

Report to Foundation for Human Rights

**Ujamaa Centre
for Biblical and Theological
Community Development
and Research**

Registration Number: 1240/1

**Report prepared by Professor Gerald West
01 November 2004 to 31 August 2006**

Final Report

Contents

Introduction	3
Intervention-research process	3
Site 1: Mamelodi East, Gauteng	5
Phase 1	5
Phase 2	6
Phase 3	8
Impact analysis	12
Site 2: Zwathi, KwaZulu-Natal	15
Phase 1	15
Phase 2	17
Phase 3	21
Impact analysis	24
Concluding remarks and future planning	25

This report covers work done with the support of the Foundation for Human Rights, which is in turn funded by the European Union under the European Programme for Reconstruction and Development.

The Ujamaa Centre runs a “Tamar Campaign” as part of its Women and Gender Programme. Having run this Campaign for a number of years and after preliminary research on the impact of this Campaign, funded by AusAID, we submitted an application to the FHR to take this research further (see attached Project Proposal).

We initially submitted a proposal to work in three sites, but were asked by the FHR to downscale our application, both in terms of funding and in terms of sites. We therefore settled on two sites, one urban and one rural. The rural site is a rural area known as Zwathi (from Swart Umfolozi), between Ceza and Vryheid in KwaZulu-Natal, and the urban site is Mamelodi East, in Gauteng. The downscaling of the FHR Project and personnel considerations led us to change our sites from those initially indicated in the Project Proposal, but we retained the urban-rural contrast and general areas.

This project was conducted by team of activists and researchers: Professor Gerald West (Director of the Ujamaa Centre), Ms Phumzile Zondi (Coordinator of the Women and Gender Programme), Rev Martin Maluleke (a Methodist minister from Gauteng), Rev Malika Sibeko (a Methodist minister from Gauteng), Rev Smadz Matesepe (a Methodist minister from Gauteng) and Sister Happiness Khumalo (a Lutheran lay sister). This team was supported by other activists and researchers who were part of the larger Tamar Campaign.

Unfortunately, Ms Phumzile Zondi, one of the principal researchers on this FHR Project, left the Ujamaa Centre in 2005, which coincided with Prof West’s sabbatical leave (from April to June). Ms Zondi was replaced by Ms Mirolyn Naidoo, though the transition did generate some confusion (see the covering letter to the September report, dated 30 September, and the email to Ms Rikky Mnyuku, dated 15 October 2005). This did not hamper the intervention-research work, but it did cause some confusion in the reporting to the FHR.

Intervention-research process

The Ujamaa Centre adopts a *praxis* approach to its work. This involves a cycle of action and reflection. In this case, the process included a series of three workshops in each site. The first workshop, Phase 1 (see Project Proposal), was designed to generate baseline research on gender violence perception in each community prior to the Tamar Campaign. However, it is important to stress that we are only able to do this kind of research in communities which have taken ownership of the project. The Ujamaa Centre is the service-provider and the community is the ‘owner’, not the object, of the project. This is why it was so important for the Ujamaa Centre to select particular sites and to work at the pace specified by the community (see also below).

Furthermore, we could only do this kind of Phase 1 baseline research because the communities wanted us to run the Tamar Campaign with them. In other words, we explained

that in order to understand the impact of the Tamar Campaign in their community, it was important for us to measure existing attitudes and perceptions. The two communities we chose to work with for this FHR Project were two of the communities that understood and supported this rationale.

This first workshop was followed by a Phase 2 workshop, either at a later date or later on the same day, depending on the circumstances (see below). The focus of the second workshop was the Tamar Campaign itself, consisting of a Bible study (see Project Proposal).

The final stage of the FHR Project process was a third workshop, Phase 3. This phase had to occur some time after Phase 2 so as to allow time for the impact of Phase 2 to be assimilated and then assessed. Phase 3 entailed a return to the kinds of questions asked in Phase 1 (see Project Proposal), though we did have to make some adjustments (see below).

The FHR Project team met regularly to report on progress. This took the form of preliminary reports (see attachments) from each workshop, which were then interrogated and annotated. In most cases additional information was requested from those who facilitated the workshops. These reports were filed and then used as the basis for final, composite reports.

This final report will provide a detailed description and analysis of each site and then offer some comparative analysis.

Site 1

Mamelodi East Methodist Church, Gauteng

This site was chosen because three of our activist-researchers had an organic link to this site,

enabling engagement and ownership of the project.

Group profile

The workshops were conducted in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa of Mamelodi East, Gauteng. This church was founded in 1950 for black South Africans who were forcefully removed from the Kilnerton area. The church started in a local primary school and its present building was erected in 1961. The present minister is Rev Londi Zulu. These workshops were conducted with his support and participation.

The congregation is made up of 370 members, including 200 women (175 of whom are pensioners and the remainder of whom work as teachers, nurses, clerks, sales women, and domestic workers), 70 men (of whom 50 are retired and 20 are unemployed), 60 young people/youth (some of whom are school learners and some of whom are unemployed), and 40 children.

Because most of the church would be present on Pentecost Sunday, May 15th 2005, it was decided to run Phase 1 and Phase 2 on the one day. In all our workshops, participants were divided into four groups (see Project Proposal): older men, younger men, older women, and younger women. In Phase 1 and Phase 2 there were 90 women over the age of forty, 40 women under the age of forty, 23 men over the age of forty, and 47 men under the age of forty.

