




When mentally ill women become sexual prey in Zimbabwe: An African indigenous religio-cultural perspective

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Abstract

There is a phenomenal increase in the number of cases of women suffering from mental illness in our contemporary society, which is hard hit by pandemics. As scholarship reflects on this condition, there has been little attention paid to the impact of indigenous religion and cultural practices to the sexual and reproductive health of women with mental illness and indigenous entrepreneurs who seek economic fortunes in a post COVID-19 epoch. Largely, the Zimbabwean society detests mental illness and this has rendered mentally ill women to the social margins. However, cases of men from the mainstream society having illicit sexual intercourse with mentally ill women are rampant, both in urban and rural environments. So one can ask why men from the mainstream society are having sexual relations with the ostracised mentally ill women. Prioritizing ethical considerations, this qualitative study uses ritual theory as its theoretical framework, sociology of religion, phenomenology of religion and gendered cultural hermeneutics to explore the prevalence of these sexual practices. Data was gathered through interviews and desk research from January to December 2023. Findings of the study were that these sexual activities are ritualistic, done to enhance success in politics, business, farming and self-initiated churches. An analysis of the reasons behind the performance of these sex rituals showed that a mentally ill woman's body is an entity which belongs to the spiritual world so the sexual relationship makes it possible for the male entrepreneur to access the spiritual world. Through these rituals, men with entrepreneurial wishes will be attempting to connect with and manipulate the spiritual world. The study concluded that mentally ill women have less choice over their sexual and reproductive lives. They are sexually exploited, yet they lack the capacity to disclose these heinous acts to the mainstream society. They are regarded by the patriarchal society as sexual preys where coercive sex and or rape are used for ritual purposes, with the intent of attaining socio-economic transformation.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, gendered cultural hermeneutics, mainstream society, mentally ill, rituals and women, ritual theory, sexual intercourse symbolisms.

Introduction and Contribution

This study explores the sexual abuses done by indigenous Shona businessmen on mentally ill women to resuscitate and boost their business fortunes which had been severely paralysed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. Utilizing the sociological, phenomenological and cultural hermeneutics approach, the study reiterates the importance of indigenous African religious traditions and spirituality to curb the sexual abuses of mentally ill women in a patriarchal society. It contributes to the ongoing academic discussions on the entwinement between religion's agency, health and well-being of vulnerable women in patriarchal societies in different parts of the world.



Introduction

World over, cases of mental health among women in a contemporary society which is hard hit by pandemics is on the increase. During times of extreme societal stress, such as the COVID-19, all facets of life were negatively affected. For example, in Zimbabwe, businesses were pushed to the brink. The pandemic struck when the Zimbabwean economy was already in a decline, weighed down by climatic shocks (Cyclone Idai in March 2019 and cyclone Kenneth in April 2019, cyclone Freddy 2023), severe drought and unstable macroeconomic environment (Chitiga et al, 2021). This study is centred on a practice used by some of the indigenous businessmen to enhance their economic prospects. It should be made clear right from the onset that though businesswomen are also accused of performing rituals to boost their businesses, this study is confined to businessmen and their sexual rituals with mentally ill women. After unpacking the theoretical framework, methodology, and a review of related literature, the study will present and discuss its findings. In order to safeguard the anonymity of the study participants in this study, their names are not mentioned.

The study displays that the success of some indigenous businessmen comes as they engage in business sex rituals with mentally ill women. Though this practice might have been in existence prior the emergence of COVID-19, it became rampant as an alternative to revive businesses which had been paralysed by this pandemic. Largely, the Zimbabwean society detests mental illness and this has rendered mentally ill women to the social margins. This study treats business sex rituals as an abuse of disadvantaged and marginalised women. This is because they do not have the capacity to give consent to any sexual interaction. Though at law the sexual interactions with mentally ill women are perceived as human rights abuse as shown above, they continue to be done because in the indigenous African religion and cultural belief systems, the use of charms and the performance of ritual sacrifice can fortify ritualists' spiritually, enhance their fortunes in business and during elections, or protect them from harm, disease, poverty, accidents, death or destruction (Sithole, 2020).

In a bid to explain why mentally ill women who roam the streets fall prey to businessmen, Hadzidzi (2011), opines that ritualists target vulnerable members of society such as the poor, women, children, people with disabilities and albinos whose families often do not have the resources to demand justice. Some of the practices like ritual murder are now detested by ritualists for the fear of avenging spirits. It explains why they prefer heterosexual ritual to ritual murder in business.

