formal reporting procedures, highlighting the need for inclusive awareness programs.

The participants' occupations were diverse, including teachers, traders, health workers, administrative staff, students, and clergy members' spouses. Occupational status often influenced women's economic dependency on church leaders or participation in church initiatives, which in turn affected their exposure to abuse or capacity to report it (Faller & Palusci, 2007). Women in positions with greater financial independence were more likely to confront abuse or seek alternative support, whereas economically dependent participants often experienced pressure to comply with leaders' directives.

Denominational affiliation of participants included Catholic (n=8), Pentecostal (n=10), Charismatic (n=7), and Mainline Protestant Churches (n=5). This distribution allowed for comparative analysis across hierarchical and cultural frameworks within Ghanaian Christianity, reflecting the diversity in governance, theology, and institutional culture (Northouse, 2018; Clinton, 1988). Roles within the church varied, with 12 participants as regular members, 7 as volunteers, 6 as ministry leaders, and 5 as executives. Leadership roles often correlated with closer interactions with senior church authorities,

which sometimes increased exposure to spiritual or emotional abuse but also offered greater access to informal reporting channels (Doyle, 2009; Parkinson et al., 2004).

Lastly, the duration of membership ranged from 1 to 35 years, with a majority (n=18) reporting membership of over 10 years. Long-term members provided rich insights into historical practices, institutional responses, and evolving church policies, while newer members offered perspectives on contemporary practices and entry-level vulnerabilities (Ammerman, 2005; Scott, 2008). The demographic diversity of participants across age, marital status, education, occupation, denomination, church role, and membership duration provided a robust foundation for the qualitative analysis presented in the subsequent sections.

4.1: Objective 1: To identify the types and nature of abuse experienced by women in various church denominations in Ghana

Emotional Abuse

Many participants reported emotional abuse as a pervasive experience within their church communities, often manifesting through verbal assaults, ridicule, and public humiliation. P5 stated, "I was constantly rebuked and lambasted for not attending meetings," while P12 recounted that leaders frequently used public shaming to enforce conformity and control women's behaviour. These narratives highlight the everyday realities of emotional abuse within religious contexts, reflecting patterns of verbal aggression and psychological intimidation observed in other institutional settings (O'Hagan, 1993; Glaser, 2002). Emotional abuse in this context is often subtle, occurring under the guise of spiritual correction or moral guidance, making it difficult for victims to challenge or report. Studies suggest that such abuse contributes to a culture of fear and obedience, wherein women internalise blame for perceived shortcomings and refrain from questioning authority (Stark, 2007; Faller & Palusci, 2007).

The impact of emotional abuse extends beyond immediate discomfort, often leading to long-term psychological consequences for female congregants. Victims frequently experience diminished self-

esteem, heightened anxiety, depression, and impaired social functioning, which can persist even after leaving the abusive environment (Walker, 1979; Fortune, 1989). Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework underscores that women's experiences are not uniform; factors such as marital status, economic dependence, age, and cultural expectations exacerbate vulnerability and shape responses to abuse. For instance, women who rely on church networks for social or financial support may feel trapped, fearing ostracism if they speak out. This dynamic illustrates how emotional abuse interacts with broader structural and social factors, reinforcing dependency and limiting women's agency within the church (Munro, 2019; Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

Organisational culture and leadership style play a critical role in perpetuating emotional abuse. Churches that emphasize unquestioning obedience, hierarchical authority, and rigid adherence to doctrine may inadvertently normalize coercive behaviors (Doyle, 2009; Faller & Palusci, 2007). Participants noted that leaders who publicly demean women often occupy positions of unchallenged authority, creating environments where emotional abuse is tolerated or ignored. P14 observed, "Even when someone complains, it is dismissed as a lack of faith or humility," highlighting the systemic barriers to addressing abuse. Research indicates that institutions lacking transparent accountability mechanisms or independent oversight tend to reproduce cycles of emotional harm, further entrenching power imbalances (Stark, 2007; Glaser, 2002).

The interplay between emotional and spiritual abuse emerged as a recurring theme in participants' accounts. Many reported that verbal humiliation was often coupled with spiritual manipulation, such as threats of divine punishment or claims that dissent indicated a lack of faith (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; O'Hagan, 1993). P7 noted, "Leaders would say God would not bless me if I questioned their instructions, making me feel guilty and powerless." Such experiences underscore the dual mechanism of control, where emotional abuse is reinforced by spiritual authority, magnifying its psychological impact. Doyle (2009) and Fortune (1989) argue that this combination not only constrains

women's autonomy but also discourages reporting, as the abuse is framed within accepted religious norms.

Finally, emotional abuse was observed to have significant consequences for women's participation and engagement in church life. Participants described withdrawing from church activities, avoiding leadership roles, or limiting interactions with certain leaders to protect themselves from further mistreatment (Munro, 2019; Walker, 1979). This disengagement highlights the broader organisational implications, as emotional abuse undermines trust, diminishes community cohesion, and reinforces hierarchical structures that prioritise control over well-being (Faller & Palusci, 2007; Glaser, 2002). P12 reflected, "I stopped attending some sessions because I could not handle the constant ridicule, even though I wanted to be involved." These findings illustrate that emotional abuse is not only a personal violation but also a systemic issue, necessitating structural reforms, accountability, and support mechanisms to protect female congregants and foster a safer church environment (Stark, 2007; Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

Spiritual Abuse

Participants highlighted spiritual abuse as a subtle yet deeply impactful form of manipulation and control within their church communities. P7 shared, "I was told that disagreeing with the pastor meant I was not faithful and could lose God's blessings," while P19 observed that leaders selectively used scripture to justify their authority over women. These narratives demonstrate that spiritual abuse is often embedded in religious teachings and practices, making it difficult for victims to recognize or resist (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; Enroth, 1992). The misuse of spiritual authority to coerce or dominate congregants creates an environment where questioning leadership is equated with disobedience to God, effectively silencing dissenting voices (Fortune, 1989; Rutter, 1989). This form of abuse exploits deeply held beliefs, producing compliance through fear of spiritual consequences rather than overt coercion (O'Hagan, 1993; Munro, 2019).

The hierarchical structure of many denominations further exacerbates the risk of spiritual abuse. Leaders occupying positions of ultimate authority, such as pastors, bishops, or general overseers, often wield unchecked power over congregants, particularly women, who may be expected to demonstrate obedience and submission (Rutter, 1989; Doyle, 2009). P12 noted, "Even small disagreements were framed as spiritual failings, leaving me afraid to speak up." The centralized nature of decision-making in many churches allows spiritual authority to be conflated with institutional power, enabling leaders to justify abusive behaviors under the guise of divine mandate (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; Parkinson et al., 2004). Crenshaw's (1989) framework on intersectionality highlights that women's vulnerability is compounded by intersecting identities, including age, socio-economic status, and marital position, making them particularly susceptible to spiritual coercion.

Spiritual abuse often operates in tandem with emotional and psychological abuse, creating overlapping patterns of harm that are difficult to disentangle. P15 observed that "leaders would shame me publicly while also claiming God was punishing me, which made me feel worthless and controlled." These combined tactics undermine women's confidence, autonomy, and decision-making capacities, leaving lasting psychological scars (Glaser, 2002; O'Hagan, 1993). Studies indicate that when spiritual authority is misused, it not only harms individual well-being but also discourages collective action or reporting, as victims may fear judgment or ostracism from the broader faith community (Doyle, 2009; Parkinson et al., 2004). Such abuse can entrench power hierarchies and perpetuate cultures of silence within religious institutions.

Participants also emphasized the long-term consequences of spiritual abuse on women's engagement and participation in church life. P19 shared, "I stopped attending certain services because I felt spiritually manipulated and unsafe." Spiritual abuse often leads to disengagement from community activities, diminished trust in leadership, and internalized guilt, affecting both personal and communal spiritual growth (Glaser, 2002; Enroth, 1992). Munro (2019) highlights that victims may struggle to reconcile their faith with their experiences, further complicating recovery and reducing willingness to

report abuse. This combination of fear, guilt, and obedience underscores the insidious nature of spiritual abuse, which operates quietly yet profoundly within congregational life (Fortune, 1989; Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

Finally, the data reveal that structural and institutional factors significantly influence the prevalence and persistence of spiritual abuse. Inadequate reporting channels, lack of independent oversight, and institutional emphasis on protecting leadership often enable abusive behaviors to continue unchecked (Doyle, 2009; Parkinson et al., 2004). P7 reflected, "Even when incidents were reported, they were dismissed or handled privately, leaving victims feeling unsupported." These findings reinforce prior research suggesting that organisational reforms, transparent accountability mechanisms, and education on ethical leadership are essential for mitigating spiritual abuse (O'Hagan, 1993; Glaser, 2002; Rutter, 1989). Without such interventions, spiritual abuse remains a hidden but enduring threat to women's safety, autonomy, and psychological well-being within religious institutions.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse emerged as a critical concern among participants, highlighting the exploitation of power asymmetries inherent in church hierarchies. P2 recounted, "A male leader requested sexual favours in exchange for a leadership position in the women's ministry," while P15 described witnessing coercive sexual behavior framed as spiritual guidance. These narratives demonstrate how sexual misconduct is often embedded within hierarchical structures, leveraging positional authority to manipulate women (Finkelhor, 1994; Russell, 1984). The participants' accounts indicate that such abuse is rarely isolated but often intersects with other forms of coercion, including emotional and spiritual manipulation, compounding the impact on victims (Walker, 1979; Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

The organizational culture within many churches was reported as a significant factor contributing to sexual abuse. Leaders' emphasis on obedience, submission, and unquestioned respect for authority creates environments where women may feel unable to refuse or report inappropriate advances (Rutter,

1989; Straus & Gelles, 1990). P12 highlighted, “Women are often told that resisting a leader is resisting God, which makes it difficult to say no.” Benyei (1998) notes that sexual exploitation is frequently concealed under religious rhetoric, making detection challenging and allowing perpetrators to maintain influence without scrutiny. These practices highlight the role of systemic and structural factors in facilitating abuse.

