

# Effects of Religion and Traditional African Cultures on Gullibility Towards People Who are Deaf's Marriage Rights: A Case of Harare, Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

In traditional African societies, choice of spouses, particularly of deaf people is marred with contention and controversies. Using narratives, in-depth interviews and document analysis, the study qualitatively explored effects of traditional African cultures on marriage rights of deaf people. Point of saturation determined the sample size. In most African cultures marriage is an incubator for raising children. According to African beliefs children strengthen marriage bonds. Thus, when a woman fails to bear own biological children the communal set up usually still expects her to express mother's role to related children from family members. Such African women are in most cases comforted by the adage; it takes a village to raise a child. Article 23 in the Convention Rights of Persons with Disability underlies that, with respect for home and the families, PWDs have the right to marry and have children. Deafness is a total or partial loss in hearing only and that should not exclude such people from marriage rights. Communal marriage perspectives in African cultures go deeper than the consensus of two partners by making decisions on who to marry or not marry, though a diminishing practice it seems still on-going in some African cultures today. In most communities any type of disability including deafness are regarded as punishment and shameful. Emerging themes from the generated data revealed that some African families/communities discouraged d/Deaf family members to marry or have children least the condition spread in their families. Genetic deafness is acknowledged. On the other hand some churches lured deaf people into their churches by promising them one-day to receive their hearing if they maintained their faith with the particular church and traditional healers also promise them healing if they followed the magical rules. Thus, most deaf people's expectations are torn between having their hearing restored through church lines or traditional cure practices where in most instances they fell prey to gullibility. People who are deaf felt that they were potential marriage partners despite the fact that some individuals or groups of people in traditional societies and religious circles felt they did not deserve the marriage rights. Advocacy on gullibility teachings and affording people who deaf marriage rights as their hearing counterpart was recommended.

**Keywords:** *(traditional African cultures, marriage rights, deaf people, religion gullibility, Zimbabwe)*

## 1.0 Introduction

In some African Societies, people with disabilities (PWDs) are seen as people without marriage rights. They are taken as asexual or people without sexual feelings. Some PWDs are even injected birth control injections through their parents/guardian's influences without their consent with a view to stop them from bearing own children least they begot similar children if left to bear children. These observations lead to questioning the role of religious practices in such happenings. Taking into consideration daily media reported stories where PWDs are sexually abused by their relatives, the public and even religious leaders the role of the church to PWDs is further put under a spotlight. Based on this background the study sought to explore the experiences of deaf people on marriage rights and how they succumbed to various African cultures; religious practices and the caused gullible practices as vulnerable and disadvantaged victims.

## 1.1 Background of the study

In Zimbabwe, in the Shona traditional culture, a woman was expected to marry whether she liked it or not though currently such systems are no longer strictly adhered to. In cases where a girl child resisted the marriage expectations the clan members facilitated the marriage and even supported the '*musenga bere*' approach which in English was forced abduction into marriage. According to day-to-day media reports, a deaf girl child or PWDs in general are vulnerable to sexual abuse on the pretext that having sex with a disabled person can remedy HIV and AIDs. Most deaf girl children are vulnerable as they cannot scream enough to be heard. On the other hand, a man who died before marrying was buried with a rat with a view to give the person a companion or a marriage partner. That also symbolised that the clan members did not expect his spirit to return and make claims.

Traditionally where an African family was expected to settle the family "ngozi" or in English avenge spirits cultural beliefs influenced the abuse of family girl child with disability with a view to use the born child to settle the issue. That also had genetic scientific intentions so that the breeding of a similar disability could occur outside the family clan. African Shona families had mixed and controversial belief on the issue. Thus, in some

instances where a girl child with disabilities married against the family's wishes her lobola was not accepted and that usually made the marrying family return the girl fearing that it would avenge their clan. A right to life was traditionally problematic though recently, that had improved as people no longer killed PWDs or consider them as punishment from God or ancestors. However, rights to marriage for PWDs still seem to remain subtly unaccepted.

In most African traditions there are three major types of marriages, that is, traditional marriage, Christian marriage and modern marriage. A very well known characteristic of African marriage is the payment of bride price or dowry yet in other cultures dowry is paid by the parents of the girl. This practice has been misunderstood by outsiders, especially Westerners. They equate the payment of bride price to buying a human being. African marriage today is still characterised by freedom except in certain cases where selfish parents force their daughters to get married against their will, even at the expense of leaving school. All these disadvantages are a double barrier for PWDs and deaf people who are the focus of this study. Haualand and Allen (2009) support these views by reminding readers that many communities/families still regard deafness [PWDs] as punishment or shameful.