From a traditional cultural perspective, a mentally ill woman's body is an entity which belongs to the spiritual world so the sexual relationship makes it possible for the entrepreneur to access the spiritual world. Through these rituals, men with entrepreneurial wishes will be attempting to connect with and manipulate the spiritual world. However, as the article unfolds, another dimension emerged, that is, within the same indigenous religious and cultural package, having sexual interaction with mentally ill women brings detrimental consequences if the business ritualist lacks a strong spiritual aura which can subdue the spirits of the mentally ill woman. Flouting any one of the prescribed ritual rules leads to a downfall of the business empire. The badness of these rituals are emphasised by this study as an antidote to sexual abuse of mentally ill women.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted contemporary ritual theory as its theoretical framework. This theory pushes towards enhancing the agency of the individual by focusing on how individuals strategically "practice" rituals to accomplish interactional goals (Johnson, 2008). Johnson further argues that there is need of a systematic framework for understanding ritual as a form of practice whereby individuals are empowered to use rituals to accomplish a desired goal. The following key concepts are handy in framing this study's ritual theory.



Ritualization

The notion of ritual has been applied by anthropologists and others to a wide assortment of acts and beliefs (Dissanayake, 2006). In ritualization, components of a behaviour that occur as part of normal, everyday, instrumental activity such as sexual intercourse are, as it were, “selected”, “ritualized,” and used to signal an entirely different motivation (Dissanayake, 2006). In this study, ritualization is used as a strategic way of acting whereby privileged people select routine practices to accomplish personal, situational or social goals. Ritualization allows businessmen to strategically navigate the needs of their business prospects by elevating the symbolic meaning of certain forms of controversial ritual elements to accomplish personal or situational goals. Through ritualization, businessmen select some of their sexual practices out of the realm of the ordinary life and imbue them with extraordinary meaning. Ritualization affords people the power to customize their rituals (Johnson, 2008).

Gender Ritualization

It can be understood as the strategic mobilization of gender whereby men and women elevate the symbolic meaning of selected gender practices to accomplish ritualistic goals (Johnson, 2008). So, gender ritualization becomes the process through which individuals, standing inside their own social location and gendered self, choose to do sexual ritual activities that constitute 'doing' of gender. They then regard these ritual practices as exceptional and tactically 'use' them to achieve the basic objectives of a ritual. More importantly, the essence of gender ritualization is actualized when individuals symbolically communicate spiritual or sacred information associated with gender and also when individuals engage in the crafting of their gender identity (Johnson, 2008). In this way, individuals who are involved in the whole process of business sex rituals not only 'do' gender, they can also 'use' gender for the purpose of business enhancement. In principle, gender ritualization is the customization of 'doing' gender (Johnson, 2008). Through gender ritualization, certain gender activities are given more spiritual and cultural authority inside the daily lives of individuals (Johnson, 2008).

Methodology

This study adopted a poly-methodic approach. It utilised the phenomenological approach, sociological approach and gendered cultural hermeneutics to describe and analyse data. According to Bourdillon (1990) the sociology of religion deals with the interplay between religion and society. In that manner, it was useful for the study in understanding the power dynamics defined by class, the societal needs of rituals and gender in the contemporary society. The sociology of religion also reinforces significance of rituals in society. The study also employed gendered cultural hermeneutics. The gendered cultural hermeneutics was the brainchild of Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi Kanyoro of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Sibanda and Humbe, 2020, p.146). It was developed as a tool for discerning God's living presence in face of neo-colonialism, poverty, HIV and AIDS, religious and cultural gender oppression, among other challenges in society (Sibanda and Humbe, 2020, p.146).