Phase 1: Understanding gender violence

There were time constraints in this workshop, as it was to be followed immediately by the Tamar Bible study. Phase 1 was, therefore, more rushed than the facilitators would have wanted. But was with all of the Ujamaa Centre's work, the process was controlled by the community.

The questions used were the following, though groups did not always respond to them systematically:

1. What is your understanding of gender violence?
2. What is your attitude towards people who are abused?
3. Is this issue ever discussed in your church? If so, how? If not, why?
4. How does your church help survivors of violence, abuse and rape?
5. Which other resources are available to openly discuss these issues, and to empower and assist survivors of the different kinds of abuse?

The four groups responded in the following ways.

Older women

The first element in their understanding of gender violence concerned physical violence and rape. A second element in their understanding was related to communication, with the women stating that the way men and women speak to each other can itself be a form of

gender violence and can also lead to physical violence. A third element was when children refused to listen to their parents. The older women agreed that gender violence was never discussed in church.

Older men

This group made it clear that gender violence works both ways, when men abuse women and women abuse men. Elements in their understanding of gender violence included physical violence and emotional violence. As with the older women, the older men expressed their concern for those who were subject to gender violence, and like the older women they agreed that these matters were never discussed in church.

Younger women

This group focussed almost exclusively on sexual abuse by their boyfriends (though they did not talk of this as rape), and then by the church who discriminated against girls who became pregnant. They felt tremendous empathy for young women who had been abused. Like the other groups, they too were definite in their reply that these matters were never discussed in church.

Younger men

This group was quite articulate and identified the following forms of gender violence: physical beating, financial abuse, emotional abuse, and child abuse. Significantly, perhaps, they did not mention rape or sexual assault. They also added that girls abuse boys when they wear short skirts and/or transparent clothing. In discussing this, they then admitted that such behaviour might lead boys to rape girls.

They too expressed sympathy for those who had been abused, and they too stated that the church never discussed these matters, trapping them all in ignorance. They attributed the silence of the church on these matters not only to the church as church, but also to the inhibitions within African culture.

Phase 2: Tamar Bible study

The Bible study was done during the Pentecost Sunday service, immediately following Phase 1 and after one of the facilitators had preached. The Bible study was as follows:

1. What is the text about?
2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?
3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?
4. What does Tamar say and do?
5. Are there women like Tamar in your church and/or community? Tell their story.
6. What is the theology of women who have been raped?
7. What resources are there in your area for survivors of rape?
8. What will you do in response to this Bible study?

The general impression was one of vigorous responses, especially from the women.

Older women

Among the particular contributions of the older women was that the Bible study helped them to explore the way in which men and women were socialised. According to them, it was this socialisation that led to the breakdown of marriages, and that therefore Bible studies like this were of immense importance.

Older men

It was clear that the older men were deeply challenged by the Bible study. It became readily apparent that “they were hurting”, witnessing the abuse that women received. While they made it clear that men were also the victims of gender violence, they admitted that women were the primary victims, and they saw the Bible study as a vehicle with which to address the issue.

The local minister, who also participated in this group, said that in the initial stages of the Bible study he began to regret having invited the Ujamaa Centre to facilitate the Bible study, but that now (at the end) he was deeply grateful. He was amazed by how open his congregation were and saw the need to have appropriately trained local leaders to deal with these issues.

Younger women

This group was particularly empowered by the Bible study, arguing that it “created a space for the women to feel free to break the silence”. The Bible also clearly showed, they said, that women “did not ask for it”. The “culture of blaming the victim” had been challenged by the Bible study.

Younger men

The younger men were “delighted by the blunt reference to sex and sexuality”. They were delighted and amazed to hear their minister talk about these things. They were the one group that wanted more time than was possible to discuss the Bible study, for they felt that it empowered them to become “active participants in the struggle against gender violence”.

General Comments

The facilitators of these workshops debated whether a church service was the appropriate context for a Bible study such as this. One felt that people came to church with different expectations; another felt that the layout of the church prevented people from really engaging in group work; the third argued that a church service was indeed the ideal context for such a Bible study, enabling the church to deal publically with such matters.

All agreed, however, that the Bible study had moved the whole discussion of gender violence into the public realm and that the silence surround gender violence had been shattered.

Phase 3: Impact assessment

The assessment of the Tamar Campaign was done more than a month after the Campaign

Bible study. This, it was argued, was sufficient time for the impact of the Tamar Campaign to have been integrated and ‘owned’.

The third workshop was conducted on the 24th July and included the same groups who had participated in the first two workshops, though the groups were somewhat smaller, as not everyone was able to attend. Because Phase 1 and Phase 2 had been rather rushed, the facilitators felt that it would be appropriate to return to the latter parts of the Bible study as a means of both summarising what had taken place in groups and of measuring the impact of the Campaign. To provide some objective assessment of the Bible study, the facilitators invited two theological students from John Wesley College and the resident minister, Rev Londi Zulu, and his wife, Khayelihle Zulu, to participate as facilitators of the smaller groups.