When Christianity was brought to Africa, it was well received by many ethnic groups although it followed the charity model to disability and was rather vague about its issues and focus. The vagueness seems to have remained to-date without clearly known reasons which may need further research. Thus, issues of disability were reported to receive subtle addresses though currently there are positive shifts through the inclusive practice advocacies. Despite this progress issues of PWDs, such as, enjoying equal rights and marriage rights remained unclear and thus gave room to unequal treatment of PWDs which still prevails today. Churches preach about equality in words while in practice absent and according to the author that possibly created loop-holes in the management and treatment of PWDs. Thus, in some instances the neglected female and male deaf individuals fall prey to people with gullible behaviours, such as, concealed sexual abuse in exchange for promise to receive healing or small gifts. On the other hand, that made them vulnerable to able-bodied people and people in authority. As is apparent by now, we need both the past which is, our traditions, values, practices and the present which includes the impact of other cultures on our own, if one is to arrive at a more satisfactory type of African marriage. According to Wanjohi (1999), it is not a question of either the past or the present but of change of African cultural attitudes.

Before the advent of education and Christianity, the traditional African Shona people considered the birth of a child with disabilities into the family as punishment for some evil deeds or failure to properly appease ancestors thus children with disabilities were killed to avoid spreading the mishap and to also spare the family name against stigma and discrimination. Thus, the discovery of a child's disability discredited him/her. Some media reports and heard stories pointed out that some church members accepted the rights to marriage of their own disabled children to a non-disabled but disowned marriage between their disabled children and disabled partners. Indicators are that such church members did not practice what they preached and this is a possible example of gullible behaviour. Basing on this background the study investigated deaf women's marriage rights and how traditional African cultures influenced gullible practices.

## 1.2 Related literature review

Gullibility according to Gordon (n.d.) is something with and without substantiating facts to support it. In other words, it is a situation where powerful people use some guile to make people believe seemingly impossible issues/facts true. Gordon further asserts that, if a person believes in something based upon a particular religion the person is gullible but that does not mean the person is evil or stupid but simply gullible. While accepting all these contradicting definitions, this study closely analysed the implications of gullible behaviour and how it may lead some people astray thus the study mainly addressed the negativity of gullible behaviours. In this study, this term is analysed in relation to religion and African tradition. Englund (n.d.) and Kusters (2014) consider religion as a social culture and not as a conceptual ideology as most people imagine it as totally separated from traditional African culture. That always needs to be taken in account since every society including Africans have their natural superstitions which may equally contribute to gullibility in various African societies as earlier own noted. However, despite all this, according to the philosopher Thomas Reid, humans have a natural propensity to be trusting even things they have not seen or tangibly touched thus usually end up being victims to gullibility.

The Bible as a moral teaching tool contains many stories in which the trust of unsuspecting individuals is violated by those who use deception and dishonest manipulation. The Biblical story in Matthew chapter 4, are good indicators where the devil bribed the weak and victims of circumstances as he did to Jesus. Unlike, the general beings who use their carnal mind to access issues, Jesus used his spiritual power to detect the devil's gullible behaviours and thus told the devil to get away and not try the Lord his God. Despite the fact that church congregants have heard these teachings since the introduction of Christianity in African traditional cultures, issues of gullibility seems there to stay since the carnal mind is frequently used to assess issues at the expense of tricksters and that has not spared deaf people. In fact deaf people as read and reported by day-to-day media are

vulnerable to gullible behaviours within their community and even religious circles as already spelt out. Thus, Greenspan (2008) proposes that religion has proven to be a fertile field for the expression of gullible behaviour, both in the portrayal of gullibility in religious characters, and in the unquestioning acceptance by followers of supernatural notions.

Marriage is sacred in Africa and beyond, because it solidifies relationships and enriches communities/nations by bringing forth new life and new hope ([www.africanmarriage.info](http://www.africanmarriage.info)). In the African context, marriage is that cultural process which ushers in new life and it is a cherished and most celebrated rite of passage since the dawn of African civilisation and Christianity. There being a dearth of information and research on marriage experiences of deaf people the applicability of the cherishment to deaf people is questioned. Thus, this study was carried out to establish the prevailing position and the reasons behind such circumstances. Marriage needs licenses and/or certificates but Human Rights do not need them. Marriage is instead a privilege afforded by communities, between men and women perceived as suitable candidates for marriage ([www.africanmarriage.info](http://www.africanmarriage.info)). It may therefore be suggested that marriages involving PWDs did not consider them as people with entitled rights. Chivasa and Mutswanga (2014) assert that cordial harmony is a basic Human Rights issue. These authors concluded that the equation of peace and Human Rights involved both PWDs and those without disabilities. In other words disowning the marriage rights of PWDs exposed them less peaceful lives.