Essentially, gendered cultural hermeneutics is interested in the marginalized people in society such as women and girls whose experiences are unveiled through the technique of storytelling. The advantage of cultural hermeneutics is that it “is the choice of combining an affirmation of culture and a critique of it that will have the potential to sustain modern Africa” (Kanyoro, 2002, p. 26). This method is important in capturing the experiences of mentally ill women exposed to abuse for business ritual purposes. The study also employed a phenomenological approach for it allowed the researcher to interact with participants coaxing information on business sex rituals. This necessitated a systematic collection of data by penetrating the cultural realities of indigenous people for their socio-economic transformation in business circles. Data collection was done through face-to-face and telephone in-depth



interviews with sixteen adult knowledgeable revered figures that were both purposively and conveniently sampled. These interviews were conducted between 2021 and 2023. Composition of the interviewees consisted of three male sacred practitioners, eight entrepreneurs, and five females who participated in the study on the basis of a voluntary informed consent. Each interview session lasted for about thirty minutes. The sampled population denoted the indigenous people located in Manicaland, and Masvingo Provinces of Zimbabwe. Interview questions were designed to explore the participant's knowledge of business ritual practices specifically sex rituals with mentally ill women as well as the participants' feelings about this practice.

Review of selected literature

The world of business is replete with rituals. According to Guillory (2021) for whatever reason, most of the people have decided that to succeed in their business, they have to separate their personal interests from their business selves. This is why they need rituals: to bring more of their *selves* into their daily work. Rituals help people align with their true nature, which will, in turn, make them a more focused and successful entrepreneur (Guillory, 2021). This is the reason why Michalowicz (2011) thinks that even those who are famous and successful have particular rituals and superstitions that they follow and believe have contributed to their success. In Michalowicz's view, there are many reasons why people engage in various rituals. They can be influenced by cultural beliefs, life experiences, and their own ideas about what helps them to succeed. Among others, some of the benefits to having rituals are that: people will perform better when they believe in the power of the rituals, rituals help to increase familiarity and ease anxiety and rituals give the person a sense of control as well as increasing their confidence (Michalowicz, 2011).

One of the ritual practices which are proliferating in Zimbabwe is business sex ritual. Elsewhere, this point is buttressed by Nyanzi (2011) by making reference to the Baganda people saying that sex is customarily a vital component for 'completing' individual prosperity, kin-group equilibrium and social cohesion. Amongst the various forms of prescribed customary sexual activities, Nyanzi cites penetrative sex interaction between penis and vagina. In the Zimbabwean context, a good example is given by Humbe (2018) in his research on a sex ritual called *divisi* which is used in agropreneurship by the Shona people in Buhera district. This sexual practice works in conjunction with a crop field-enhancing magic. He found that *divisi* is powered by the desire to accumulate wealth. Wealth in indigenous Shona communities is very symbolic. In their understanding of soteriological belief systems, wealth is one of the criteria used to assess the attainment of salvation in African traditional religion. This is because indigenous Africans are strongly bonded to the earth.

Basing an argument on Humbe's views in relation to this research study, it can be said that there is a thin line between fortune-enhancing sex rituals and witchcraft among the indigenous Shona people since all are classified under one term known as *hurombwa*. In *hurombwa*, there is use of magical powers to manipulate the spiritual world through intentional sexual abuse of females to enhance a business enterprise. *Hurombwa* and its harmful effects are detestably condemned by the Shona people. In this vein, Sithole (2020) brings in the idea of greediness as the driving force in business rituals. Because of greediness Sithole thinks that the advent of get rich quick schemes have pervaded nations. In 2019 she wrote an article on "Microwave Entrepreneurship" which she believes has opened conversations on the need by entrepreneurs to follow good business practices in growing their businesses.

Research findings

At this stage, the study presents some findings on how mentally ill women in Zimbabwe have become sexual preys in the context of indigenous businesses. A gendered cultural hermeneutics is used to understand the sexual interaction prevailing between businessmen



and mentally ill women. The study established that in the contemporary world there are some business entrepreneurs who perform business sex rituals to boost their business prospects. Through interviews, majority of the participants confirmed that the ritual which is mostly practiced by indigenous businessmen is done by having sex with mentally ill women. One middle aged male participant attributed this rampant practice to the impact of COVID-19 on businesses when he succinctly said “COVID-19 paralysed indigenous businesses, so in Zimbabwe’s harsh economic environment, a lot of businessmen are resorting to sex rituals with mentally ill women to revamp their poor performing business prospects” (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 18 January 2023). To exemplify how the indigenous businessmen are succeeding, another male participant in Masvingo cited names of businessmen who are allegedly accused of performing business sex rituals and their material wealth acquired within a short period of time. He also listed the top of range vehicles that the businessmen have bought since they commenced using sex rituals. He concluded by saying “*idzi dzave minga*” meaning they are now wealthy people who are monied and propertied (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 10 August 2023).