The facilitators judged that a creative and productive entry point for this workshop would be to return to the difficult question of “What is the theology of women who have been raped?” and then to move to the final question, “What will you do in response to this Bible study?” They felt that these two questions would be more appropriate in measuring the groups’ understandings of gender violence than simply returning to the questions used in Phase 1. However, some of the groups used the summary of their previous Bible studies as an opportunity to discuss the issue of gender violence in more general terms. This was particularly the case in the group of older women.

Older women

This group consisted of 25 women and was facilitated by Ms Khayelihle Zulu, the wife of the minister.

The group raised the question of why we do not hear of Tamar’s mother and sisters, who should have been available to hear Tamar’s story. The very absence of women was an indication of gender violence. The kind of presence of the males was also an indication of gender violence, with David being a clear example. The group asked why David had not taken action against his son, Amnon, as he should have. It seemed as if males were protected and that gender violence was covered up and life continued as if nothing had happened.

They also argued that God seemed to side with the males. Did this mean that God, who is usually described as ‘he’ is actually a male? This seemed to be the case, they said, for God did nothing to prevent the rape of Tamar. God too, then, seemed to be involved in gender violence.

The group then made a connection between what had happened in David’s household, a household of an apparently godly man, and Christian homes. This appeared to be a significant point of connection between their current contexts and the biblical text. If such a thing could happen in David’s household and could be spoken about in the Bible, then the similar things that they knew happened in Christian homes could and should also be spoken about.

Their initial response to the recognition of gender violence in Christian homes was it was “a sickness” and that “healing was needed”. “The antidote to this sickness”, they said, “is prayer”. However, the group did not stop here, moving immediately to the issue of what structures “are needed in the church to empower them with knowledge about these evil things in their societies”. Among the structures mentioned were: prayer support groups, Bible study, and counsellors. With respect to the last, there was a concern for confidentiality, because what was needed was counsellors to whom people could confide freely without worrying about whether their stories would be discussed with others over tea! In addition, they saw a role for men generally, in that men must take responsibility for protecting women, both inside and outside of the church. More specifically, male ministers must also take responsibility in helping them “to overcome these problems”.

The group made it clear that they were ready for action, particularly now that there had been the catalyst of the Tamar Campaign. The Campaign, they said, had provided the initiative for action, which included setting and achieving specific goals. The minister’s task was to assist them in doing this.

Older men

There were 17 in this group, which was facilitated by Rev Smadz Matsepe. Significantly, the minister also participated in this group.

This group engaged with the assessment process via Tamar’s theology. Remarkably, they were able to enter into the kind of theological perspective that abuse generates. Their responses included an analysis of the survivors image of God, which was threefold. First, they said, such a person might wonder whether God was there. Indeed, it would appear, they thought, that God was not there. Second, they felt that survivors would believe that God was punishing or penalising them, thereby blaming themselves for the abuse. Third, there would also probably be anger towards God.

With respect to their image of themselves, the group argued that the survivor of gender violence would feel ashamed of herself and humiliated. She would also wonder, “Why me?” However, the group were adamant that any sense of self-blame was wrong, particularly when brought about by questions from others such as, “What time were you out?” and “What clothes were you wearing?”

Coming to their action plan, the group prioritised the need for appropriately trained counsellors, who would deal with gender abuse, but also a number of what they saw to be related issues, such as marriage and divorce. Their preference was for counsellors to be trained from within their own church, for they would understand “the dynamics within our church”.

They also agreed that the Methodist Church should equip its ministers to deal with these issues, and that there should be a place in the church for survivors of gender violence. The church should be careful to treat them like everyone else and not stigmatise them or the

church structure established to support them. In other words, they wanted the church to be a place of safety. They also argued that the church should make greater use of appropriately trained professionals within the church, such as social workers, teachers, preachers, etc.

Their overall opinion was that the church should provide a platform to deal with gender violence and a place of safety for the survivors of gender violence.

Younger women

This group consisted of 25 women and was facilitated by Rev Martin Maluleke. This group also began with a theology of people who have been raped.

The group used three questions to assess their understanding of gender violence: What is a theology of people who are raped?, How does the church treat victims of rape?, and What is the way forward/What should the church do about this?

With respect to the first question, the group's first response was that those who had been raped would be angry with God. Related to this was the survivor's question, "Why is this happening to me?" Because of these theological responses, the group felt that it was important for the survivor to have support.

This then led to the second question, which was about how the church treats victims of rape. The group were clear in their response. The church usually scorned and isolated survivors of abuse, blaming them for the gender violence. Given this response from the church, it was not safe to come out and speak about gender violence. However, the group felt that it was now time to open up and speak, and so to break the silence.

This led to question three, in which the group discussed possible ways forward. The first response was that the church needed to come to grips with the spiritual needs of rape survivors. This would require structural and spiritual support, and so would in turn require that ministers were trained psychologically and spiritually to deal with these matters.

Significantly, this group of young women found it difficult initially to talk openly about this subject, even after the Bible study. They tended to deflect the issue, saying things like "Such things do not happen to Christians". They even avoided using the word "rape". However, all this changed when one of the group, someone that they all knew, began to share that she was a survivor of rape. Her courage and her breaking of the silence created a safe place and the space for the others to join her in talking openly. Suddenly, the entire atmosphere of the group changed, leading to the kinds of responses recorded above.

Younger men

Perhaps surprisingly, this was the biggest of the groups, consisting of 28 young men. Working in two smaller groups, they were facilitated by a theological student, Ms Lea Selo.