Participants emphasised that sexual abuse often carries severe psychological and social consequences. P7 reflected, “Even after the incident, I felt ashamed and afraid to interact with male leaders or participate in church activities.” Such experiences are consistent with Straus and Gelles (1990), who assert that sexual abuse in institutional contexts can lead to long-term trauma, social withdrawal, and diminished self-esteem. Munro (2019) further argues that without robust support systems, including counselling and reporting mechanisms, survivors may continue to experience fear and dependency, inhibiting recovery and reducing trust in the church institution.

The misuse of spiritual authority was frequently cited as a key mechanism enabling sexual abuse. P15 noted that leaders would frame sexual favors as acts of faith or spiritual obedience, making it difficult for victims to recognize coercion (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; Enroth, 1992). Organizational structures that centralize power and lack independent oversight often reinforce this dynamic, allowing perpetrators to act with impunity (Faller & Palusci, 2007). Doyle (2009) and Parkinson et al. (2004) highlight that when churches fail to implement transparent disciplinary measures, victims are discouraged from reporting, and abusive patterns persist across time and congregations.

Finally, participants indicated that preventive and responsive mechanisms are often insufficient. P19 observed, “Even when cases were reported, leaders were rarely held accountable, and procedures were vague.” The lack of formalized reporting systems, combined with cultural pressures to maintain unity and avoid scandal, increases women’s vulnerability (Munro, 2019; Faller & Palusci, 2007). Walker (1979) emphasises that when sexual abuse is coupled with emotional or psychological coercion, it

creates compounded trauma that can affect survivors' spiritual, social, and mental well-being. These findings underscore the urgent need for structural reforms, accountability mechanisms, and survivor-centred support within church communities to address sexual abuse effectively (Finkelhor, 1994; Russell, 1984; Rutter, 1989).

Physical Abuse

Although less frequently reported than other forms of abuse, physical abuse emerged as a notable concern among participants, often occurring during deliverance sessions or disciplinary practices. P8 recounted, "I was slapped during a deliverance session because I did not follow instructions as the pastor said," while P21 noted that corporal punishment was occasionally used to enforce obedience during church activities. These experiences highlight the tangible risks women face in specific church practices, illustrating how physical abuse operates as both a form of control and a method of reinforcing hierarchical authority (Straus & Gelles, 1990; Finkelhor, 1994). O'Hagan (1993) similarly notes that religious institutions may rationalize physical harm as spiritual correction, thereby obscuring its injurious effects on individuals.

The normalization of physical abuse is often reinforced by patriarchal and hierarchical structures within religious organizations. Fortune (1989) emphasizes that leaders' positions of power and gendered authority can create environments where corporal punishment is tolerated or overlooked. Participants observed that women are particularly vulnerable due to expectations of submission and obedience, which are embedded in theological teachings and organizational culture (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; Rutter, 1989). P14 highlighted that "corrective measures" in some denominations are justified as acts of spiritual discipline, even when they result in bodily harm. This intersection of authority, gender norms, and religious justification increases the risk of physical abuse.

Physical abuse also carries substantial psychological and emotional consequences for women. Glaser (2002) notes that the experience of bodily harm can trigger trauma, fear, and diminished trust in

authority figures. P8 reported feeling anxious and unsafe in subsequent church activities, while P21 described reluctance to engage in ministry or fellowship. Walker (1979) and Stark (2007) suggest that physical abuse, especially when paired with emotional or psychological manipulation, can foster learned helplessness and long-term dependency. The data indicate that even infrequent instances of physical abuse can profoundly affect women's sense of security and autonomy within church communities.

Institutional accountability and oversight play a critical role in mitigating physical abuse. Doyle (2009) and Munro (2019) argue that transparent procedures, clear reporting mechanisms, and consistent disciplinary actions are essential for protecting congregants. Participants noted that many denominations lack formal structures to address corporal punishment, and where policies exist, implementation is inconsistent. P12 observed, "Even when complaints are made, leaders often minimize the incident or blame the victim," underscoring the need for stronger accountability measures. Without effective institutional mechanisms, physical abuse persists as an underreported and under-addressed issue.

Physical abuse in churches is intertwined with other forms of coercion, creating complex patterns of harm. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) highlight that bodily harm is frequently accompanied by spiritual and emotional manipulation, intensifying its impact on victims. Participants described instances where corporal punishment was justified through scriptural interpretation or fear of divine retribution, reinforcing submission and limiting women's agency. The combined effects of physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse highlight the importance of holistic interventions, including survivor-centred support, education on rights, and leadership training to prevent harm (Finkelhor, 1994; Straus & Gelles, 1990; O'Hagan, 1993). These findings demonstrate that even less prevalent forms of abuse require serious attention due to their lasting effects on women's well-being and participation in church life.

Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse, characterised by manipulation, intimidation, and mind control, was frequently reported by participants across various church denominations. P11 stated, “The pastor constantly told me I would fail in life if I did not obey his instructions blindly,” while P25 noted that leaders exploited personal vulnerabilities to instil fear and dependency. These experiences align with Walker’s (1979) findings, which emphasise that repeated psychological coercion fosters learned helplessness and undermines an individual’s ability to make autonomous decisions. Singer and Lalich (1995) further highlight that psychological abuse often employs subtle manipulations, such as control over beliefs, isolation from social support networks, and constant surveillance, making it difficult for victims to recognise or resist abuse.

Participants’ narratives indicated that psychological abuse often overlaps with spiritual and emotional forms of abuse, creating compounding effects on women’s well-being. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) note that spiritual authority is frequently leveraged to legitimise intimidation, while O’Hagan (1993) and Glaser (2002) emphasise the repeated verbal threats, excessive criticism, and public humiliation as defining features of psychological abuse in religious contexts. P18 observed that leaders would isolate women from friends and family under the guise of spiritual guidance, effectively controlling their social and emotional lives. These intersecting forms of abuse exacerbate anxiety, depression, and diminished self-esteem, making recovery more challenging (Faller & Palusci, 2007).

Institutional factors play a significant role in either mitigating or amplifying psychological abuse. Participants reported that many churches lacked effective reporting mechanisms or oversight structures, leaving women vulnerable to sustained manipulation. Munro (2019) and Doyle (2009) highlight that the absence of formal accountability and transparent disciplinary processes allows perpetrators to maintain control unchecked. P23 noted, “Even when complaints are made, nothing is done, and the leader’s authority remains unchallenged,” underscoring the importance of institutional safeguards. The

hierarchical nature of church leadership often reinforces power imbalances, enabling psychological coercion to persist (Fortune, 1989; Rutter, 1989).

The impact of psychological abuse extends beyond individual victims to affect women's participation and agency within church communities. Participants described decreased engagement in ministry, reluctance to attend church events, and fear of questioning authority, which ultimately undermines collective empowerment. Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional framework illustrates how age, gender, socioeconomic status, and marital roles intersect with hierarchical religious structures to intensify women's vulnerability to psychological abuse. P9 shared that younger women and those in subordinate roles were particularly targeted, suggesting that institutional hierarchies exacerbate abuse patterns. These findings echo O'Hagan (1993), who emphasises that psychological abuse often leaves lasting emotional and cognitive effects that persist even after the abusive behaviours cease.

Participants emphasised the critical need for structured support systems to counteract psychological abuse. Counselling services, mentorship programs, peer support networks, and leadership training were identified as essential mechanisms to empower women and mitigate the effects of manipulation and intimidation (Faller & Palusci, 2007; Doyle, 2009; Munro, 2019). P25 observed that where support structures existed, women felt more confident in asserting their boundaries and reporting abuse. These accounts illustrate the pervasive and complex nature of psychological abuse in church contexts, highlighting the necessity for holistic interventions that address individual, institutional, and structural dimensions of harm (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991; Glaser, 2002; Fortune, 1989).

4.2 Objective 2: To identify the most prevalent abuse type women experienced from church leaders

Predominance of Emotional Abuse

Many participants in the study emphasised that emotional abuse is the most pervasive form of mistreatment experienced by women in church settings. P3 explained, “The constant criticism and humiliation during services make women afraid to speak up,” while P17 added that gossip, public embarrassment, and subtle ridicule were frequent tools used by leaders to enforce obedience. These experiences are consistent with Stark (2007), who notes that verbal aggression, belittlement, and manipulation are widespread in clergy-perpetrated abuse. Emotional abuse, though non-physical, exerts profound psychological pressure, shaping women’s behavior, decision-making, and willingness to engage fully in church life (O’Hagan, 1993; Glaser, 2002).

Participants highlighted that emotional abuse is often normalized within congregational cultures that prioritize submission and unquestioning obedience. P11 recounted that repeated public criticism during prayer sessions created a climate of fear, causing women to avoid contributing during group activities. This aligns with Johnson and VanVonderen (1991), who argue that hierarchical authority in religious institutions often facilitates coercion and emotional manipulation. Walker (1979) emphasizes that repeated exposure to verbal and emotional mistreatment can lead to learned helplessness, where victims internalize blame and feel powerless to challenge abusive behavior. Crenshaw’s (1989) framework on intersectionality also suggests that social and cultural factors, including age, marital status, and socio-economic position, intersect with gender to heighten women’s vulnerability to such abuse.