The developing view here was that though this practice of sexually abusing mentally ill women has been in existence, it became rampant because of the effects of COVID-19 on businesses. Participants were in agreement that there are designated traditional healers who are approached by these business entrepreneurs for purposes of business prosperity. It is from the consultation sessions that the traditional healers prescribe having sexual interaction with mentally ill women as a precondition for economic opulence. According to one participant who runs a food outlet shop in Mutare, the efficacy of the ritual is realized when the sexual dealings involve seriously mentally ill women who are ostracised by the mainstream society (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 19 October 2023). These are the women who usually roam the streets or villages. Referring to retailing business, a female cross border trader from Birchenough Bridge reasoned the manner in which the mentally ill woman wanders from place to place is the same way clients move from their different designated destinations to the ritualistic businessman’s shop (Interview with Study Participant, Birchenough Bridge, 6 December 2023).

Interviews held indicated that for the businessmen, the process of obtaining the mentally ill women is a complex affair. A female participant in Mutare, admittedly expressed ignorance of how mentally ill women are grabbed from the streets in the following words: “how the mentally ill women are taken from the streets by the businessman is not very clear since these businessmen avoid the public from knowing what they secretly do with mentally ill women” (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 2 June 2023). This was buoyed by a certain businessman who claimed that the whole procedure of taking these mentally ill women from the streets is done surreptitiously to avoid the police and public ridicule. He went further saying that “the businessmen have strategized a way of overcoming this problem. They engage agents who facilitate catching of mentally ill women from streets” (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 2 June 2023).

In support of this view, two female participants who jointly run retail shop testified that in Masvingo there is a woman who pretends to play a philanthropy role in the city. The woman takes mentally ill women from the streets on the guise of clothing and feeding them. She then hands them over to her businessmen clients for sex rituals (Interview with Study Participants, Masvingo, 5 May 2023). Providing more information on this issue, a male participant affirmed saying “there are moments when familiar mentally ill women are not seen on the streets for quite some time, only to reappear in nice clean pair of jeans and shoes which allegedly should have come from this female agent” (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 19 March 2023). He added that business sex rituals are performed by people who are in transport, retailing, fuel, culinary and vending businesses (Ibid). It is against this background that in the contemporary world, mentally ill women have become commodities of exchange, with sex ritual also becoming a commercial business for some women.



From the research, it was noted that there are some commentators who blame businessmen for sleeping with women who are detested by the society. However, from some responses, it was clear that there are some reasons why they prefer mentally ill women to normal women. A certain food outlet entrepreneur concurred justifying the preference of mentally ill women in the sex rituals saying “Mentally ill women are chosen because the indigenous worldview regard women as being associated with luck which is a crucial component in a world of business competition” (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 24 March 2023). All spiritual healers used in this study concurred that mentally ill people are believed to be spiritually rich since they are a host to many spirits. But the uniqueness of mentally ill women as was clarified by one female participant springs from an African religious traditions perspective, whereby women are conceived as sacred figures worthy of revering in all spheres of life, business included (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 21 March 2023). She further commented that having sexual intercourse with a mentally ill woman is done to ward off spirits and misfortunes which stifle business prosperity. So the sex ritual cleanses evil spirits ensuring economic prosperity and sanctification of the business empire (Ibid).

One businessman in Mutare fittingly described mentally ill women as people who are imbued with luck. He illustrated this point using his own experiences as a retailer and food outlet businessman saying “There are times when mentally ill women storm into my shop and their visits bring some luck in my business. I normally record high sales on such days” (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 24 June March 2023). COVID-19 crippled the vitality of businesses run by indigenous people, such that the issue of luck in sales is taken seriously for one to survive the current harsh economic environment as well as competition from other players. These findings were contrary to a research which was carried out in the United States of America. According to ALISTAIR MICHARG (2011) Lord Chumley Frampton stunned the mental health community when he announced that his team of researchers had located a quantifiable connection between mental illness and bad luck.