The young men had a great deal to say about the theology of those who have been raped.

They focussed on how the person herself would feel, emphasising that she would feel, angry, sad, used, betrayed, dirty, rejected, self-blaming, guilty, invaded, empty, and disturbed. Their second set of comments reflected on how this person would think of God. Here they said that the woman would feel betrayed by God and would therefore lose their faith in God. They also said that women who had been abused would blame God “for not stopping the rape from happening”. Either that, or they would “feel that God was not there”.

They agreed that it would be very difficult to “come out” and break the silence. Like Absalom, there would be many voices which would try to silence them. But, these young men insisted, this should not be allowed to happen. The issue must be addressed “head on”. Others must not be allowed to change the subject. They also completely rejected responses which accused the survivor of rape of lacking self control or being immoral. They realised that the failure to talk about this thing would lead to depression and social withdrawal.

Real men, proper men, they said, were not rapists. Indeed, rapists were not “men enough”.

The discussion of a theology of rape led into formulations of plans of action, which included the need to create forums which did not stigmatise those who were the victims and survivors of gender violence. The church needed to become a safe place to discuss these issues and, specifically, the various Methodist societies needed to be used to work with these issues.

Perhaps most importantly, friends and relatives of survivors and victims of gender abuse needed to be invited to talk about these issues, which included forming support groups across age groups. This was a very important element for the younger men, the need for cross-age-based support groups, in which there was confidentiality and appropriate resources. They recognised, however, that the resources were not always in the church and so the church would have to work with NGOs and the government. Skilled counsellors were desperately needed.

In general, they said, the church needed to be educated and perceptions needed to be changed. They were willing to be part of a movement which continually spread the word and which would help individuals who had been abused.

General comments

Like the older women, the younger men were appalled at David who as a parent and king protected his son at the expense of his daughter. They too noted the absence of Tamar’s mother. These two groups, as with the others, found lines of connection between their contexts and the biblical text. This is the power of contextual Bible, namely, that it forges lines of connection between our present contexts and the past contexts within the biblical text. The Bible becomes, therefore, a site in which the untold stories and suppressed experiences of our present find resources to be voiced within the Bible.

Impact analysis

It should be clear from this report of the workshops that the Tamar Campaign had a significant impact on the Mamelodi East Methodist Church. If we compare the initial responses to the first workshop, Phase 1, we find, first, that all the groups have become more articulate. The short responses of Phase 1 are replaced by the longer and more detailed responses of Phase 3. The Bible study seems to have enabled what was previously difficult to speak about to be articulated. From our experience in the Ujamaa Centre this is one of the contributions of the contextual Bible study process, namely, that it enables what is inchoate or incipient to be articulated. The pooling of academic and community resources through the Bible study provides additional lines of connection to be found and forged between current context and biblical text. These connections or resonances, together with the safe and sacred space provided by the Bible itself, facilitate and enable an articulation of only partially discerned perspectives. The Tamar Campaign has provided, it would seem, a vocabulary with which to break the silence.

Second, all the groups have owned the issue of gender violence. This is most marked in the responses by the older men. In Phase 1 this group was quite defensive in their responses (see above). However, after the Bible study, there is no hint of defensiveness at all. Indeed, the group is able to enter, without reservation, into the contours of a theology of those who have been raped. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, the younger men too show no sense of defensiveness in Phase 3, whereas in Phase 1 there are some signs of this. These groups of men have clearly been impacted by the Tamar Campaign, and the most marked way in which they have been impacted is in their self-conscious ownership of the issue. One of the remarkable features of the Bible study on 2 Samuel 13:1-22 is that it does seem to have the capacity to reach men in a way that bypasses their usual defensive response to the issue of gender violence. While the responses of the older men to Phase 2, the actual Bible study, still shows some signs of defensiveness, this has been completely forgotten two months later as they reflect back on the Tamar Campaign. The responses of the younger men to the Bible study are clear; they feel that they have become “active participants in the struggle against gender violence”, and the Phase 3 analysis confirms that this is an enduring response.

The ownership of the issue among the women is more nuanced, as one would expect. The men have had to move quite substantially, whereas the women were already committed to the issue of gender violence. For the older women the Bible study (Phase 2) provided resources with which to explore and analyse the social construction of gender, and this is an enduring aspect of their appropriation, as is evidenced in their responses in Phase 3. For the younger women the Bible study clearly dispelled the notion that women who are raped “were asking for it”. The impact of the Bible study two months later is that they are able to move beyond having to defend women from such charges and into a more in-depth analysis of the effects of abuse on women.

Third, the Tamar Campaign has totally transformed the church. All the groups agreed that the church was a place in which “these things” were never discussed. Not only was the church not a safe place to speak of these matters, if gender violence was discussed it was to

condemn the victim/survivor herself. By Phase 3 the church has not only become a site in which “these things” can be discussed, it has become a safer place too. The disclosure of one of the younger women in her group, knowing that this would be reported to the congregation as a whole, is testimony to this.

Fourth, and closely related to the above points, the Tamar Campaign has given resources for a theological engagement with the issue of gender violence. Each of the groups, particularly the older men, the younger women and the younger men, grappled with the question of a theology of rape. The older women, while not dealing with this question directly, raised probing questions about the androcentric nature of the Bible and representation of God. The Bible study provided resources not only to engage with the issue of violence against women, it also enabled them to interrogate their faith. This is a remarkable achievement for a resource that comes from their faith tradition!