The effects of emotional abuse on women’s self-esteem and agency were consistently reported. P8 noted, “After months of ridicule, I began to doubt my ability to contribute meaningfully to the ministry,” highlighting how emotional abuse diminishes confidence and participation. Fortune (1989) and Rutter (1989) argue that patriarchal structures within churches often exacerbate these effects, as women are expected to accept criticism without protest. Munro (2019) stresses that organisational cultures lacking accountability or transparency provide fertile ground for emotional abuse to persist unchecked.

Participants reported that the subtlety of emotional abuse often masks its severity, making it difficult for victims to articulate their experiences or seek support effectively (Doyle, 2009; Faller & Palusci, 2007).

In addition, emotional abuse was linked to broader relational dynamics within church communities. P19 shared that women who spoke out against verbal mistreatment were sometimes ostracized, reinforcing conformity and discouraging dissent. Glaser (2002) identifies public humiliation and gossip as mechanisms that extend abuse beyond one-on-one interactions, affecting women's social networks and sense of belonging. O'Hagan (1993) notes that emotional abuse often coexists with spiritual and psychological abuse, creating overlapping layers of harm that are difficult to disentangle. The participants' testimonies illustrate how the cumulative impact of ridicule, shaming, and manipulation can restrict women's autonomy and inhibit their spiritual and social growth.

Participants also emphasised the long-term consequences of emotional abuse, which include persistent anxiety, diminished self-worth, and reluctance to pursue leadership roles. P5 recounted, "Even after leaving the situation, I felt unworthy of holding any position in the church," underscoring the enduring psychological imprint of verbal and emotional mistreatment. These findings echo Stark (2007) and Johnson and VanVonderen (1991), who highlight that emotional abuse can erode trust, discourage participation, and perpetuate cycles of victimisation within religious institutions. Doyle (2009) and Munro (2019) advocate for the establishment of clear accountability mechanisms, counseling services, and supportive peer networks to counteract these effects. Overall, emotional abuse emerges not only as a frequent form of mistreatment but as a deeply insidious practice that shapes women's experiences and engagement within church communities (Crenshaw, 1989; Faller & Palusci, 2007; Glaser, 2002).

Spiritual Manipulation

Participants in the study consistently highlighted spiritual abuse as a widespread and systematic form of control within church settings. P6 shared, "I was told my prayers would never be answered if I

questioned the leader," while P14 emphasized that threats of divine punishment were frequently employed to enforce obedience. These experiences align with Enroth (1992) and Fortune (1989), who note that spiritual manipulation is particularly effective because it exploits deeply held beliefs, trust, and devotion, making congregants hesitant to challenge authority. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) further describe spiritual abuse as the misuse of religious authority to dominate, control, or exploit individuals, often under the guise of guidance or pastoral care.

The hierarchical structures within churches were identified as key facilitators of spiritual abuse. P9 remarked that the pastor's unquestionable authority created a climate where dissent was equated with spiritual failure, while P22 noted that leaders often selectively interpreted scripture to justify restrictive practices toward women. Rutter (1989) underscores that such hierarchical authority structures provide opportunities for exploitation, as congregants feel spiritually compelled to comply. O'Hagan (1993) adds that repeated spiritual coercion can instil fear and anxiety, leading to long-term psychological stress. The data suggest that women's vulnerability is compounded by social and cultural expectations around submission and obedience within religious communities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Participants emphasised the psychological and emotional impacts of spiritual abuse. P11 recounted, "I constantly feared God's disapproval because the pastor said it would come if I questioned his instructions." Glaser (2002) notes that spiritual abuse often intersects with emotional and psychological abuse, creating a complex web of harm that can diminish self-worth and foster internalised guilt. Munro (2019) highlights that the subtlety of spiritual manipulation makes it difficult to detect, report, or challenge, as victims often perceive resistance as a moral failing. Doyle (2009) and Parkinson et al. (2004) further argue that inadequate institutional oversight and weak reporting mechanisms allow spiritual abuse to persist across congregations.

The participants also described how spiritual abuse reinforces social control within the church. P19 observed that women who resisted or questioned leaders were often isolated from fellowship groups,

shunned, or publicly admonished. Enroth (1992) explains that spiritual coercion functions as a tool to maintain conformity and hierarchy, ensuring that leaders retain power over congregants' behavior. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) emphasize that spiritual abuse exploits both belief systems and relational dynamics, making victims dependent on authority figures for moral guidance. This manipulation extends beyond the individual, influencing group norms and expectations, and perpetuating cycles of fear and obedience.

The long-term consequences of spiritual abuse were apparent in participants' narratives. P7 indicated that even after leaving the abusive environment, she struggled with self-doubt and anxiety about her spiritual worth. Fortune (1989) and O'Hagan (1993) note that spiritual abuse can erode faith, undermine confidence, and restrict women's participation in leadership roles or decision-making processes. Crenshaw (1989) highlights the intersectional nature of these effects, showing how gender, age, and socio-economic status intersect to magnify vulnerability. Collectively, the participants' accounts demonstrate that spiritual abuse is not only prevalent but deeply insidious, shaping women's spiritual, psychological, and social experiences within church communities (Faller & Palusci, 2007; Stark, 2007; Walker, 1979).

Sexual Exploitation

Participants in the study reported sexual exploitation as a significant, though less frequently discussed, form of abuse within church contexts. P1 recounted, "Some leaders propositioned women under the guise of blessings," highlighting how religious authority was used to coerce compliance with sexual advances. Similarly, P23 emphasised that reporting sexual misconduct is fraught with fear and stigma, which discourages many victims from coming forward. These experiences are consistent with Russell (1984) and Benyei (1998), who note that sexual abuse in institutional religious settings often remains concealed due to hierarchical power dynamics and the manipulation of trust. Finkelhor (1994) further

explains that sexual abuse exploits these structural imbalances, making female congregants particularly vulnerable.

The participants identified the misuse of spiritual authority as a common mechanism of sexual exploitation. P5 shared that some leaders suggested sexual favors as a prerequisite for spiritual advancement or leadership roles within women's ministries. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) argue that spiritual authority can be weaponized to legitimize sexual misconduct, as congregants may perceive resistance as moral or spiritual failure. Enroth (1992) similarly notes that abusers often cloak coercion in religious rhetoric, making detection and confrontation difficult. Rutter (1989) highlights that hierarchical governance structures exacerbate these risks, as accountability is often limited and concentrated among senior leaders.

Fear of reputational damage and social ostracism further suppresses reporting of sexual abuse. P15 remarked that victims are often silent to avoid gossip or blame, reflecting the broader social pressures that silence women. Straus and Gelles (1990) note that the psychological and social consequences of sexual abuse, including shame and isolation, are amplified in close-knit religious communities. O'Hagan (1993) adds that secrecy is reinforced by both formal and informal mechanisms within churches, including private admonitions and community surveillance. Munro (2019) emphasizes that inadequate support structures and the lack of transparent reporting channels allow sexual exploitation to persist unchallenged.

Participants also discussed the emotional and psychological toll of sexual exploitation. P12 shared that the experience left her with anxiety, distrust toward religious authority, and difficulty engaging in communal worship. Glaser (2002) identifies that sexual abuse often leads to long-term trauma, eroding victims' confidence and sense of agency. Walker (1979) suggests that repeated exploitation, particularly when combined with emotional and spiritual abuse, fosters learned helplessness and dependency on authority figures. Crenshaw (1989) underscores the intersectional dimensions,

indicating that age, marital status, and socio-economic dependence further intensify women's vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

The study revealed that organizational culture plays a critical role in enabling sexual abuse. P20 indicated that some congregations implicitly condone the behavior by avoiding confrontation or normalising subtle coercion. Doyle (2009) and Parkinson et al. (2004) argue that institutional failure to enforce ethical standards or investigate allegations creates environments where abuse can continue unchecked. Faller and Palusci (2007) emphasise that the presence of formalised reporting mechanisms, survivor support services, and accountability frameworks is essential in mitigating sexual abuse. Collectively, the participants' accounts demonstrate that sexual exploitation in churches, though less visible than emotional or spiritual abuse, has profound and enduring impacts on women's well-being, trust, and participation in religious life (Fortune, 1989; Stark, 2007; Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

Targeted Abuse by Local Leaders

Participants consistently identified local leaders, such as elders, deacons, departmental heads and ministry coordinators, as the primary sources of abuse within church hierarchies. P10 remarked, "Abuse mostly comes from elders who hold operational power and are rarely questioned," emphasising the role of local-level authority concentration in enabling exploitative behaviours. P20 further noted that the highest level authority, like Bishops, Arc Bishops, the Chairman and mid-leaders like pastors, junior pastors, were comparatively less likely to perpetrate abuse. However, specific research focusing exclusively on local leaders (elders, deacons, officers) as primary perpetrators of abuse in church hierarchies appears to be an underexplored area in academic literature.

P13 indicated that women are reluctant to challenge local leaders due to fear of spiritual reprisal or social ostracism, which aligns with Rutter's (1989) findings that hierarchical structures in churches foster environments conducive to abuse. Finkelhor (1994) also notes that abuse is more likely to

occur when victims perceive that they have no alternative avenues for recourse. In such settings, the congregants who experience abuse in various forms live in silence for fear of victimisation.

The psychological impact of abuse by local leaders is profound. P15 shared that encounters with middle leaders who exercised power abusively led to anxiety, loss of confidence, and spiritual disillusionment. Stark (2007) and Glaser (2002) observe that emotional and psychological harm is intensified when the perpetrator occupies a position of trust and authority, as victims struggle to reconcile spiritual devotion with personal trauma. Walker (1979) notes that repeated exposure to hierarchical coercion fosters learned helplessness, making it difficult for women to challenge abuse or seek help. Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework further explains that age, socioeconomic status, and gender intersect with hierarchical dynamics to compound vulnerability, making senior leaders' abuse particularly impactful.