Another reason why mentally ill women are the cog of the business sex ritual was attraction. Several participants emphasised that women in indigenous African cosmology are a center of attraction. One participant in Mutare aptly said “*Vanhukadzi vane mukweerera kudarika varume*” (women possess this quality of attractiveness more than men) (Interview with Study Participant, Mutare, 8 April 2023). He further explained that it is this attribute of attraction which makes the efficacy of the rituals performed using mentally ill women become powerful. It does not matter whether the ingredients of the rituals are coming from a mentally ill woman or not what is important is that the requirements of the ritual have been drawn from a woman. A female participant in Masvingo was quick to clarify that the notion of attraction was not confined to the essence of beauty, but the attention and response given to a mentally ill person wherever she is (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 11 March 2023).

The way the mainstream society is attracted to mentally ill women gives an impression that it is an unusual phenomenon to have them on the streets in their vicinity, for relatives should be taking care of them. This was precisely explained by a male participant from Masvingo saying “*Mupengo wemunhukadzi anoita attract attention yevanhu vakawanda*” (a female mentally ill person draws attention of many people) (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 13 September 2023). Maybe it explains why some indigenous families hide their mentally ill women relatives in houses to avoid them from drawing attention of public view. However, these elements of attraction and responsiveness in the case of mentally ill women have been pointed out to be an effective recipe in business traction that is why they are used in sex business rituals. The restlessness behaviour is the most sought after by the businessmen. They want their business to operate restively similar to the behaviour of the mentally ill women. That is why mostly the businessmen pick mentally ill women who energetically always roam the streets.



Another view raised by participants was the use of mentally ill women was a measure to test the seriousness of the businessman in his pursuit of wealth accumulation. By prescribing a sexual intercourse with a mentally ill woman, the traditional healer will be giving the businessman a practical test to see if the businessman is serious in his request. It is also a moment to prove that he is a brave entrepreneur through sleeping with a mentally ill woman. All participants emphasised that the ritual of sleeping with mentally ill women was preferred to ritual murders. So, once the businessman agreed, the traditional healer then knows that they are dealing with a strong hearted man.

Participants also expressed concern that in some cases, business rituals performed by certain families result in girl children becoming mentally ill. According to one participant in Bikita, once the girl child becomes mentally ill, the biological father then sleeps with her to ensure success in their family business. She gave an example of transport business which thrives on this sex ritual practice (Interview with Study Participant, Bikita, 18 November 2023). Another female participant re-joined that the reason why the businessman made his daughter mentally ill was to prevent her from realizing that she was being sexually abused by her father (Interview with Study Participant, Bikita, 19 November 2023). The ritual was not only entailing sexual abuse but incest as well. Because there is sexual intercourse within a prohibited degree of relationship, Humbe (2018) argues that incest is a crime under both the Zimbabwean law and Customary law. The third reason for inducing insanity in the girl was to prevent her from marrying so her condition would ensure a permanent stay with her natal family. So she becomes the cog of the family business. Information from another female participant showed that the biological mother of the mentally ill girl will be aware of these rituals but does nothing to stop this abuse (Interview with Study Participant, Gutu, 19 March 2023).

In a similar situation which happened in Gutu, a participant reported that a certain married woman was divorced and she went back to her natal family which runs retail shops and grinding mills in the district. She did not stay long before she started suffering from mental illness. The reporter claimed that her father has assigned a male goblin to be the new husband of the now mentally ill woman. Each time the goblin has sex with the mentally ill woman, the family business booms (Interview with Study Participant, Gutu, 11 March 2023). Both Bikita and Gutu cases show that the fluids which are produced when having sexual intercourse signify lubrication of the business to run smoothly. This is another version of sex ritual for business. All participants were in agreement that these business sex rituals are abusive to the mentally ill women. Thus, according to Harare High Court Case Number REF R 105 of 2012, ZWHHC 450 (12 May 2015); Law report citations understand the issue of mentally ill women sexual abuse in the following words:

Recent research found that people with mental retardation are not able to consent to sexual interaction, regardless of the degree of impairment. The level of their intellectual functioning is considered to be equivalent to that of minors. Evaluation of the complainant's ability to consent should focus on the event in question, and include information on the individual's understanding of sexual behaviour and the context of normal sexual relationships; knowledge of the consequences of sexual intercourse, for example, pregnancy and infections; ability to make an informed decision to engage in sexual intercourse, based on the above awareness and understanding of the right to say "no", and the ability to resist or say "no" in context (<https://zimlil.org/zw/judgement/Harare-high-court/2015/450>).