Lack of marriage is the death of a nation and a people (Wanjohi, 1999). Besides that, a person who shall give birth to a President or an important person who can rescue societies from contemporary social ills is not be determinable by face value or physical outlook. The Biblical story of the birth of Jesus is a good example. Jesus came from a despised city and low family as exemplified by his birth in a manger but later made history which still reigns today. This story suggests that background, circumstances and conditions of an individual should not determine the destiny of an individual. The same principle applies to PWDs, specifically deaf people who are the focus of this study. Deaf people and their children therefore equally have the potential to become tomorrows' popular people or people who matter in society as exemplified by Jesus Christ's birth. Nevertheless, the rise to top position in a society that is intolerant is no accident at all. Thus, it takes paradigm and policy shifts at every level of society.

The background to this study expressed the value of marriage and childbearing in the African traditional systems even though that was reported not firmly applying to PWDs despite Wanjohi (1999)'s observation that marriage and childbearing still holds a special place in society. Unless institutions and policy makers that matter on the marriage rights of PWDs, specifically deaf people claim their rights they will remain unrecognised and despised. In other words people who are deaf need to be empowered to claim their marriage rights.

To address rights issues of deaf people there may be need to take into consideration that, they do not have a disability but a linguistic challenge (Middleton, Emery, Palmer, and Boudreault, 2013). Oxford Journals Medicine and Health Social (2005) asserts that, disability construction brings with it needless medical and surgical risks for deaf people and that has possibilities of bringing wrong solutions to their real-life problems, like marriage rights. According to Oxford Journals Medicine and Health Social (2005), deaf people are discriminated against in various places mainly because of their language than their bodies. Thus, deaf people are more oppressed as language minorities than as ability groups and that makes them struggle to have their destiny established because they have been subjected to the globalised disability label. Oxford Journals Medicine and Health Social (2005) further suggest that, for a win-win situation deaf people need to aggressively make the government and policy makers aware of the rights of deaf people and their recognition as equal beneficiaries. Until this happens, deaf people, specifically deaf women are likely not to enjoy all the Human Rights enjoyed by hearing peers.

Thus, at one Conference, the Gallaudet University President, King Jordan who was deaf was asked whether he preferred to be hearing or deaf. And in his response he likened this question to asking a black person to be white. He further argued that his arguments were based not on demanding hearing rights but Human Rights where deaf people are seen as human beings as any other person which in this study are marriage rights. The Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) reported that in 19 countries which are possibly more than that, mentioning a few they include; Armenia, Bolivia, Cape Verda, Chile, Eritrea, Loios, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Mynanmar, Nepal, Pastine, Qartar, Seychelles, South Korea, Swinane, Swaziland and United Emirates, deaf people are not recognised as citizens on equal basis. The common cause was probably lack of legislation which explicitly defines deaf people as citizens with equal rights across all rights afforded to people without disabilities. Thus, in such circumstances people who are deaf are denied the right to choose marriage partners. It therefore calls on states and policy makers to unsubscribe from seeing deaf people with a disability but linguistic challenges and also from generalising them as victims of genetics who could be responsible for the increase on births of deaf children without evidence. Probably this is a possible grey area for further research.

### 1.3 Methodology

Using narratives, in-depth interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs), the study qualitatively explored effects of religions and traditional African cultures on gullible behaviour towards marriage rights of people who are deaf. The phenomenological design was employed to collect data from participants selected through snowballing and point of saturation which determined the sample size. It was the best design because it solicited rich information on the marriage experiences of deaf people in Zimbabwe. Additionally it was the best design that could give insights on how religions and traditional African cultures were fertile grounds for the experienced gullibility affecting the marriage rights of the majority of deaf people in Zimbabwe. This is equally supported by Turner (2010) and Letts, Wilkins, Law, Stewart, Bosch and Westmorland (2007) who consider phenomenology as a design which seeks to understand the phenomenon of lived experiences.

Deaf participants were selected on the marriage criteria, that is, they should have had marriage experiences and should also have issues about their marriage to share so that other people learn the extent to which deaf people have marriage rights and the circumstances that succumb them to gullibility from both society and religious circles. The deaf participants' consent was sought after the purpose of the study was explained to them and the researchers cross-checked whether they had understood it. Thus, interested deaf participants who met the criteria and had also understood the purpose of study signed the consent forms. The narrators and FGD participants were selected from this group basing on the preferences and skilledness to express themselves through print or Sign Language (SL). The fact that the researcher was skilled in basic SL was good breaking ground for creating rapport with deaf participants. These participants' preferences were later considered, that is, to write narratives, join the FGDs or be individually interviewed.