Fifth, an important impact of the Tamar Campaign was to move the groups to action. Every group spent substantial time preparing an action plan. The Bible study was not simply interesting information; it was a call to action. The older women focussed on actions to be taken within the church, taking individual responsibility to pray against “this sickness” and corporate responsibility to establish structures within the church. The older men focussed almost entirely on the need for appropriate structures in the church to address violence against women, including macro-ecclesial structures to do with the training of ministers. The younger women emphasised the need for psycho-spiritual resources, and the younger men focussed on the need for structured support structures in the church, possibly using the existing guild structures of the church as a resource. They also went further than the other groups, arguing that the church needed to work together with NGOs and government on this issue, and that an educational programme needed to be established.

Sixth, all the groups agreed that the first priority was for appropriately trained counsellors from within the church. They recognised that for the church should be a safe place for those who were survivors of gender violence, the church would need to offer confidential counselling services.

An interview conducted with the minister of this church, Rev Londi Zulu, confirmed much of our analysis (see attached interview). In summary, he indicated that he was initially apprehensive about the Tamar Campaign, fearing that it was “feminist theology seeking a place to confuse the church and my pulpit”. However, he acknowledged that the Bible study process had enabled members of the congregation to speak openly. He also thought that the process could and should be expanded to the various Methodist societies/guilds. Remarkably, he openly admitted that he did not feel that he was adequately equipped to address issues of gender violence. This admission is particularly significant given that all of the groups had indicated that they expected the minister to be a resource in this area. He not only acknowledged his own inadequacy, he was interested in obtaining further training himself. He was also willing for someone from his congregation to be trained specifically as a counsellor and resource person. Finally, he recognised the need for structures in his church

(and more widely) to deal with the question of violence against women and children.

Site 2

Ekuhlengeni Lutheran Congregation, Zwathi

Group profile

The workshops were done in a Lutheran Congregation, called Ekuhlengeni. The church is situated in a rural area, between Ceza and Vryheid, where traditional culture is strong and polygamy prevalent, though economic realities place some restrictions on the formal implementation of polygamy. The Lutheran church in the region was sympathetic to the cultural traditions; indeed, the minister of the congregation adopted traditional dispute resolution structures within the church. Many of the 'cases' dealt with by these structures had to do with domestic matters, including violence against women.

This particular congregation consisted of about 60 adults and 40 children. Most of the men

in the community as subsistence farmers, though there also a few who work for the police services. Most of the women are employed, with many of them working as community health workers. The youth are either in school or are unemployed.

These workshops were facilitated by Sister Happiness Khumalo, a lay Lutheran religious sister. That this facilitator is a women, working a very traditional context, and dealing with issues such as gender violence, was almost certainly a significant factor in this component of the research.

Phase 1: Understanding gender violence

Phase 1 was held on two days, on the 7th April, a Thursday for the women, and on the 10th April for the men and youth. Those who participated in the workshops were 28 older women, 18 older men, 6 younger women, and 16 younger men. In addition to the five questions used in Phase 1 above, a six question was introduced by the facilitator: “What do you think is the reason for people to abuse other people?”

Older women

Most of the older women were pensioners. They were clearly aware of abuse and violence in general, but they did not know the term ‘gender violence’. When the term was explained to them they responded, though they clearly found it difficult to begin talking about the subject.

The first element in their understanding of gender violence was the assumption that men can do and say whatever they like. This attitude of men was perceived to be potentially abusive. When men treated women as children this was gender abuse.

A second element in their understanding of gender violence had to do with their husbands’ having more than one sexual partner, particularly widows (sometimes as a prelude to another marriage but sometimes simply as another sexual partner), and the potential for them passing on “those women’s sickness” (by which they clearly meant HIV/AIDS). The only way these women saw to protect themselves from this source of abuse was to separate from their husbands, a traumatic experience in their retirement.

A third and related element in their understanding of gender violence was the forced invasion of their space by one of their husband’s “girlfriends”. Their husbands would sometimes make them share their living space with one of his “girlfriends”.

A fourth and related element was actual physical violence when they refused to comply with one of their husbands’ demands. In at least one case, beatings were a routine event for one of the women. A fifth element in their understanding of gender violence was the control their husbands exercised over their social grants. They themselves had no say in how their social grants should be used. A sixth element in their understanding had to do with young women being taught “their responsibilities”, without the same being done with younger men.

The women added that though they had been members of the church for many years, “the church does not teach or help the members of the church concerning abuse”.

Older men

Some of the men are pensioners, but the majority are still of a working age, with most of them working on their land. Their initial response was that there was no abuse in their community and no person was abused, only their animals, which were stolen almost every day.

However, after the emotive topic of stolen cattle had been discussed, the men began to acknowledge that they did understand the concept of gender violence. The first element in their understanding of gender violence was that of physical abuse, and the second that of financial abuse. However, they denied that “teaching” women their responsibilities was gender violence. A third element in their understanding of gender violence was when a man divorced his wife without telling her.

The older men focussed, in their responses, on the social structures that were present in the community to deal with gender violence, which included that a report of abuse should be dealt with by the families concerned.