In view of the above citation, what the businessmen and traditional healers do is an abuse of the disadvantaged and marginalised women. This is because they do not have the capacity to give consent to any sexual interaction. However, during the fieldwork, the study learnt that there is another form of women abuse which does not involve sexual intercourse. As one female participant narrated, in Masvingo three daughters of a big transport company were seen early in the morning every day undressed parading their womanhood to their father's fleet of buses before the buses depart to take their daily routes. She concluded saying such



behaviour could not be done by sane people (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 4 February 2023). So there was an element of insanity which drove these girls to perform these rituals while in nudity. Though this happened before COVID-19 pandemic, there are certain businessmen especially in agropreneurship who have a similar practice of having girl children walking in their farming lands in nudity. The ritual is abusive in that it denigrates the dignity of these young women at the expense of flourishing family businesses. Together with the above two cases, responses received asserted this aphorism “*vana ava varikushandiswa*” (these children are being used in family business rituals).

However, several participants castigated wealth accumulated through these rituals on the pretext that it is difficult to avoid flouting some of the rules which are prescribed by the traditional healers hence the businesses are always threatened with the risk of collapse. According to one sacred practitioner, the complexity of having riches through sex rituals is that it is unavoidable to break any one of the set rules by the traditional healer (Interview with Study Participant, Masvingo, 7 January, 2023). He clarified saying sometimes the entrepreneurs are barred from having sexual intercourse with anyone else except mentally ill women, in other cases there are certain moments in which they are forbidden to interact with normal women, and lastly they are also not allowed to deride mentally ill women. Breaking rules has a direct impact on the vitality of the business, as was emphasised by another traditional healer. He gave an example of two middle aged businessmen accused of being business ritualists whose business empires have crumbled dramatically after flouting the set ritual rules (Interview with Study Participant, Birchenough Bridge, 20 March 2023). So right from the onset, the social life of businessmen is compromised, there is little or lack of independence.

Discussion of findings

The discussion emphasizes how gender ritualization functions as a mechanism of women abuse, stereotyping and exploitation by focusing on the moment business men approach traditional healers to the point of sexual abuse. Basing on the research findings, identification and or acquiring of the mentally ill woman symbolically becomes the first strategic objective of gender ritualisation (Johnson, 2008). In this case, the fundamental point of this ritual is that the traditional healers communicate a sacred meaning of sexual interaction to the businessmen who would have approached them. The businessmen then got involved in gender ritualization by differentiating mentally ill women from the mainstream society, using them for sexual rituals to accomplish their primary business objective that is socio-economic transformation. In the context of this study, such rituals in indigenous societies are utilized by the privileged to continue to exploiting the marginalised and vulnerable women.

It can be said that the traditional healers and the businessmen are collaboratively advancing the patriarchal society's gender bias against women through these sexual mistreatments. It is imperative to note that the sexual act itself is not the desired outcome; rather it is the spiritual connection which the businessman has symbolically implanted into his business enterprise. The sexual performance then elevates the business enterprise to a more powerful symbolic status. In other words, by imbuing the sexual deed with extraordinary meaning, the businessmen would have ritualized their business operations. As the study findings have shown, there are also cases of fathers who use their daughters in boosting businesses by making an oath that they will sleep with their daughters regularly, or alternatively, assign goblins to have sexual intercourse with their daughters regularly. Thus, ritualization holds that individuals can use a daily routine activity to achieve the same goal (Johnson, 2008).

The research also established that the businessmen are expected to possess certain elements extracted from the mentally ill women whom they would have slept with for onward submission to the traditional healers. During or after the sexual act the male entrepreneur should draw combined sexual fluids and any one of the following for the business rituals: pubic hair, under garment and milk of the mentally ill woman. The sexual intercourse and obtaining of the above



mentioned ingredients are the hallmark of the business sex ritual. They are the ingredients which are used to prepare charms and other traditional medicines meant to heighten businesses. Such focal moments according to Boyer et al (2020) combine the following features: (i) compulsion: the agents who are the businessmen in this study have a strong motivation to perform the sexual act; (ii) scriptedness: the businessmen also feel that the sexual intercourse must be performed in a specific way, and in a specific order; and (iii) goal-demotion: the overall series of sexual acts may be described as directed to a goal. These features depict a ritualized behaviour that is a special form of action that is not present in all 'rituals'. The businessmen's attention is entirely captured by explicit symbol of the rules (Boyer et al, 2020) given by the traditional healer.