The collected data was read several times to generate emerging messages and themes. Thus, emerging themes were presented under finding and supported by relevant verbatim from the participants' lived experiences to make the findings robust. The fact that the qualitative paradigm allowed deaf participants' marriage experiences to be explored in their naturalistic environments enabled the author to observe and probe to help understand the phenomenon under study. The deaf participants were interviewed using Sign Language as their natural language. The used three instruments, namely; 3 narratives, 4 in-depth interviewees and 5 FGDs members helped to augment and triangulate the findings. The numbers of in-depth interviewees were determined by point of saturation. Participants were given pseudo names to protect them from the public. Thus, Sue, Pee and Tee were narrators; Lee, Dee, Josie and Jay were in-depth interviewees and Participant 1 to 5 were members of the FGD.

The use of these instruments, made the findings from this study creditable, trustworthy, dependable, confirmable and dependable. These virtues were affirmed through the above described triangulation and verbatim from study participants while probes also reinforced understanding of unclear issues and narratives were also e-mailed back to narrators to authenticate the obtained data. The discussion section addressed how the findings addressed the research questions and literature supported where possible under the themes emerging from the findings.

#### 1.3.1 Statement of the problem

The majority of people in Zimbabwe are married to able-bodied people but people with disabilities, particularly deaf people who are the focus of this study, informally reported that they were being discriminated as marriage partners. However, despite emerging educational paradigm shifts and religious practices preaching equality and equity as ways of reducing the prevalence of social injustices towards others, religion and African traditional cultures seem to remain equal platforms for gullibility in respect to marriage rights to PWDs. Thus, this study investigated the effects of religion and traditional African culture on gullibility towards people who are deaf's marriage rights.

#### 1.3.2 Research questions

- 1) How does the Zimbabwe African culture view marriage between deaf and hearing people?
- 2) To what extent do deaf people know their rights to marriage?
- 3) What are the effects of the African culture on the marriage of deaf people?
- 4) How can religious practices and African traditional cultures reduce gullibility in order to promote marriage rights among people who are deaf?

### 1.4 Document analysis

Generally PWDs are vulnerable to all sorts of societal gullibility. Thus, the author felt that PWDs were a group which required judicial protection in even taken for granted issues to enable them to exercise their human rights such as marital rights. The study analysed the Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act of 2013 and the 2006 Convention of Rights for Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to establish the extent to which they accorded marriage rights to PWDs. The Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment (No.20) Act of 2013's Chapter 2 Sections 22 and 26 respectively addresses issues of PWDs and Marriage but both sections are silent on marriage rights for PWDs. Section 26(a) on marriage just generally suggests that the state should take measures to ensure

that, *no marriage is entered into without the free and full consent of the intending spouses*. This is a noble assurance but it is not explicitly expressed for PWDs, thus could be the possible loop-hole to the existing denial of marriage rights to PWDs and prevailing gullibility. Article 23 of the 2006 CRPD underlies that, with respect for home and the families, PWDs have the right to marry and have children. These measures are appreciated as good commitment of the United Nations but this study criticises them for lack of clarity and mandating State parties on precise expectations on marriage rights for PWDs. The Zimbabwean 2013 Constitution and the 2006 CRPD therefore require clarity on marriage rights to PWDs to enhance their provisions as a human rights issue.

## 1.5 Findings and discussions

### 1.5.1 Communication Breakdown

One deaf participant described her in-laws as reluctant to learn Sign Language while the other pointed out that the in-laws did not want to associate with her because they feared stigmatisation from the community and church members. The in-laws felt very comfortable when their deaf-in-law was with her husband [their deaf son]. The other expressed that her in-laws wanted her to do all household chores without giving her rest. In agreement the majority of deaf participants reported:

*I think my in-laws gave me a lot of tasks to keep me busy as a way of not affording me chances to communicate with them [Sue].*

*My mother in-law was very impatient with me. She described me as a lazy person when I did not carry household chores according to her expectation, yet we would not have understood each other. Thus, everyday she verbally scolded me. Before me and my husband found our own accommodation I lived liked a slave and a stranger among my in-laws [Pee].*

*I am a deaf woman married to a deaf man. We have both managed to complete tertiary education. We have managed to acquire properties and our own house. As employed people, who have not had chances of staying with our in-laws. All we know is that we are progressing in life and are happy. However, at d/Deaf Clubs we have heard stories of friends who where forced to divorce because they married a deaf person and the other way round. We have often joked with some of our friends that they should tell their in-laws that their child was not getting married to deaf ears but to a human being.*

*Probably policy makers need to develop explicit Human Rights policies for each disability type [Tee].*

Considering the above excerpts, society probably needs deaf education and to be exposed to successful deaf individuals who have managed to make it life, such as *Tee* and her husband. Probably more of biblical verses as, “Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind but fear your God, I am the Lord” (Leviticus, 19: 14) should be taught by churches to transform people’s mindsets so that they consider deaf people as equal beings. On the other hand, educationists and religious institutions should empower deaf people to claim their marriage rights and any other rights afforded to hearing people.