Younger women

The younger women were between eleven and fifteen. They were intimidated by the questions on gender violence and did not feel that church was the place where they could talk about such things. They made it clear, as did the younger men, that the church was not interested in their problems.

However, they did say that it was gender violence when a man takes by force something from a girl.

Younger men

The younger men responded rather defensively to the questions on gender violence, immediately claiming that they are the ones abused by girls. One element that the younger men found to constitute gender violence was the way young women dressed. By dressing in a particular manner girls “abuse the feelings of the boys”; as a result, they then abuse the girls sexually. A second element of gender violence was being “forced to own babies that do not belong to them”.

Shifting the focus to men, the young men said that taking advantage of young women who had material needs, offering to supply these needs in exchange for sex, was a form of gender violence. So too, they said, was it gender violence when men raped (vulnerable) women who used drugs or alcohol. They did acknowledge, however, that rape was gender violence.

Again, the younger men felt that the church, and their parents, were not particularly

interested in their problems, including HIV and AIDS.

General comments

The responses indicate a more clearly demarcated social space for these different groups than for their urban compatriots. In this site there are quite different ‘worlds’ for each group. Nevertheless, there was, particularly among the women and the younger men, a fairly in-depth understanding of gender violence.

Phase 2: Tamar Bible study

The Bible study was done during a Sunday service, on the 12th June, in which the congregation was divided into the four designated groups. 13 older women, 10 older men, 13 younger men, and 8 younger women participated in the Bible study. In addition to the usual four groups, there was an additional group of 3 German speaking Lutheran sisters, who were put in a group by themselves by the facilitator for language reasons. As in the site above, it is important that this kind of work is done in one’s own language.

We will report on this Bible study in a slightly different format from that used above, following the Bible study question by question and group by group.

1. What is the text about? What theme would you give to this story?

This question was discussed in plenary, with all present, and is designed to create an atmosphere of sharing and unrestricted contribution. Each response, no matter what it was, was recorded, affirming the speaker and their contribution. The following responses emerged to this question: a woman counts for nothing in the eyes of men; plans for a bad act; a shame for Amnon to rape his sister; the slavery of sin conquers Amnon; Tamar is raped; Tamar is being abused; Amnon destroys his sister; etc.

2. Who are the main characters in this story and what do we know about them?

This question too was discussed in plenary. Each of the characters was identified from the text and described. Tamar, for example, was described as a respectful, beautiful and innocent girl, who understood her culture and gave good advice to her brother Amnon. The other characters were all briefly described (see workshop report), but, interestingly, David was described at length. He was described as the one who sent Tamar to Amnon, and as a result, she was raped. Though he was a king and a father, he was useless to his own family. Though he was angry with Amnon, he did nothing about it. He was also identified as himself a rapist who raped Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife (in 2 Samuel 11). And, just as he had ‘murdered’ Tamar’s virginity, so he had ordered Uriah to be murdered.

The next six questions were discussed in the small groups.

3. What is the role of each of the male characters in the rape of Tamar?

Older women

This group said that each man had a hand in the rape of Tamar. They did not emphasise one

more than the other, which is significant, indicating perhaps that they were aware of the necessity of male complicity in rape.

Older men

This group emphasised the aspect of power and how the men used their power “to satisfy Amnon”. They made it clear, however, that these men “satisfied Amnon’s desire in a wrong way”. This comment is significant in that already, right at the beginning of the Bible study, the men are not at all defensive about the question of gender violence, nor did they generalise the issue of abuse as they had in Phase 1. This Bible study has a remarkable capacity to deflect male defensiveness. These men did not at all protect any of the men in the story, even David.

Younger women

Like the older women, this group identified the role of each male without stressing any one role.

Younger men

Their response too did not focus on any particular role, but recognised the role of each of the males.

Sisters

This group emphasised the roles of Absalom, who silences his sister, though protecting her, and David, who shows his weakness in not being able to protect Tamar, either before or after the rape.

4. How does Tamar respond throughout the story? What does she say and do?

Older women

The older women noted how Tamar advised Amnon correctly about their culture. They then went on at length to comment on Tamar’s shame and despair, empathising with her desolation at the loss of her virginity. This empathy is not surprising, nor is their comprehension of the social consequences of rape and the loss of virginity, which would have been very similar in both their and Tamar’s society.

Older men

This group also noted the concern about their cultural prohibition of rape, but picked up on the possibility that Tamar had indicated that Amnon might be able to take her as his wife. From our experience with the Tamar Campaign, we have noted that women tend not to pick up on this option, horrified as they are by the prospect of having to marry someone who wants to rape you. Men, however, really do see this as a plausible way out of the dilemma for Amnon.

Younger women

They too focussed on Tamar's clear arguments about culture, but unlike the older women did not focus on the loss of virginity, but on Tamar's actions after the rape as a form of proclamation that she had been raped. They seemed to suggest that Tamar used the tearing of her clothes as a way of breaking the silence about rape. The group of younger women argued that Tamar deliberately made the community aware of the rape, so that "no one can overlook what happened to her".

Younger men

They did not say much, but did note Tamar's desolation.

Sisters

They too emphasise Tamar's wisdom in dealing with her brother and rapist, noting the extent and detail of her arguments. They too interpret Tamar's tearing of her dress as an overt act of disclosure.