Participants emphasised the need for structural reforms to reduce abuse risks among senior leadership. P12 suggested introducing oversight committees and transparent disciplinary protocols, while P23 recommended regular audits of local leaders' conduct and accountability mechanisms. Fortune (1989) and Faller and Palusci (2007) argue that formalised reporting systems, coupled with education and empowerment programs for congregants, can mitigate the abuse of power at local levels. O'Hagan (1993) highlights the importance of fostering a culture of openness and vigilance, where abuse is not hidden by deference to authority. Collectively, the findings illustrate that the concentration of power among local leaders significantly elevates abuse risk, and addressing these structural vulnerabilities is essential for protecting women within church contexts (Northouse, 2018; Clinton, 1988; Doyle, 2009).

Normalisation and Concealment

Participants frequently indicated that certain abusive practices were normalised within church settings, often under the pretence of spiritual discipline. P18 explained, "Spiritual threats or public shaming are

seen as discipline, not abuse," highlighting how congregations reinterpret harmful actions as corrective rather than injurious. P29 added that many women internalise mistreatment, believing it to be divinely ordained or culturally expected. These narratives align with Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework, which emphasises that gender, social expectations, and religious norms intersect to shape women's experiences of oppression. Similarly, West and Zimmerman (1987) discuss how social constructs of femininity and submission can legitimise unequal power dynamics, leading victims to accept or overlook abusive behaviours.

The cultural framing of abuse as acceptable discipline was reinforced by theological teachings that emphasised obedience and deference to authority. P12 shared that congregants often interpreted public humiliation as a necessary step for spiritual growth. Fortune (1989) notes that patriarchal interpretations of scripture within religious institutions frequently justify coercive practices, making it difficult for women to recognise abuse. O'Hagan (1993) further asserts that verbal threats and spiritual coercion are often misperceived as moral guidance, which normalises the mistreatment and silences resistance.

Participants also highlighted the role of communal reinforcement in perpetuating normalised abuse. P20 observed that congregations tend to protect leaders by rationalising or minimising their actions, creating a social environment where complaints are discouraged. Doyle (2009) and Parkinson et al. (2004) suggest that such collective reinforcement allows harmful practices to persist without challenge, while Munro (2019) emphasises that institutional cultures prioritising conformity over accountability amplify these effects. In this context, internalisation of abuse becomes a coping mechanism, as women balance spiritual devotion with fear of reprisal.

The psychological consequences of normalised abuse are significant. P7 indicated that women often experience guilt, shame, and self-blame when subjected to what is framed as "corrective discipline." Glaser (2002) and Stark (2007) argue that repeated exposure to normalised abuse undermines self-

esteem and fosters learned helplessness, making it difficult for victims to seek help. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) similarly highlight that spiritual manipulation, when socially sanctioned, reinforces dependency and compliance, entrenching hierarchical control over female congregants. Walker (1979) observes that this learned helplessness is compounded when multiple forms of abuse, emotional, physical, spiritual, sexual and psychological, coexist, creating complex trauma patterns.

Participants underscored the need for awareness and cultural shifts within congregations to challenge the normalisation of abuse. P15 suggested educational programs for both leaders and members to delineate between spiritual guidance and coercive control. Faller and Palusci (2007) stress the importance of accessible reporting mechanisms and support systems to empower victims to speak out. Rutter (1989) and Enroth (1992) advocate for theological reinterpretations that promote accountability and gender equity. Collectively, the findings indicate that normalisation of abuse is both a cultural and institutional phenomenon, and addressing it requires structural reforms, education, and the cultivation of congregational vigilance (Crenshaw, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Fortune, 1989).

4.3 Objective 3: To analyse the responses and mechanisms employed by different denominations when abuse is reported.

Formal Reporting Procedures

Participants highlighted that while many churches have formal reporting procedures for abuse, their effectiveness is often limited by inconsistent implementation and lack of follow-up. P4 explained, “There is a complaint book, but leaders rarely follow up on reports,” emphasising that the mere existence of a reporting mechanism does not guarantee protection or accountability. P13 added that reporting channels are frequently opaque, making victims hesitant to come forward. These observations align with Doyle (2009), who notes that formal procedures without enforcement are largely symbolic and fail to safeguard victims. Similarly, Parkinson et al. (2004) argue that

organisational protocols must be actively applied and monitored to achieve meaningful protection within institutional settings.

Participants also indicated that the fear of retaliation and social stigma often discourages women from utilising formal reporting systems. P7 recounted, “Even if you submit a complaint, you worry about being labelled a troublemaker or being spiritually condemned.” This concern resonates with Munro’s (2019) findings that institutional hierarchies and power imbalances can render formal mechanisms ineffective when victims fear reprisal. Glaser (2002) further notes that when leadership lacks transparency, the credibility of reporting structures diminishes, reinforcing a culture of silence. These dynamics suggest that the mere presence of a complaint system is insufficient without active support and protection for complainants.

The design and accessibility of formal reporting systems were also cited as barriers to their effectiveness. P12 mentioned that some churches require victims to approach senior leaders directly, which can be intimidating given the power asymmetry. Stark (2007) and Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) emphasise that reporting procedures must account for power differentials and provide confidential, independent avenues for complaints. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality framework further highlights that women from marginalised social or economic backgrounds may face compounded barriers in accessing formal channels, including fear of social or financial repercussions.

Participants underscored the importance of follow-up and institutional accountability in ensuring that formal reporting mechanisms function effectively. P20 stated, “Even if the report is written, nothing happens unless there is external oversight or pressure from the congregation.” Doyle (2009) notes that organisations without monitoring or enforcement mechanisms often perpetuate systemic abuse. Faller and Palusci (2007) stress that responsive procedures, including timely investigation, victim support, and transparent outcomes, are crucial to restoring trust and promoting safety. Rutter (1989) adds that

without these measures, reporting systems risk becoming ceremonial, serving institutional legitimacy rather than actual protection.

Participants suggested that improving formal reporting procedures requires cultural and structural reforms within churches. P15 proposed training leaders on abuse recognition and ethical reporting, while P25 emphasised the need for clear communication of procedures to all congregants. Fortune (1989) and Enroth (1992) argue that effective reporting mechanisms are inseparable from organisational transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership. By integrating these reforms, churches can ensure that formal reporting procedures are not merely symbolic but actively contribute to the prevention, detection, and redress of abuse (Walker, 1979; O'Hagan, 1993; Munro, 2019).

Disciplinary Actions

Participants reported that disciplinary actions against church leaders accused of abuse were infrequent and often lacked substantive consequences. P9 recounted, "An Elder who was accused was transferred rather than sanctioned," illustrating a pattern in which leadership misconduct is addressed superficially rather than corrected. This aligns with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) concept of decoupling, where organisations maintain formal policies to signal compliance and legitimacy but fail to enforce them meaningfully. Bromley and Powell (2012) further note that such decoupling allows institutions to preserve authority structures while avoiding reputational damage, often at the expense of victims' welfare. Doyle (2009) emphasises that this symbolic approach undermines trust in institutional accountability mechanisms, signalling to congregants that abuse may go unpunished.

Several participants highlighted that institutional reputation often took precedence over addressing abuse transparently. P22 observed, "Punishment often prioritises institutional reputation over victim welfare," suggesting that churches may manipulate disciplinary processes to minimise scandal rather than ensure justice. Fortune (1989) and Enroth (1992) argue that hierarchical organisations frequently

protect senior leaders, reinforcing power imbalances and perpetuating abuse. Munro (2019) notes that when punitive measures are symbolic, they fail to deter future misconduct and contribute to a culture of impunity. These patterns emphasise the tension between maintaining institutional legitimacy and upholding ethical accountability.

Participants also noted the inconsistency and lack of clarity in disciplinary practices across different denominations. P14 stated, “Some leaders receive warnings while others face no action at all, even for similar offences.” This observation supports Rutter’s (1989) argument that uneven enforcement of policies exacerbates perceptions of injustice and undermines confidence in institutional governance. Faller and Palusci (2007) add that victims are less likely to report abuse when they perceive disciplinary systems as arbitrary or ineffective. Glaser (2002) underscores that inadequate consequences can compound the psychological trauma experienced by survivors, reinforcing feelings of helplessness and mistrust.

Another critical aspect highlighted was the transfer or reassignment of abusive leaders instead of substantive sanctions. P11 mentioned, “Leaders accused of abuse are sometimes just moved to another parish or ministry, allowing misconduct to continue elsewhere.” Stark (2007) and Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) argue that such practices reflect an organisational priority on damage control rather than ethical rectitude. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectional lens shows that women’s social and cultural positions often amplify their vulnerability in these scenarios, particularly when leaders exploit hierarchical authority to evade accountability. Walker (1979) further emphasises that repeated exposure to unaddressed misconduct fosters learned helplessness among victims and perpetuates systemic abuse.

Participants suggested that meaningful disciplinary actions require transparency, standardised procedures, and external oversight. P25 proposed, “There should be clear rules on consequences and independent committees to ensure fairness.” Doyle (2009) and Munro (2019) assert that robust

enforcement, coupled with support for victims, is essential to dismantle power asymmetries and restore trust. Finkelhor (1994) emphasizes that accountability not only serves justice but also deters future abuse, while Fortune (1989) stresses that consistent, transparent sanctions reinforce ethical leadership and protect congregants. Enroth (1992) further highlights that integrating monitoring mechanisms and clear consequences can prevent symbolic responses and promote institutional integrity.