### 1.5.2 Fears of deaf partners

As exemplified by excerpts below, the findings revealed that a majority of deaf participants feared to commit themselves into marriages because of lived experiences and the way some traditional African cultures and religious circles viewed and treated them. This is equally supported by excerpts below:

*I have many examples and experiences of deaf girls who have tried to marry hearing boys but most of them have divorced after discovering that they were being cheated [Lee].*

*I thought marrying a hearing man was a blessing but I was surprised by the way he cheated on me with even sisters in the same church we attended. This was worsened and openly done when I could not conceive a baby and we divorced. I remarried a deaf person and he still cheated on me. Thus, I have since divorced this man and am now operating as a street vendor selling juice cards and a few small items. I fear to be cheated by men and I have told myself never to marry until I die [Dee].*

*I married a deaf man but we are now divorced because he was a cheat and had many small houses. I never had a child because each time I conceived I miscarried. I had 4 miscarriages. This did not please my in-laws and my husband, thus I divorced [Josie].*

These excerpts show that both male and female deaf people encounter several challenges when they marry or attempt to marry a hearing or deaf person. However, it seems female deaf people experience more hardships in marriage life from both their hearing or deaf husbands plus from in-laws than their hearing counterparts. This is another grey area for possible further studies. Maybe when people get to know that disability does not have boundaries but a condition that can befall anyone at any time; parents and in-laws would probably accept marriage choices of their children. The findings also show that when people are vulnerable, they are subject to abuse and gullible characters such as cheating husbands/wives and so forth. The study revealed common marriage experiences and challenges among deaf and hearing people although linguistic challenges seem to impact more negatively on female deaf colleagues than their hearing counterparts as portrayed by the majority of deaf study participants’ lived experiences.

### 1.5.3 Suspiciousness and gullibleness

The study findings reported people who are deaf as a suspicious group but this characteristic is questioned since they are succumbed to gullibility despite their suspicious habits. The study also questioned why Samson in the Bible ended up betraying his powers by telling Delilah his source of powers yet he suspected Delilah to be a trickster. Thus, the philosopher Thomas Reid could be right by describing humans as having a natural propensity to trusting things they have not seen or touched. These views are supported by the following excerpts:

*I married a hearing girl from our neighbourhoods but people used to laugh at her and even tried to influence her to divorce me despite the fact that we have 2 children. Some community members tried to influence my wife to cheat on me with hearing people like her and I always found that out. Due to all that we have since divorced and am now married to a very beautiful deaf girl but still hearing people want to snatch this beautiful girl away from me. I just do not trust hearing people because they think best things should always be theirs. I have currently put a flashing light at my home for us to be aware of trespassers [Jay].*

*I am a deaf woman. I was raped by an HIV positive uncle who infected me. When the case was communally debated his intentions were to get HIV cure through me since I was a virgin. The case was made a court case but charges against my uncle are unclear since he is back from jail [Participant 1]*

*I am a victim of the story published through media where one manager of an organisation took advantage of several deaf girls' lack of voice condition at an HIV awareness workshop for the deaf on the pretends that we were going to continue to receive more workshop attendance favours besides the small tokens [Participant 2]*

Indicators from the study are that, the majority of churches need to do a lot of teaching and awareness on marriage rights. There is need to continually remind society that all people are created by God as equal partners and nobody is best or worst despite one's conditions or disability. Maybe such continuous lessons will one day make couples, the disabled and non disabled understand each other better. The above highlighted cases have high chances of falling prey to gullible characters for empty promises. Thus, such excerpts should teach societies at large lessons to remain loyal to their partners. The majority of the Bible's deception stories are found in the Old Testament, particularly in the Book of Genesis. The story of Samson and Delilah is a good example of gullible behaviour where Samson was tricked to reveal his source of powers. Samson fell in love with Delilah who was used by the Philistine King to coax and betray him through pretending to be in love with Samson yet they were gulle actions.

Other portrayed gullible behaviours in the Book of Genesis is about Lot. In this story, Lot escapes from the condemned city of Sodom with his wife and two daughters but the wife looked back and turned into a pillar of salt. However, the two daughters of Lot in a bid to keep their father's posterity made him drunk with wine to make sure he would not have memory about what would have happened when he woke up thus seduced him and raped him [incest] and the two daughters became pregnant. These biblical accounts actually echo common contemporary events in which some high profile people end up taking advantage of the weak in society as exemplified by above excerpts. Another interesting story portraying gullible behaviour is about Jacob when he worked for 7 years to marry the girl he had selected but was tricked by his in-laws into marrying the older daughter Leah and had to work for another 7 years before he could marry Rachel as his second wife of prior choice. Issues of tricksters [gullibility] are therefore a global phenomenon which is difficult to stop through traditional cultural and religious means since they seem there to stay and to take advantage of vulnerable people. However, through this write up, readers are expected to refrain from gullible behaviour, maybe this would help diminish such habits.