5. Are there women like Tamar in your church/community? Tell their story.

Most of the groups knew of and told stories similar to that of the biblical story. In the story told by the older women the rapist was a father, in the story told by the older men it was a brother, and in the story told by the younger women it was a pastor. In each case the rape was kept within the family. Significantly, however, the sharing of these stories demonstrated that they could be told outside of the family. In our experience, the stories told, though told in the third person, are often the disguised stories of members of the group itself.

6. What is the theology of women who have been raped?

Older women

They had two contradictory, but common responses. First, the survivor feels abandoned by God. Second, the survivor may believe that God is testing their faith.

Older men

This group responded with the same contradictory comments, namely that God is teaching them, trying to make their faith strong and that God does not love them. For the older men and women there is a deep tension trying to understand rape theologically.

Younger men

For this group there seemed to be little tension; in their view, God was in control and was teaching the survivor a lesson of some kind. Significantly, none of these groups that argued for some kind of lesson from God saw the lesson as being a negative one. The lesson was to strengthen faith, not to condemn or punish.

Younger women

For the younger women there was no lesson, except perhaps that God does not love the raped woman or that God does not exist. Certainly, they said, the survivor would no longer trust God.

Sisters

Similarly, this group said that survivors of rape would not trust a God who allows such things to happen. This God cannot love or respect them. Such an experience would, they said, crush faith.

7. What resources are there in your church/community for survivors of rape?

Older women

This group listed the following resources: hospitals, clinics, police, social workers, and psychologists.

Older men

The older men mentioned: traditional courts, police, and clinics.

Younger men

This group mentioned the same resources as the older men.

Younger women

This group listed the following, similar to the older women: clinic, hospital, help-line, and police.

Significantly, the men included traditional courts, whereas these were not seen as resources by the women.

8. What will you now do in response to this Bible study?

In response to the final question on their plan of action in response to the Bible study, both groups of men said that they would help the church to speak about abuse. The younger men added that they would help those still in school to speak about abuse, particularly those who had been abused. The younger women focussed on helping those who had been abused.

General comments

The responses by the different sectoral groups demonstrates how useful the Tamar Bible study is. There is no sense of alienation from the biblical text, not even from the older men. The Bible study has an amazing capacity to generate discussion and to get groups talking about things they do not usually talk about in church.

Phase 3: Impact assessment

After initial delays, some of which may have been an indirect response to the Tamar Campaign, the third phase was finally conducted on the 12th March 2006. The facilitator had tried on numerous occasions to set up a date for Phase 3, but though the community appeared willing to complete the process, they had not settled on a date as yet. This may reflect a covert concern on the part of the leadership to terminate the project, or it may simply indicate the difficulty of intruding into the rhythms of a rural community. There may also be element of gender politics here, given that the facilitator is a woman and that the leaders of the

community are men. Indeed, the women in the community were very keen to follow up the Phase 1 and 2 workshops, but they do not control the congregation. Given the kind of work most of the older women do, it is not surprising that they want to take every opportunity to work with these issues.

The following questions were used:

1. What is your understanding of gender violence?
2. What is your attitude towards people who are abused?
3. Is this issue ever discussed in your church? If so, how? If not, why?
4. How does your church help survivors of violence, abuse and rape?
5. Which other resources are available to, firstly, openly discuss these issues, and, secondly, to empower and assist survivors of the different kinds of abuse?

Unfortunately it was not possible to divide the participants into the four groups used previously because this final phase was conducted during a Sunday congregational service. In some respects, however, this was not a serious impediment in that congregational responses to these questions would indicate to what extent the Tamar Campaign had impacted on the congregation as a whole. Having said this, we recognise that some things may not have been said in this public forum which may have been said in a small group. It must be said that we had no control over the arrangements for this phase.

The responses to the questions are as follows:

1. What is your understanding of gender violence?

The participants were clear and vocal in their responses, saying that “Gender violence is another way of destroying somebody’s identity, of utterly humiliating them; it is similar to killing someone”. This ‘someone’, it became clear, was usually a woman. It was said that it was “easier for a woman to be vulnerable to abuse and violence since she is helpless and cannot defend herself”. Here the power of men over women was overtly referred to, with participants adding that “Gender abuse is when a woman is seen as unimportant, especially in the eyes of men”.

Participants went on to distinguish between different forms of gender violence, including job discrimination, women “as tool for sex”, and men socially “looking down” on women, especially in contexts of discussion.

2. What is your attitude towards people who are abused?

A number of responses to this question emphasised the empathy of other women. “When I see an abused person I feel compassionate, and wonder what the situation was like for her, what her feelings were when she was abused, and how she might have tried to defend herself without winning the fight”. The empathy experience was also one of an “inner pain” that came from longing to help them. This pain came from the realisation, firstly, that helping was not always possible because “one cannot talk about her being abused”, and, secondly, that participants felt helpless because “one needs skills like that of a social worker in order to help an abused person”, and, thirdly, that abused people often withdrew into themselves and

became “mentally sick”.

3. Is this issue ever discussed in your church? If so, how? If not, why?

There responses to this questions were almost entirely negative, though with a clear understanding of why. The first response was that “‘they’ [the abused] are afraid to talk about such things, especially in our [local] area”. Fear of talking about abuse was a constant refrain. One of the reasons given for this fear, besides a general reluctance in their community, was because “it is something that exists even within the church”.