Though this ritualized sexual behaviour has been widely used to revive stagnant businesses, failure to perform it in the precise manner is accompanied by consequences that jeopardise the businessman's economic prospects. Precision is fundamental to prevention of potential threats in the business initiatives. While the African religious traditions and culture regard rituals as dependable instruments which function as intended regardless of the motivations of the ritual performers, findings of this study have revealed that a ritual can fail, and that indecorous ritual performances do in fact matter. The traditional healers are aware of the risks associated with prescriptions of rituals which involve people who host spirits in their lives like mentally ill women. So the traditional healers' decision to have mentally ill women involved is not a coincidence. They do that for purposes of getting protection in the event that the businessmen flout some of the prescribed rules. When the sex rituals miscarry, the traditional healer will not be affected; rather the problem goes straight to the businessman who slept with the mentally ill woman. In this case, the state of mental illness defends the ritual prescriber. It should be also pointed out that the traditional healer has power over the entrepreneur and his business. So the entrepreneur is expected to make the traditional healer happy especially in terms of payment.

From the study findings, the exercise of taking women with mental health conditions from the streets is a typical example of human trafficking whereby traffickers exploit and manipulate individuals with vulnerabilities such as mental health conditions. According to the British Columbia Government's resources on human trafficking, mental illnesses may limit a person's ability to consent and assess risk (O.U.R IN THE U.S, 2022, para 5). Furthermore, the fact that individuals with mental health concerns are isolated most of the time makes them more susceptible to the tactics that traffickers use to make them feel safe and accepted. Once trust has been earned, perpetrators prey on the person's feelings of shame and low self-esteem to trap them in a cycle of abuse. As was established by the research, the philanthropist trafficker also uses food and clothes to build an emotional connection with the mentally ill women she exploits; this is referred to as trauma bonding (O.U.R IN THE U.S, 2022, para 7).

There is no doubt that business sex rituals are harmful practices because there is a possibility of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Both the entrepreneur and the mentally ill woman are exposed to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. Lack of protection during the sexual intercourse is testified by pregnancies carried by the mentally ill women. Sometimes there is use of force during the intercourse which means these women are open to Gender-Based Violence (GBV). According to Canadian Women's Foundation (2017) the link between violence and mental health concerns is found to be much higher for women.

Women already experiencing mental health issues are vulnerable to violence, as those with mental or behavioural disabilities are four times more likely to experience it. Because of this, sometimes the sexual exploitation worsens their mental health condition. Results of this study showed that they face double abuse, on one hand they are abused by men and on the other by fellow women for example in the cases of women philanthropists and biological mothers who facilitate their abuse for the sake of success in business.



Conclusion

This study was an exploration of sex rituals with mentally ill women in order to boost business prospects. There are some women who were made to appear as if they have a mental challenge not because they were born so but because they were made to become so by business men. Sexual intercourse is perceived as a sacred rite when it is performed as a ritual. This study established that some of the business enterprises associated with the sex rite are retailing, fuel, culinary and transport. The rituals are performed in the context of African religious traditions, though their utilisation is ambivalent. From an indigenous African religious-cultural perspective, the underlying intention of this ritual is to cleanse evil spirits barricading the road to economic prosperity and to sanctify the business. Once the cleansing is done, clients are lured to the business premises of the ritualist businessmen. The ritual is also perceived as an act of spiritual fortification.

The study noted that this cultural belief in management of businesses is triggering abuse of women with mental illness. However, this research was not meant to bring an awareness of the sexual abuses involving women with mental illness only, but it was also compelled to conscientise the businessmen of the challenges associated with these sexual business activities. This is because once they bend the rules of the rituals, their business would fall drastically. Another danger is of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. Lastly, during sexual intercourses, there is an exchange of spiritual entities. If the man does not have a strong spiritual aura, his spiritual life will be badly affected by that of the strong mentally ill women. In the end his life will be filled with misfortunes. All these patriarchal nuances enshrined in African indigenous religious knowledge and spirituality serve as a protection for mentally ill women against abusive ritualist businessmen. Reinforcing them can be one of the intervention strategies to safeguard the vulnerable mentally ill women in Shona communities.

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