### 1.5.4 Double gullibility from in-laws and people of high profile

Below are some supporting evidence that all sectors of society, namely the beliefs of some traditional African cultures and religions contributed to gullibility expressed towards deaf people in their marriage attempts and marital status as reported below:

*Some church members used us as objects of charity not for our benefit but for their own benefits. They sourced gifts from rich people and well wishers using our names. With additional communication challenges and hearing losses our trust for hearing people disappeared after expose to several cases of hearing people's gullible behaviours. The same hearing people, name-called us various names daily to describe our hearing losses [Participant 3].*

*When we got our own accommodation, we worked very hard to acquire our own property which is even better than of my in-laws. My in-laws now frequently visit us and on each visit they expect to carry grocery parcels back home. I know they pretend to like me so as to get parcels because each time they visit they look at each other with corners of eyes in a scarstic manner. It is the reason why I describe my situation as doubly cheated because churches use us deaf people as charity objects for their own benefits. I have on several occasions heard my in-laws question other members whether our marriage is not going to cause the clan to have many deaf people [Sue]*

The adage that when one is vulnerable such a person is likely to be in circumstances that exposes her/him to more vulnerability as expressed by the majority of FGD members. Indicators are therefore that not only PWDs their parents and nations at large need education but even religious institutions and some people of high profile need it too on PWDs, specifically deaf people who are the focus of this study. Probably the verse of Leviticus (Chap.19: 14) needs to be taken as a key text which could be used to transform people's mindsets on issues of disability and gullible behaviours and their treatment as equal partners with rights to decent marriages and opportunities.

#### **1.5.5 Society Considers us as People with no Rights to Marriage**

The researchers felt that the Jews' historical tendencies of viewing PWDs as cursed human beings seems to be prevailing even today. In other words, modernity seems to be failing to completely delete it from one generation to the other. This is expressed by excerpts below:

*When relatives visit us, the way I am introduced seems to spell out that I am responsible for my in-law's deaf son, who is my husband because they speak highly about their son but always scroll their mouths when making references to me. Deaf females are taken as people with rights to marry. My in-laws openly suggested that they wanted their child to marry a hearing person although he is deaf [Participant 5]*

*Society seems to support it by just watching without commenting or trying to correct such attitudinal feelings displayed by the majority of hearing people [[Participant 4]*

*It is only the right to education where society has greatly improved in educating both female and male deaf people. When it comes to marriage, society seems to expect the deaf male to marry a hearing partner [Tee].*

In the above section deaf people emotionally feel that society sees them as not worthy to select marriage partners. As a result they recognise the progress in educational access as better as compared to marriage right. It therefore means that, Human Rights policies need to be revisited to make sure that deaf people enjoy equal marriage rights as any other person in society. In fact, religious institutions are expected to play a leading role in transforming society to consider marriage rights for deaf people since the Bible does not despise or condemn anyone, disabled or non disabled.

#### **1.5.6 Lack of Education and Guidance**

Lack of education and guidance on marriage rights and possible gullible behaviours that people who are deaf could possibly encounter were reported by the majority of participants in this study as responsible for the prevailing experienced marriage challenges as expressed by the selected excerpts below:

*Deaf people end up being described as people who should never marry because of our inquisitive ways which hearing mistake for emotional tantrums. Nobody explains to us what to expect and how to behave when one marries or gets married. It is for this reason that most of our deaf colleagues exchange women or go for small houses where we contract HIV and AIDs and are usually left to die due to lack of information about counselling services and medication [Pee].*

*Even at churches nobody dares to take classes of deaf people to talk to them about selecting marriage partners. HIV and AIDs issues are discussed for the benefit of hearing people because the majority of churches do not have Sign Language interpreters thus all teachings in church benefit hearing people only [Josie].*

*I am a deaf married woman to a hard-of- hearing man. I go to church but husband does not go to church with me. He also drinks beer. In church we have Sign Language interpreters and we have been told that if we increase our faith we shall have our hearing restored but to date I have not had any improvements in my hearing [Participant 1].*

The section seems to portray that a majority of churches talk about missing faith among deaf people before making sure that they understand what it is and is thus usually end up making deaf people lose trust in what churches or religious leaders say. That further indicates the need for disability studies in society in general and churches too. Probably church leader need to be in-service on disability issues.

### **1.6 More findings addressing research questions**

This section discussed how the study's findings addressed the research questions and supported it with related literature review where possible.