A second response was that those who most often had the opportunity for such discussion in the church context were men, and they “have no experience and do not understand what women experience when it comes to abuse”.

There was, thirdly, however, a hope that given the Tamar Campaign and its challenge about this “new topic”, “a time would come for it to be heard within the church”. Some took this sign of hope as a challenge to themselves “to take it up”, both in the church and “to teach our children about it”. In saying this, they made a direct link to similar difficulties in discussing HIV and AIDS.

4. How does your church help survivors of violence, abuse and rape?

The fundamental obstacle to helping was the silence of those who had been abused, and the difficulty of breaking this silence. Not only were those who had been abused fearful of speaking about their abuse, but those who were aware of their abuse did not want to shame those who had been abused by raising the question of their abuse. As one person said, “if it does not exist in society, it does not exist in its church, for the church is formed by the same society”.

A second concern was that the authority and role of the church had been somewhat usurped by traditional courts. Cases of abuse, they said, where they were discussed, tended to be discussed at traditional courts. This, it seemed from their responses, was a relatively new development, for in earlier times such cases were “dealt with under the church-bell”. So even when traditional leaders were members of the church, cases would be taken to them outside of the church context. For participants this was a negative development.

In addition, abuse was also now seen as “the business” of the police and doctors, while “the church is quiet and does not want to involve herself”.

There was a general response at this point to the rapid change taking place in society, which left many participants feeling bewildered. The world they knew was changing, and “even *ubuntu* has disappeared”.

The final response was a courageous response from an individual who said she did not think that the church would every know about her being abused. All that was possible for her, and indeed it was her duty, she said, “to choose one woman within the church, whom I trust, to

share with her how I suffer. If I do not share my problem with someone, nobody will ever know and nobody will ever help me”.

5. Which other resources are available to, firstly, openly discuss these issues, and, secondly, to empower and assist survivors of the different kinds of abuse?

Here the participants listed the following: the police, clinics, social workers, psychiatric hospitals, social welfare, traditional courts, psychologists, and hospitals.

This evaluation phase was conducted with more than fifty people in the church, including children. The researcher noted that though there were some concerns about speaking about this in front of children, the adults were unusually open before the children. She appreciated this because in her experience in this area children were often the victims of abuse.

In general women responded more than men, as the above responses indicate. The researcher noted in her field-notes that the participants “were more vibrant than during the first phase”. That first phase had been extremely difficult with participants being very reluctant to respond. On this second occasion, discussing the same questions, there was considerable openness, even in the presence of children.

The researcher also notes in her field-notes that there remained considerable fear about speaking openly about HIV and AIDS, even though they are having “to bury someone almost every week”. She goes on to say that women were aware of the connection between sexual abuse and HIV/AIDS.

A final observation from the researcher is that women in this community know that abuse takes place in the church and welcome the challenge “to speak about gender abuse”, difficult though it is. Her presence as an outsider and the Tamar Campaign as a tool were clearly important resources “to help them break their silence”.

Impact analysis

Reflections on the impact of the Bible study, particularly during Phase 2, suggest that the Bible study was able to move the different age and gender groups to a similar level of awareness and perspective, though they had come to the Bible study with very different perspectives. The Bible study also enabled each of the groups to speak publically about gender violence for the first time in the context of their faith, though women were the predominant responders. What had never before been spoken about in church was now spoken about; the silence had been broken, and all agreed that it should continue to be broken. Furthermore, the men had explicitly committed themselves to act in addressing the issue of gender violence, both in the church and beyond.

The Stage 3 impact assessment, however, indicated that some of the momentum of Phase 2 had been lost, and that the lasting impact was mainly among the women. However, the fact that the male leadership eventually allowed Phase 3 to go ahead indicates that they too, though less vocal, had retained some of the commitment formed during Phase 2.

However, the prevailing ‘sense’ gathered from the findings of Phase 3 is that of fear and silence. This rural community, it would seem, struggles to find a public space within the church and society to deal openly with gender abuse. Where there is public space, it is male controlled space and consequently is not conducive to dealing with the most prevalent forms of gender violence, those that occur among women.

Concluding remarks and future planning

These results demonstrate, firstly, that it is far more difficult to deal with gender violence within a church context in rural areas than in urban areas. Secondly, while participants agree that it remains difficult to address gender violence in their church, all are far more articulate about gender violence than in phase one. In particular, Sister Khumalo notes that although not separated into groups, the older women and younger women responded openly and often, participating far more than the men. There was clearly a much deeper understanding of gender violence than before. What is also clear is that gender violence is overtly linked to HIV and AIDS. In the final analysis, in rural contexts, “it might take a long time for the church to be open in talking about gender abuse because most of the people who suffer are women and yet most of the people who have the most chances to break the silence in the church are men, who are not the ones experiencing the pain of being abused”.

Arising from our research on the impact of the Tamar Campaign, we plan to provide training workshops for community selected representatives in basic counselling skills. Each community which participates in the Tamar Campaign will be asked to identify one person that they want trained in basic counselling and referral skills. The Ujamaa Centre will then run a week long workshop. We will draw on the resources of our University pastoral counselling and psychology colleagues to assist us in establishing these training workshops. We have also applied to the European Commission for funds to implement the Tamar Campaign and its research and training components in four other African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia, in addition to South Africa.