Counseling and Support Services

Participants consistently reported that access to counselling and support services within their church communities was limited or inadequate. P12 explained, "After reporting abuse, I received little to no follow-up or guidance," highlighting a gap between formal reporting mechanisms and practical support for survivors. Herman (2015) emphasises that structured counselling is critical to facilitate recovery from trauma, restore agency, and rebuild trust. Campbell and Martin (2001) similarly note that organisational support systems are essential for promoting psychological well-being and empowering survivors to navigate the aftermath of abuse. The participants' experiences suggest that without proactive support, women remain vulnerable to prolonged psychological harm and disengagement from church activities.

Several participants pointed out that even when counselling was available, it often lacked professional, trauma-informed approaches. P27 noted, "Counselling, when available, was not trauma-informed," reflecting concerns about the adequacy and quality of support provided. Munro (2019) stresses that generic pastoral advice or spiritual guidance alone cannot address the complex emotional and psychological consequences of abuse. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) argue that inadequate support perpetuates the power imbalance between leaders and congregants, leaving survivors feeling isolated and invalidated. Glaser (2002) adds that counselling interventions must be responsive to individual experiences, particularly in cases where abuse intersects with spiritual and emotional manipulation.

Participants emphasized that the absence of consistent follow-up mechanisms exacerbated the sense of neglect and vulnerability. P19 remarked, “After reporting abuse, no one checked on me or offered assistance; it felt like my voice didn’t matter.” Doyle (2009) asserts that institutional neglect in post-reporting care undermines credibility and discourages future disclosures. Stark (2007) and Walker (1979) note that survivors of abuse require ongoing support to counteract learned helplessness and restore autonomy. The participants’ accounts indicate that church organisations often lack systematic strategies to ensure survivors receive timely, continuous, and effective support services.

The data also revealed that peer and community support structures were minimal or underutilised. P23 shared, “There are no women’s groups or networks to help those who experience abuse.” Faller and Palusci (2007) highlight that peer support, mentorship, and advocacy groups are critical components of a holistic approach to victim assistance. Enroth (1992) further emphasises that collective support can empower survivors to challenge abusive structures and contribute to cultural change within congregations. Crenshaw (1989) notes that intersectional factors, such as age, marital status, or socio-economic position, influence women’s access to informal support, highlighting the need for tailored interventions that consider these dimensions.

Participants suggested improvements to counselling and support mechanisms, advocating for professionalised, trauma-informed, and accessible services. P30 proposed, “There should be trained counsellors, clear follow-up protocols, and safe spaces for women to share their experiences without fear.” Herman (2015) stresses that structured support fosters recovery, resilience, and reintegration, while Campbell and Martin (2001) note that accessible counselling services increase trust in organizational processes. Fortune (1989) emphasizes that institutionalizing robust support mechanisms not only aids survivors but also signals a commitment to ethical leadership. Munro (2019) and Doyle (2009) highlight that comprehensive support systems, including psychological, legal, and spiritual dimensions, are vital to protect women and prevent re-traumatization, ultimately strengthening accountability within church communities.

Community-Based and Informal Interventions

Community-based and informal interventions emerged as a recurring theme in participants' accounts, underscoring their significant yet inconsistent role in addressing abuse within church settings. P15 remarked, "Elders sometimes resolve conflicts privately, which can either help or worsen the situation," illustrating how these responses can be both remedial and problematic. P6 further noted that the effectiveness of such informal approaches varied widely across congregations, depending on leadership attitudes and community cohesion. Parkinson et al. (2004) emphasise that informal mechanisms often mirror the institutional culture and prevailing values of faith communities, influencing the tone and effectiveness of conflict resolution. These findings suggest that while community-based interventions can offer immediate relief, they may also perpetuate bias or favouritism in abuse cases.

Participants revealed that informal interventions frequently relied on mediation by pastors, elders, or respected church members who lacked professional training in trauma or gender-sensitive counselling. P19 noted, "Sometimes the elders tell women to forgive and move on, even when the issue is serious." This reflects what Fortune (1989) describes as the "spiritualization of reconciliation," where forgiveness is prioritised over justice or healing. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) similarly caution that informal pastoral mediation, while well-intentioned, can reinforce hierarchical control and minimise the survivor's pain. Herman (2015) argues that non-professional interventions may inadvertently retraumatize victims by dismissing their experiences or pressuring them into silence.

Some participants appreciated the accessibility and cultural resonance of informal mechanisms, particularly in smaller congregations where trust and familiarity were strong. P23 shared, "Sometimes talking to a trusted elder is easier than going through formal church committees." Enroth (1992) and Campbell and Martin (2001) observe that informal interventions can be empowering when rooted in empathy, confidentiality, and fairness. Crenshaw (1989) adds that community-based approaches can be more inclusive, especially for women marginalized by class or education, when they foster

participatory dialogue and collective accountability. Thus, informal systems hold potential for positive impact when grounded in transparency and survivor-centered values.

However, the same mechanisms often lacked structure, documentation, and accountability, leading to inconsistent outcomes. P27 stated, “There is no record of what happens when an issue is reported informally, so sometimes abusers go unpunished.” Munro (2019) and Doyle (2009) highlight that informal dispute resolution without oversight can entrench impunity and discourage survivors from seeking justice. Glaser (2002) notes that ambiguity in procedure undermines institutional credibility and limits opportunities for systemic reform. These insights underscore the dual-edged nature of informal interventions—capable of providing rapid, culturally sensitive responses, yet also prone to perpetuating silence and protecting perpetrators when unregulated.

Participants proposed integrating community-based approaches into formal structures to enhance their effectiveness. P9 suggested, “If the church can combine traditional mediation with proper follow-up and counselling, more women would feel safe reporting issues.” Faller and Palusci (2007) advocate hybrid models that blend informal cultural practices with formalised accountability systems to balance compassion and justice. Herman (2015) emphasises that training community mediators in trauma-informed care can transform informal interventions into effective channels of support. Fortune (1989) and Parkinson et al. (2004) agree that embedding ethical guidelines and gender sensitivity into community-based processes strengthens trust and long-term prevention. Overall, participants’ perspectives illustrate that community-driven responses, when aligned with professional standards and institutional backing, can become valuable complements to formal mechanisms in addressing abuse within faith communities.

Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability emerged as critical determinants of how effectively churches respond to abuse cases. Participants consistently emphasised that when processes were opaque, trust in

leadership eroded, and victims felt discouraged from reporting incidents. P8 noted, “Sometimes cases are discussed openly, but most times, they are hidden to protect the church’s image,” highlighting how institutional reputation often takes precedence over justice. Suchman (1995) and Scott (2008) argue that organisational legitimacy depends on both compliance with societal norms and perceived fairness in internal processes. In church contexts, concealment of abuse cases not only undermines institutional credibility but also perpetuates harm against women by normalising silence.

Several participants observed that accountability mechanisms were inconsistently applied, with outcomes often depending on the leader’s status or influence within the church. P16 explained, “Senior pastors rarely face consequences, but lower-level leaders are quickly reprimanded for minor infractions.” This disparity aligns with the concept of decoupling, where formal policies exist in principle but are not operationally enforced (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2012). Doyle (2009) emphasises that without consistent enforcement, accountability measures fail to protect vulnerable members and may reinforce hierarchical power imbalances. These findings suggest that structural inequalities within denominational leadership significantly affect transparency and fairness in abuse cases.

Participants also highlighted that the lack of clear communication about actions taken in response to abuse exacerbated distrust. P24 stated, “Even when a case is investigated, we are not informed about what happens, so it feels like nothing is done.” This reflects the observation by Faller and Palusci (2007) that transparency in institutional responses is essential for survivor confidence and effective redress. Munro (2019) similarly notes that visible and documented procedures strengthen both internal and external trust in organisational systems. The absence of feedback loops can inadvertently signal tacit approval of abuse, diminishing women’s willingness to report violations.

Some participants acknowledged instances where transparency and accountability were more robust, often in denominations with formal oversight bodies or external supervision. P19 remarked, “In our

church, cases go to an independent committee, and members are informed about outcomes, which builds trust." Enroth (1992) and Fortune (1989) highlight that external accountability and independent review mechanisms are effective in mitigating abuse and reinforcing ethical norms. Glaser (2002) emphasises that institutional legitimacy is reinforced when congregants perceive procedural fairness and equitable treatment of offenders, regardless of rank or influence. These insights underscore that accountability is not merely procedural but also relational, shaping members' trust and participation.

Participants suggested that improving transparency requires both structural reforms and cultural shifts within church communities. P12 proposed, "Leaders should routinely communicate how cases are handled and ensure follow-ups, so members see that justice is served." Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) argue that transparency combined with ethical leadership fosters moral authority and deters future misconduct. Stark (2007) adds that openly addressing abuse challenges entrenched hierarchies and reinforces survivor-centred norms. Collectively, the data indicate that accountability and transparent reporting processes are indispensable for protecting women, restoring institutional legitimacy, and fostering a culture of ethical leadership within Ghanaian churches.

4.4 Objective 4: To find out whether there are any mechanisms in place to protect women in various denominations

Existence of Policies and Protocols

The existence of policies and protocols within churches was frequently cited by participants as a critical, yet unevenly applied, mechanism for protecting women. P3 noted, "There are codes of conduct, but many leaders do not follow them," highlighting a disconnect between formal regulations and actual practices. Demerath et al. (1998) argue that denominational structures may establish policies for legitimacy, but enforcement often depends on internal power dynamics. Similarly, Zech (2007) observes that written codes alone are insufficient without consistent accountability, monitoring, and

cultural reinforcement. Participants' responses suggest that policies may exist in theory but fail to shape behaviour or protect vulnerable congregants effectively.