#### **1.6.1 How the African culture Views Marriage between Deaf and Hearing People**

The study reveals very controversial issues. It was discovered that in-laws differed in their preferences especially those with male deaf children. Some of them preferred their deaf sons to marry deaf girls while others preferred hearing girls. However, after a close analysis, the study revealed that the majority of hearing parents preferred their deaf sons to marry hearing girls than deaf girls. In one instance one deaf male expressed how he had to divorce because the hearing public influenced his wife to elope to a hearing person rather than marry a deaf person. When people are vulnerable it's easy to believe someone and be gullible to someone who appoints

themselves in power either traditionally or even in modern traditions and in religious circles too just as gullible people are known for empty promises. According to Mutswanga, Makoni and Chivasa (2015) traditionally, disability is understood in the negative terms where it is perceived as tragedy; and object of charity or as an individual's problem. According to these authors all these views are likely to have created the base for the existing foundation of stigma towards PWDs. The invisibility of deafness is reported to increase the stigma towards people's belief systems as proposed below:

*Before I married I was never taught courting, dating issues and how to bring up a family. It was after an incident that elderly deaf friends briefly showed me the correct or expected behaviour [Participant 2].*

*When I married and had my first child I learnt that hearing people were taught how to court and bring up their children. May be society does not expect us to marry thus does not dare to teach us anything about marriage and child rearing yet hearing people are informed and taught about it [Participant 5].*

### **1.6.2 The extent to which deaf people know their rights to marriage**

The findings revealed that a majority of hearing males married deaf females as compared to deaf males against hearing females, hence this needs further cross-checking and studying. Despite these observations, the majority of participants suggested that hearing people married a deaf person by default because hearing people did not see them as equal human beings and besides, the opposite that the other way round would cause genetic deafness to spread repeatedly emerged in this study. It was for such reasons that the majority of narratives and FGD members expressed that a majority of deaf people were to a large extent not expected to marry. In other words they did not have marriage rights even among themselves. As expressed by one participant and supported by majority others, some in-laws were not pleased when deaf couples married each other least it increase a generation of deaf people in the family. This also explains weaknesses in the issues of deaf people. As far as genetic screening is concerned African states and globally, states needs to proactively address this before individuals engage into serious relationships. However, some cases in the study revealed that some churches gave them empty promises to hear and talk which to date has not happened. Kusters (2014) equally suggests that the majority of people take deaf people as objects of charity and as people they could use to lure crowds to their religious institutions on empty healing promises just to increase their congregations. These are some of the examples of gullible behaviours found in some churches yet churches should help such people receive their salvation.

### **1.6.3 Effects of the African culture on the marriage of deaf people**

The above findings reveal that gullibility is a global phenomenon and African cultures have not been spared. Gullibility trends continue to exist even today in modern communities as exemplified by excerpts in this study. Just as in the past, as exemplified by the Judas kiss which betrayed Jesus as long as mankind, religion has turned out to be fertile ground for gullible behaviour even in modern religious circles. The findings revealed men and women who cheated on their husbands and wives despite having wedded and had children. The authors felt the possibility of Jews' historical recognition of disability as a curse to have transferred to modern church circles even though Jesus made several attempts to de-teach such mindsets. For example, the findings indicated how some hearing people felt that beautiful women with or without disabilities were not good enough for someone with a disability. Indicators are that societies at large need to be assisted to interpret the bible correctly because Jesus never described PWDs as curses. In Exodus 4: 11 (p. 52) God rebuked Moses when he said he was not an eloquent speaker saying, *Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute?.....Is it I the Lord.* This teaches us not to judge or condemn them or pair people into marriages because it is God's will and everything is done for a purpose

As portrayed in the introductory or background section. The materialistic explanations of some religious beliefs have also resulted in some deaf people failing prey to gullibility. For instant, the deaf participants who were raped by a person of high profile and asked to conceal the sexual abuse for favours to attended several workshops and receive small gifts is according to author of this study a first class example of gullibility. While marriage rights of people who are deaf are necessary but considering the above example, the marriage rights should also address punitive measures to perpetrators of sexual abuse because they spoil the marriage future of such victims or PWDs in general.

### **1.6.4 How culture/religion may reinforce/enhance marriages among deaf people without practicing gullible behaviour**

The author of this study question and wonder why a person of high profile in the likes of Samson continued to befriend Delilah yet her betrayal was clear. The major moral lessons of Samson's story are a cautionary tale on risks of gullible extremists. Indicators are that the African tradition and religious circles should continuously teach people to always cross-check assurances promised by gullible people. In other words people are encouraged to have a critical assessment lense to help them determine empty and true promises into their situations and circumstances. People would need to be cautioned not to try out ideas without having put into place informed remedies.