Several respondents emphasised that awareness of protective policies among members is limited. P19 explained, "Most women do not even know what the rules are or how to report violations," reflecting a communication gap that diminishes policy effectiveness. Munro (2019) stresses that clear dissemination and member education are essential for ensuring that institutional protocols translate into meaningful protections. O'Hagan (1993) and Glaser (2002) further suggest that without accessible information, congregants remain unaware of their rights and available resources, which perpetuates vulnerability. This highlights the importance of not only drafting policies but actively embedding them within congregational culture.

Participants also noted that the effectiveness of policies is influenced by leadership commitment and the church's structural hierarchy. P7 stated, "Even if rules exist, senior pastors or influential leaders often override them without consequence." Northouse (2018) and Clinton (1988) argue that hierarchical authority in religious organisations can create environments where formal policies are selectively enforced, often to protect institutional interests. This aligns with the concept of decoupling, where written protocols serve symbolic purposes but fail to regulate actual conduct (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Bromley & Powell, 2012). The data indicate that the mere presence of policies is insufficient to prevent abuse when institutional culture does not support adherence.

Some participants highlighted examples of proactive policy implementation in certain congregations. P15 remarked, "Our church recently updated its conduct guidelines and holds leaders accountable through a committee review," demonstrating how policies, when effectively operationalized, can enhance protection. Fortune (1989) and Enroth (1992) suggest that robust oversight mechanisms, combined with structural clarity and independent accountability, can reduce abuse risk. Doyle (2009) also emphasizes that the legitimacy and trust of an organization are strengthened when formal

procedures are consistently applied. These cases illustrate that policy effectiveness is contingent on both structural enforcement and leadership integrity.

Finally, participants underscored the need for continuous review and adaptation of protective protocols to address emerging risks. P12 observed, “Policies are only useful if they are updated and taught to members regularly; otherwise, they remain meaningless.” Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) highlight that evolving social norms and changing congregational demographics require dynamic policy frameworks. Stark (2007) also notes that continuous monitoring and feedback mechanisms are essential for sustaining protective measures. Overall, the findings suggest that while the existence of policies is a critical first step, effective protection of women requires awareness, consistent enforcement, structural accountability, and ongoing cultural reinforcement within church communities.

Training and Education for Leaders

Participants indicated that training programs aimed at preventing abuse exist in some churches but are inconsistently implemented. P11 stated, “New leaders attend orientation, but ongoing training on ethical conduct is rare,” highlighting a lack of sustained education beyond initial induction. Munro (2019) emphasises that continuous training is crucial for fostering ethical leadership and mitigating abuse risks within hierarchical institutions. Similarly, Faller and Palusci (2007) note that one-off training sessions are insufficient for shaping long-term behavioral change or reinforcing accountability standards. The participants’ accounts suggest that while orientation programs introduce leaders to expected norms, the absence of ongoing training undermines their effectiveness in protecting congregants.

Several participants highlighted the importance of consistent sensitization to ethical and protective measures. P26 remarked, “Leaders need continuous reminders about conduct and the consequences of abuse,” underscoring the need for reinforcement mechanisms. Doyle (2009) asserts that repetitive training helps embed organizational values into daily practice, enhancing compliance. O’Hagan (1993)

further argues that ethical conduct is reinforced through regular reflection, dialogue, and practical application rather than theoretical instruction alone. These insights indicate that periodic or sporadic training leaves gaps in leader awareness and accountability.

The content and scope of training were also identified as critical factors influencing effectiveness. P17 shared, “Most trainings focus on church management, not on how to handle sensitive interactions with women or prevent abuse.” Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) and Enroth (1992) emphasize that training must address power dynamics, gender sensitivity, and abuse prevention strategies to be meaningful. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality framework suggests that leaders must understand how age, socio-economic status, and cultural expectations interact with abuse risks to protect diverse congregants effectively. Without such tailored content, training risks being perfunctory and failing to address actual vulnerabilities.

Participants also noted that leadership commitment determines the success of training programs. P9 explained, “Even when training is offered, leaders who feel untouchable often ignore the lessons.” Stark (2007) and Northouse (2018) assert that hierarchical authority and centralised power can diminish the impact of ethical training if leaders are not held accountable. Faller and Palusci (2007) similarly argue that institutional culture, including reinforcement by senior leadership, plays a decisive role in whether training translates into tangible protective practices. The data indicate that effective training requires alignment between educational initiatives and institutional enforcement.

Finally, participants emphasised the need for monitoring and evaluation of training outcomes. P22 stated, “It is not enough to train leaders once; there must be follow-ups and assessments to ensure they apply the principles.” Munro (2019) and Doyle (2009) argue that continuous evaluation identifies gaps, measures effectiveness, and informs improvements in ethical conduct programs. Glaser (2002) and O’Hagan (1993) further highlight that monitoring ensures leaders internalize abuse prevention strategies rather than treating training as a procedural formality. Collectively, the findings suggest that

ethical and abuse-prevention training for leaders must be continuous, context-specific, reinforced by leadership, and coupled with accountability mechanisms to effectively safeguard women within church communities.

Oversight and Monitoring Structures

Participants noted that oversight structures exist in some denominations but are weak or ineffective. P5 shared, “There is an oversight committee, but it rarely investigates allegations seriously.” P21 highlighted the importance of independent monitoring to strengthen accountability. Effective governance and monitoring are central to safeguarding women in institutional settings (Ammerman, 2005; Carroll & Roof, 2002).

Congregational Participation in Protection

Participants revealed that congregants' active engagement in safeguarding women within church communities was often minimal. P14 explained, “Members sometimes avoid intervening for fear of backlash and victimisation,” highlighting the pervasive influence of hierarchical authority and fear of retaliation. Research indicates that in highly centralised church structures, congregants may hesitate to challenge leaders due to potential social, spiritual, emotional and economic consequences (Northouse, 2018; Clinton, 1988). This dynamic limits the ability of community members to serve as a protective mechanism, leaving women more vulnerable to abuse. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectionality framework further emphasises that women’s vulnerability is compounded when congregants lack empowerment to act, particularly in contexts where gender, age, and social status intersect to reinforce silence.

Several participants noted the existence of women’s committees or similar structures but stressed their limited efficacy. P28 stated, “Women’s committees exist but have minimal authority,” suggesting that such groups often lack the formal power to enforce protective measures or hold leaders accountable. Chaves (1993) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that organizational structures that centralize decision-making impede meaningful participation from lower-level actors, including lay congregants.

Consequently, committees and community groups may operate symbolically, offering limited practical protection despite appearing active in policy and advocacy.

The data indicate that cultural norms and social expectations also constrain congregational involvement. P11 shared, “Many members believe it is not their place to question the pastor, even if they witness mistreatment.” This aligns with Fortune (1989) and Johnson and VanVonderen (1991), who note that patriarchal traditions and theological interpretations emphasizing obedience reinforce compliance and discourage intervention. Such norms create an environment where abuse can persist unchecked, as the community’s collective moral responsibility is subordinated to hierarchical authority. Faller and Palusci (2007) further assert that without empowerment and cultural shifts, formal committees alone cannot ensure effective protection.

Participants highlighted that awareness and education among congregants were inconsistent. P20 remarked, “Some members do not even know what constitutes abuse or the mechanisms available to report it.” Munro (2019) emphasises that knowledge gaps reduce the capacity of community members to identify, respond to, or prevent abuse. Doyle (2009) similarly notes that active participation is contingent on congregants being well-informed, confident, and supported by clear institutional policies. When awareness is lacking, fear of social repercussions or misunderstanding of ethical obligations can discourage engagement, perpetuating cycles of silence and inaction.

The findings suggest that fostering distributed leadership and empowering congregants could enhance protection mechanisms. P26 suggested, “If members and committees had authority to hold leaders accountable, more women would feel safe to report.” Scott (2008) and Suchman (1995) argue that organizational legitimacy and trust improve when accountability is shared across multiple levels, rather than concentrated in senior leadership alone. By actively involving congregants and ensuring committees have both authority and resources, churches can create participatory protective frameworks that supplement formal policies. Overall, the data indicate that meaningful engagement

by community members is critical for safeguarding women but is currently constrained by hierarchical structures, cultural norms, and limited authority within committees.

Recommendations for Strengthening Protection

Participants consistently highlighted the need for stricter enforcement of existing policies to better safeguard women in church communities. P1 emphasised, "We need clear reporting channels and regular education on abuse prevention," reflecting a broader concern about the gap between formal rules and their implementation. Meyer and Rowan's (1977) concept of decoupling illustrates how policies often exist for legitimacy but are not operationally enforced, leaving women unprotected. Bromley and Powell (2012) further note that without active enforcement, institutional mechanisms fail to deter abuse effectively. Doyle (2009) stresses that enforcement requires both clear guidelines and accountability structures to ensure consistent application across all leadership levels.

Enhanced training and ongoing education were frequently recommended to equip both leaders and congregants with the knowledge to identify and prevent abuse. P17 observed, "Many members do not know what constitutes abuse or how to intervene safely," highlighting gaps in awareness. Munro (2019) argues that structured training programs foster ethical leadership and empower congregants to act against mistreatment. Faller and Palusci (2007) emphasise that trauma-informed approaches and continuous sensitization are critical in ensuring that leaders understand their responsibilities and the consequences of abusive behavior. Johnson and VanVonderen (1991) similarly note that education reduces reliance on hierarchical coercion and promotes more equitable church practices.