In this study deaf people express that they do not understand all people surrounding them including their families, siblings and church leaders and congregants. Thus, in support Chivasa and Mutswanga (2014) suggest that gullible ways of treating and managing issues of PWDs contributed to peacelessness which the majority of PWDs are experiencing. Indicators therefore call for state parties to make sure that PWDs and their families receive education on possible gullible activities and actions which may befall them and their children with disabilities to forewarn them and take precautions.

### 1.7 Learnt Lessons

Both traditional African cultures and some religious habits and behaviours are reported to make deaf people victims of gullible behaviours as equally portrayed in several biblical stories where the devil managed to convince for example, Delilah enticed Samson to reveal his source of power at the pretext that she loved him. Even though Samson lied three times to Delilah about his source of power, she pestered him until he revealed the truth (The Holy Bible in Judges 16) ; the reason for the trust could be out of love for her even though she was only his girl-friend and not his wife. This is supported by the bible verse in Jeremiah 9:4-6 (p. 687) which reads,

*Beware of your friends do not trust your brothers. For every brother is a deceiver and every friend a slanderer. Friend deceives friend, and no-one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie; they weary themselves with sinning. You live in the midst of deception; in their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me, declares the lord.*

The verses teach us not to act out of ignorance or gullible drives but treat each other with love despite ones' disability whose purpose is best known by the creator, who is God. Furthermore, another Bible verse in Hebrews 12:13 (p.215) reads, *Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees! Make level paths for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.* This verse encourages us to see the image of God in every person as a human being despite his/her disability, implying the need for equality, equity and inclusivity in society. In Proverbs 28: 3 God further rebukes society when he said, *A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain that leaves no crops.* The verse teaches us, including church leaders not to despise that which God purposively created such as the vulnerable and PWDs because there is greater disability in a society which ill considers what God created than in people with disability themselves. This is quite a pregnant statement. Thus in Psalms 28:3 God further rebukes us not to be dragged away with the wicked, thus this study encourages us to learn lessons through the presented shared experiences.

The study revealed that vulnerable people, such as people who are deaf are susceptible to gullibility because societal perceptions are biased towards the discrimination of PWDs. The major lesson from the study is the reality of gullibility. PWDs are more vulnerable to gullibility because they easily submit to tricksters at the expense of seeking acceptance. They are not perceived as human beings thus are described as susceptible to gullibility. The study showed that powerful people used pressure and inducements to lure PWDs into their gullible tricks. Gullible behaviour against anyone is therefore condemned because it distracts sustainable socio-economic development because everyone's contribution is essential because of the diverse talents and knowledge each brings to society whether disabled or not. This emphasizes on inclusivity in society.

### 1.8 Conclusions and recommendations

The study noted with concern that, while society has a history of discrediting PWDs, including deaf people this stereotyping is also prevalent in religious circles as portrayed by several excerpts above. Gullibility was reported rife in both African cultures and religious circles thus the findings recommended that all sectors of society be educated so as to take an active role in mitigating gullibility among PWDs in Zimbabwe and also empower people who are deaf to claim rights to receive education on marriage rights. The study further reported that State parties seemed to have more enlightenment on educational rights of PWDs than their marital rights. In this study deaf female participants who failed to conceive and have own children revealed miserable lives where they experienced double challenges from their in-laws and their hearing or deaf husbands and the study showed that the majority of them divorced for such reasons. That means that the African adage, *it takes a village to raise a child* seems not to hold water for the modern society. Thus, for PWDs to experience peace and happiness there may be need to incalculate this adage into modern systems so that it equally applies to PWDs. Conclusively the study found that some religious and traditional African cultural beliefs negatively impacted on deaf people's marriage rights and also exposed them to gullibility.

Basing on the above discussed ideas the study therefore recommends that:

- There is need for traditional and religious circles to run awareness workshops on gullible behaviour education and their impacts on people who are deaf (PWDs)
- That all sections of society which includes; African traditional cultures, religion circles and non Christians take a leading role in mitigating gullibility with specific reference to marriage rights of people who are deaf (PWDs)
- That government and civil society organisations create social platforms where people share and

enlighten each other on how African cultural and religious beliefs are contributing to denial of marriage rights to people who are deaf [PWDs] and further seek possible solutions through such foras

- There is need for governments to design legal frameworks with punitive measures against people who perpetuate marriage discriminations and other related circumstances such as abuse and gullibility with a view to regard people who are deaf (PWDs) as equal beings with equal rights
- There is need to carry out in-depth surveys and researches on reported cases of African culture and religious gullibility towards people who are deaf (PWDs)'s marital rights so that the nation at large learn lessons from them
- That the learnt lessons further be developed into accessible literature to everyone
- That both biblical and folktales be extensively used to mitigate and reduce gullibility in all sections of society.

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