Participants also underscored the importance of independent oversight bodies to ensure impartial investigation and accountability. P10 suggested, "An external committee could review complaints to avoid bias and retaliation from senior leaders." Suchman (1995) and Scott (2008) argue that legitimacy and trust are enhanced when oversight mechanisms operate independently of the hierarchical structure. Enroth (1992) highlights that external accountability is particularly effective in addressing abuses that

internal structures may overlook or conceal. Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality framework further suggests that external monitoring can help protect the most vulnerable women, who may lack influence within church hierarchies.

Cultural norms that discourage confrontation were also identified as a barrier to implementing improvements. P17 noted, "It is hard to challenge leaders because of traditions that emphasise obedience and submission." Fortune (1989) and West and Zimmerman (1987) highlight how patriarchal values and social expectations can inhibit reporting and engagement. Rutter (1989) emphasises that cultural shifts, combined with institutional reforms, are necessary to empower women and congregants to recognise and resist abusive practices. Doyle (2009) argues that without addressing these cultural factors, policy enforcement and oversight mechanisms may remain ineffective.

Finally, participants suggested a holistic approach integrating policy enforcement, education, oversight, and cultural change to strengthen protection. P26 recommended, "Churches should engage members, provide resources, and ensure follow-up for every complaint." Watts and Zimmerman (2002) emphasise that reducing vulnerability requires comprehensive strategies addressing power imbalances, social norms, and structural weaknesses. Chaves (1993) notes that distributed leadership and participatory governance enhance accountability, making abuse less likely to persist. Collectively, the findings indicate that improving protection for women in churches is multifaceted, requiring both organizational commitment and community engagement to create safer, more responsive environments.

4.5: Discussion of Results

The discussion of results interprets the analysed data in relation to the study objectives, theoretical framework, and existing literature. The findings reveal that various forms of abuse—emotional, spiritual, sexual, physical, and psychological—are embedded within institutional and cultural dynamics that privilege authority, obedience, and gendered subordination in church settings. The

discussion is organized under three main themes: (1) Patterns and Forms of Abuse Experienced by Women, (2) Institutional Culture and Accountability Mechanisms, and (3) Pathways Toward Protection and Empowerment.

Patterns and Most Prevalent Form of Abuse Experienced by Women

The results reveal that emotional, spiritual, and psychological abuse were the most pervasive experiences among participants, often occurring under the guise of discipline or divine authority. Emotional abuse manifested through ridicule, public shaming, and humiliation during religious activities. These experiences align with O'Hagan (1993) and Glaser (2002), who describe emotional domination as a subtle yet destructive form of institutional control. Stark (2007) adds that verbal aggression and public belittlement are the most common yet least reported forms of abuse in faith communities. Participants' accounts echo these findings, showing how ridicule and intimidation erode women's self-worth and silence dissent. This dynamic supports Crenshaw's (1989) intersectional theory, which argues that gender, faith, and community expectations interact to amplify women's vulnerability and limit their autonomy in religious spaces.

Spiritual abuse was also found to be widespread and deeply ingrained in church structures. Participants described instances where disagreement with church leaders was equated with disobedience to God, reflecting Johnson and VanVonderen's (1991) definition of spiritual abuse as the misuse of religious authority to control and manipulate. Enroth (1992) and Fortune (1989) emphasise that spiritual coercion is particularly harmful because it weaponizes faith—something deeply personal and sacred—to suppress individual thought and independence. Rutter (1989) notes that rigid hierarchies within churches create environments conducive to such exploitation. The study's findings confirm that threats of divine punishment and selective use of scripture are powerful tools that maintain compliance and sustain patriarchal dominance, leaving victims fearful of both human and divine retribution.

Sexual abuse, while less frequently reported, carried severe emotional and psychological repercussions. Participants described coercive sexual behavior masked as spiritual mentoring or blessings, illustrating Finkelhor's (1994) argument that sexual exploitation in institutional contexts thrives on power asymmetry and secrecy. Russell (1984) and Benyei (1998) observe that religious institutions often conceal sexual abuse due to stigma and the desire to preserve their image—an issue reflected in participants' reluctance to report incidents. Similarly, Walker (1979) and Straus and Gelles (1990) explain that the combination of psychological coercion and social power dynamics creates a context where survivors internalise shame and helplessness. Together, these patterns highlight how abuse within faith institutions is not accidental but systemic, rooted in structures that elevate authority and demand unquestioned obedience.

Institutional Culture and Accountability Mechanisms

The findings underscore that institutional responses to abuse were inconsistent, fragmented, and largely symbolic. Although many denominations have formal reporting systems and codes of conduct, participants noted that these mechanisms are rarely enforced. P4 and P13's experiences, where complaints were ignored or inadequately followed up, reflect Doyle's (2009) argument that policies without enforcement are ineffective in safeguarding victims. This phenomenon aligns with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) and Bromley and Powell's (2012) concept of *decoupling*, where organisations adopt formal policies for legitimacy while failing to implement them meaningfully. As a result, accountability becomes performative rather than protective.

Disciplinary actions against abusive leaders were often limited to suspension, transfers or reassignment rather than genuine sanctions, emphasising institutional tendencies to prioritise reputation over justice. Fortune (1989) and Munro (2019) argue that such practices perpetuate impunity by signalling that misconduct carries little consequence. Additionally, counselling and support services for victims were reported as scarce or non-trauma-informed, confirming Herman's (2015) and Campbell and Martin's

(2001) findings that survivor recovery requires structured, empathetic, and sustained interventions. The study also found that informal, community-based responses such as pastoral mediation sometimes provided temporary relief but often reinforced existing hierarchies. Parkinson et al. (2004) note that these informal mechanisms tend to reflect institutional values—meaning that where patriarchal norms prevail, abuse is more likely to be normalized or minimized.

Transparency and communication within church systems were also limited. Participants described inconsistent reporting of cases and deliberate concealment of abuse to protect institutional image. Suchman (1995) and Scott (2008) argue that legitimacy and member trust depend on transparency and open communication; thus, a lack of it erodes credibility and discourages victims from seeking help. The findings collectively indicate that weak institutional accountability, coupled with hierarchical authority and fear of reputational damage and victimisation, sustains a culture of silence and perpetuates cycles of abuse.

Pathways Toward Protection and Empowerment

Despite these challenges, participants offered constructive recommendations for improvement, emphasising stricter enforcement of policies, independent oversight, and continuous leadership training. Their perspectives align with Zech's (2007) and Demerath et al.'s (1998) argument that written policies must be complemented by education and behavioral change to be effective. The study further supports Munro's (2019) and Faller and Palusci's (2007) findings that regular training on ethical leadership reduces the likelihood of abuse and fosters accountability. However, participants noted that such initiatives are rarely ongoing and often treated as one-off orientations for new leaders, limiting their long-term impact.

Active involvement of congregants in safeguarding women was also limited, with many fearing retaliation for speaking out. Chaves (1993) and DiMaggio and Powell (1983) emphasize that distributed leadership and community participation are vital for monitoring leadership behavior and

ensuring institutional accountability. The findings suggest that empowering women's committees, promoting open dialogue, and encouraging peer accountability could strengthen internal oversight mechanisms. Moreover, as Watts and Zimmerman (2002) assert, meaningful protection requires both structural reform and cultural transformation. In this study, participants recognized that while policies and trainings are necessary, dismantling cultural norms that discourage confrontation and normalize abuse is equally crucial.

Ultimately, the discussion reveals that protecting women in religious institutions requires a dual approach: institutional reform through transparent, enforceable systems, and cultural change that challenges the misuse of spiritual authority and patriarchal control. A holistic model—combining policy enforcement, education, and grassroots empowerment—offers the most promising pathway toward justice, healing, and transformation within Ghana's faith-based organizations.

4.6: Chapter Summary

Chapter Four demonstrates that abuse against women in church contexts is a multidimensional issue rooted in power imbalances, cultural norms, and weak accountability systems. The chapter's insights highlight the urgent need for transparent, inclusive, and survivor-centered interventions that combine spiritual integrity with institutional accountability. The next chapter will present the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations**,** providing practical pathways toward establishing safer and more equitable faith communities in Ghana.

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.0: Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of key findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from the study on the abuse of women in church contexts in Ghana. It also offers suggestions for future research. The study examined the various forms of abuse experienced by women, the institutional and denominational responses to such abuse, and the mechanisms available for prevention and redress. This chapter synthesizes these findings within the broader framework of gender, power, and institutional accountability in religious settings.

5.1 Summary of Key Findings

The study found that emotional and spiritual abuses were the most pervasive forms of mistreatment experienced by women in Ghanaian church contexts. Emotional abuse manifested through persistent criticism, humiliation, and public shaming of women during services, often justified as correction or spiritual discipline. This aligns with existing literature indicating that religious authority is frequently used to enforce conformity and suppress dissent, especially among women (Fortune, 1989; Glaser, 2002). Spiritual abuse, on the other hand, involved coercive manipulation through threats of divine punishment or loss of spiritual favor, echoing Enroth's (1992) argument that faith-based coercion is particularly harmful because it exploits believers' trust in divine authority. The findings thus highlight that religious language and rituals can be weaponized to control women's behavior and reinforce dependency on leaders.

The analysis also revealed that hierarchical power structures significantly increase the risk of abuse. Senior church leaders—often male—were cited as key perpetrators due to their unchallenged authority and influence over congregants. This corroborates the theoretical perspectives of Northouse (2018) and Clinton (1988), who argue that centralized decision-making and lack of oversight in religious

organizations create fertile ground for abuse of power. Participants' experiences further indicated that abuse was often normalized or trivialized within congregations, where public shaming, intimidation, and corporal punishment were rationalized as expressions of discipline or spiritual correction. Such normalization reflects patriarchal cultural norms that valorize male leadership and silence female dissent (West & Zimmerman, 1987; Crenshaw, 1989).

The findings also show that institutional responses to abuse were inadequate and often symbolic. Although formal complaint systems and disciplinary procedures existed in some denominations, their implementation was inconsistent and lacked transparency. Leaders accused of misconduct were more likely to be transferred than sanctioned, reflecting institutional priorities that favor image management over justice for victims (Doyle, 2009; Bromley & Powell, 2012). This phenomenon resonates with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) notion of *decoupling*, where formal structures exist primarily for legitimacy rather than for substantive enforcement. The weak enforcement of accountability mechanisms, coupled with the absence of trauma-informed pastoral care, further discourages victims from reporting abuse.

Finally, the study found that counseling and support services for victims were either non-existent or poorly structured. Where available, they were rarely survivor-centered or professionalized. Participants expressed the need for continuous education, gender-sensitive pastoral training, and the establishment of independent oversight bodies. These findings support the argument by Campbell and Martin (2001) and Herman (2015) that effective support systems are critical for healing, empowerment, and institutional trust. Collectively, the study underscores that abuse in church contexts is not merely the result of individual misconduct but a reflection of broader structural, cultural, and theological dynamics that reinforce gendered subordination.

5.2: Conclusions

The study concludes that abuse of women in church contexts in Ghana is a systemic issue rooted in both institutional and cultural structures. Emotional, spiritual, and sexual abuses persist largely because religious authority is exercised without adequate accountability. Churches, while upholding doctrines of compassion and morality, often fail to translate these values into internal governance. The absence of strong protective mechanisms, coupled with patriarchal theological interpretations, allows gendered abuses to thrive under the guise of spiritual obedience (Crenshaw, 1989; Fortune, 1989).

The evidence indicates that institutional responses to abuse remain largely reactive and inadequate. Churches often focus on preserving their public image rather than addressing misconduct transparently. The lack of consistent enforcement of disciplinary procedures diminishes trust and perpetuates a culture of silence. Moreover, the tendency to rationalize abuse as correction or divine discipline reflects the deep entrenchment of patriarchal ideology within religious life (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Ultimately, the study confirms that the issue of abuse in church contexts is multifaceted—encompassing theology, culture, and organisational management. Addressing it requires more than policy formulation; it demands structural reform, ethical leadership, and theological renewal that promotes gender equity, accountability, and pastoral empathy.

5.3: Recommendations

Institutionalise and Enforce Comprehensive Anti-Abuse Policies

Churches must develop and rigorously implement clear policies that define and prohibit all forms of abuse—emotional, spiritual, psychological, and sexual. These policies should outline transparent reporting mechanisms, protection for complainants, and enforceable sanctions against offenders. Oversight should not be left solely to internal leadership structures but should include external experts or lay members to ensure impartiality. As Bromley and Powell (2012) assert, institutional legitimacy in faith organisations depends on visible accountability and justice-oriented governance.

Establish Mandatory Ethical and Gender-Sensitivity Training for Church Leaders Training should be institutionalised as a continuous process rather than a one-off orientation. Clergy, volunteers, and lay leaders must be educated on gender justice, ethical leadership, and trauma-informed care. Such training enhances self-awareness, reduces power misuse, and fosters safe pastoral environments (Munro, 2019; Faller & Palusci, 2007). When religious leaders are equipped with ethical and emotional intelligence, they are better positioned to model integrity and protect vulnerable members.

Create Independent Oversight and Reporting Structures

Independent safeguarding committees should be established across denominations, with members drawn from clergy, laypersons, gender experts, and legal professionals. These bodies should receive and investigate abuse complaints transparently. Independent oversight builds credibility, encourages reporting, and ensures that disciplinary measures are not influenced by hierarchical bias (Scott, 2008; Chaves, 1993).

Strengthen Counseling and Survivor Support Systems

Churches must integrate professional, trauma-informed counseling services into their welfare structures. Survivors should receive psychosocial support, spiritual guidance, and access to referral services outside the church environment to avoid conflict of interest. According to Herman (2015) and Campbell and Martin (2001), survivor-centered interventions are critical to restoring agency and trust after experiences of abuse.

Promote Congregational Involvement and Empowerment

Active participation of congregants, especially women, is vital in safeguarding efforts. Churches should establish empowered committees for women's affairs and lay ministry engagement, allowing congregants to monitor compliance with safeguarding policies. This aligns with DiMaggio and

Powell's (1983) argument that distributed leadership and participatory governance reduce institutional blind spots and foster community accountability.

Reform Theological Education and Cultural Orientation

Theological seminaries and Bible colleges should revise their curricula to include courses on gender equity, human rights, and pastoral ethics. Reinterpreting scriptures that have historically justified submission and silence among women is essential to dismantling the patriarchal ideologies that underpin abuse (Crenshaw, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Faith-based teachings must emphasize mutual respect, equality, and pastoral care as central to Christian discipleship.

5.4: Suggestions for Future Studies

Future research should undertake a comparative exploration of abuse across different faith traditions to understand how various theological frameworks influence patterns of victimisation and response. Quantitative studies could complement these qualitative insights by measuring prevalence, demographic trends, and the relationship between church governance structures and reported abuse. Longitudinal studies would also be useful in tracking the impact of institutional reforms and awareness campaigns over time.

Moreover, research could focus on male clergy perspectives and their role in shaping accountability systems, as understanding the mindset of those in authority is essential for designing effective preventive interventions. Finally, future studies should explore the role of media, advocacy groups, and interfaith networks in promoting institutional transparency and survivor support, as social accountability has proven critical in driving reform within faith-based organisations (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002).

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Interview Guide

Introduction

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. My name is Naomi, and I am conducting a research project as part of my academic requirements. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of women in church settings, particularly regarding abuse, denominational responses, and protection mechanisms.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw at any time. All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes. Your responses will be anonymised, and no identifying information will be linked to your answers. There are no right or wrong answers, and we value your honest experiences and opinions.

Section A: Demographic Information

Before we begin, please provide some information about yourself.

Age: _____

Marital Status: Single / Married / Divorced / Widowed

Educational Level: No formal education / Primary / Secondary / Tertiary / Other

Occupation: _____

Denomination of Church: _____

Role in Church: Member / Volunteer / Ministry Leader / Executive / Other

Duration of membership in the church: _____ years

Section B: Objective 1 – To identify the types and nature of abuse experienced by women in various church denominations in Ghana

Can you describe any experiences where you felt mistreated or harmed within your church?

Follow-up: Can you explain what led to this situation and how it affected you?

Have you ever witnessed or heard about other women experiencing abuse in your church?

Follow-up: What type of abuse did they experience, and how did it affect them?

In your opinion, what behaviors or actions by church leaders would you classify as abusive?

Follow-up: Could you provide specific examples you have seen or experienced?

How do you think the nature of abuse in your church differs from abuse in other denominations or contexts?

Follow-up: What factors do you think contribute to these differences?

Are there certain settings, rituals, or church practices where women are more vulnerable to abuse?

Follow-up: Can you explain why these settings increase vulnerability

Section C: Objective 2 – To identify the prevalent form of abuse women experienced from church leaders

What type of abuse do you think occurs most frequently in your church? (e.g., emotional, spiritual, physical, sexual, psychological)

Follow-up: Can you describe specific incidents or patterns you have observed?

Are there particular leaders or positions in the church where abuse is more likely to occur?

Follow-up: Why do you think abuse is more prevalent in these cases?

How do women usually respond to abuse when it occurs?

Follow-up: Are there cases where women do not report abuse? Why do you think that happens?

In your experience, which type of abuse causes the most harm or long-term effects on women?

Follow-up: Can you provide an example or describe the impact?

Do you believe some forms of abuse are overlooked or normalized within the church?

Follow-up: Which forms and why do you think they are ignored or accepted?

Section D: Objective 3 – To analyse the responses and mechanisms (e.g., disciplinary actions, counselling, support systems) employed by different denominations when such abuse is reported

Have you observed or heard about the church responding to cases of abuse?

Follow-up: Can you describe what actions were taken and by whom?

Are there any formal procedures or policies in place for reporting abuse in your church?

Follow-up: How effective do you think these procedures are in protecting women?

How does the church provide support to women who have experienced abuse?

Follow-up: Are the support systems adequate, and why or why not?

Have you ever seen disciplinary actions taken against a leader accused of abuse?

Follow-up: What was the outcome, and did it seem fair or consistent?

In your opinion, how transparent is the church in handling abuse cases?

Follow-up: Can you give an example of a transparent or non-transparent response?

Section E: Objective 4 – To find out whether there are any mechanisms in place to protect women in various denominations

Are there any policies, practices, or rules in your church specifically designed to protect women from abuse?

Follow-up: How well are these mechanisms communicated to members?

Does the church provide training, orientation, or guidance to leaders on ethical conduct and abuse prevention?

Follow-up: How effective or comprehensive do you think this training is?

Are there monitoring or oversight structures to ensure leaders do not abuse their power?

Follow-up: Who is responsible for oversight, and how effective is it?

How do church members participate in ensuring women's safety within the church?

Follow-up: Are there specific roles or committees that promote accountability?

In your opinion, what improvements or changes could be made to protect women in your church better?

Follow-up: What challenges might prevent these improvements from being implemented?

Closing Remark: Thank you so much for sharing your experiences and insights with me. Your contribution is valuable to this research and to improving how churches protect women. If you think of anything else you'd like to add, please feel free to contact me. Here is information for support services if you need them [0244371281]. Do you have any questions for me?