

Evaluation of the Gender Dimension to the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya's policy on women dressing in Mumias Sub-county, Kenya

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Abstract: The world of the twenty first century today has many achievements yet as the saying goes; the more things change the more they remain the same. This seems to be the case in matters of dress especially in reference to women's attire. The Christian scriptures do not seem to give a normative direction in matters of adornment in general and women's dress in particular. The main objective of this study was to examine the extent to which the attitude towards adornment in trousers among women in Mumias sub-county Full Gospel Churches of Kenya was a gender negation rather than a Biblical position. To achieve this, the study analyzed the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya policy on women dressing. The literature review was carried out using themes drawn from the objective. The study was guided by the liberal feminism theory. This theory was used to establish if there were individual rights and equal opportunities as a basis for social justice and reform in Mumias Full Gospel Churches. This study adopted descriptive survey design to present data thus it was involved in studying the situation as it is in an attempt to explain why the situation is the way it is. The sampling techniques were stratified random sampling, purposive and simple random sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select the clergy and their spouses, stratified random sampling was used to select the representative sample from the target population of the general faithful and the simple random technique was used to sample respondents for the Focus Group Discussion. The study instruments were interview schedule, questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions and document review. The validity of the instruments was established through content validity by experts from the school arts and religious studies, Masinde Muliro University. The study found out that there is gender bias against women in church. Patriarchy of the African society had been carried to, and perpetuated by the church through formulation of rules and erroneous interpretation of the Bible to favor paternalistic positions on issues of adornment translating to a church that is oppressive to the womenfolk. The study recommended that Mumias FGCK should initiate training programs for the clergy and other leaders in hermeneutics and exegesis for better leadership and training skills on matters of adornment, women should be allowed freedom of choice according to the constitution and that Mumias FGCK should expose its adherents to the church constitution by making it easily accessible and practice its contents especially on matters of adornment. This study shall add to the existing pool of knowledge in Religious and Gender studies, assist in FGCK policy formation and bring about liberation to oppressed women.

Keywords: Christian scriptures, women dressing, constitution.

INTRODUCTION

Cunningham [1] observes that multiplied millions of women all over the world are looking over the Church's shoulder, longing to see the freedom Jesus purchased for them at Calvary. Millions more have found freedom in Jesus but are still bound by human ideas. Ideas that pressure a woman to let culture, not God, determine her place in the Kingdom.

Cunningham indicates that the teachings of the men of God should not always be taken as absolute truth but relative statements. Some were only meant to correct a specific situation in a given Church, for example, the Church at Corinth. Cunningham adds that it gets complicated when man adds his rules to God's word. Tucker [2] supports this position by affirming

that indeed much of what is taught about women in both the old and new testament is simply a result of cultural conditioning and not God's specific instruction to His people.

Wiesner [3] observes that there was always conflict between the opinion of men and the commandment of God. Cunningham [1] points out that God's absolute principle that should guide all our thinking concerning men and women is, equality; absolute equality. What is modeled for us in the Godhead between God the father, God the son and God the Holy Spirit is equality. There is no hierarchy in the trinity, only absolute equality).

Cunningham emphasizes that what was laid down in the Garden of Eden when God, *Elohim*- plural unity- created man and woman in his image was equality. The absolute that is never contradicted in all of scripture is equality. We have equal value, even though we have unique personalities and different giftings, callings and functions (*Ibid*).

Nadar [4] observed that there is a discrepancy between legality and reality. That while the Full Gospel Church in South Africa claims that it has never forbidden women from ministry, the actions speak the contrary. Discrimination can be seen through actions; for example, women were not allowed some dress codes like trousers for women during worship. God set up human judicial system in exodus chapter eighteen [5] out of necessity. He gave certain people control over others based on the need for order in a sinful, imperfect world. He set up authorities on earth, whether parents to lead families or leaders for the Church or leaders for government, because we have practical need for them to function. But we should not confuse function with value [1]. She added that, each of us is equally valuable before God. We should walk in this way, consciously copying the loving, humble pattern given us by the trinity and backed up by the word of God. Jesus taught us to wash one another's feet and to serve one another. This is the principle that should rule the body of Christ and ultimately in every society: the absolute equality of male and female.

Cunningham [1] emphasizes that men and women were created in the image of God. Jesus paid the supreme price for both with his death on the cross. For God so loved the world and not just male, that he gave his only begotten son. Souls are souls. A male soul isn't more valuable than a female soul. A woman has absolute equality with men in God's eyes; therefore, she should be equal in our eyes as well. From this observation, it is therefore important to note that the principle of equality in church is important in building the body of Christ. Luptoton [6] asserts that Christ went out of his way to make sure that people felt at home,

especially those who had known the sting of oppression. He emphasizes that the place where oppression should never be felt is in church.

Are women then supposed to dress in trousers for Church worship? Cunningham [1] observes that, Jesus mission was not gender biased. It was gender inclusive. Jesus said, "All that the father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away." So if Jesus never drives away then the Church should not drive away. This study therefore sought to analyze the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya's policy on women dressing.

Cunningham observes that marginalization of women in places of worship was common even in the days of Jesus. Women were relegated to the back of the synagogue, separated from the men. Jesus broke this habit or rule when he spotted a crippled woman struck out against the male monopoly of public worship. He shattered the male world view. She adds that marginalization is also evident whereby men were referred to as sons of Abraham but never were women referred to as daughters of Abraham. Everyone knew that women were not heirs of Abraham in the way that men were.

This position was supported by Tucker [2] who noted that Vashti was a feminist of her day and refused to be used or controlled by the opposite sex. Her protest was regarded dangerous that it could potentially infect the whole female population and result in the loss of male authority. That action was deemed dangerous as it would cause a devastating turn of events in such a patriarchal society so Vashti was dethroned as the queen. Cunningham [1] emphasizes the fact that Jesus never excluded women either by word or action. He deliberately chose words that emphasized his common standing with women and men, especially the words he used to describe himself. The most common term he used for himself was, "son of man." The word "man" is inclusive of both male and female.

Cunningham pointed out to us another incident where Jesus again freed another woman from exclusion by the society. The woman had been suffering from incessant vaginal hemorrhaging for twelve years. According to the laws of the day, she was unclean plus everything else she touched. Instead of Jesus rebuking her when secretly touched him yet she was "unclean" Jesus commended her. No longer would the flow of menstrual blood exclude women from full participation among the people of God.

Cunningham [1] noted that Jesus ministered side by side with women. She quotes the evidence from the book of Luke which says; "after this Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God. The

twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; Joana the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Sussana; and many others ". These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

Cunningham [1] shows us that Paul defended women in ministry. Paul refuted the claim of some men holding exclusive rights to minister. God's word wasn't going to be limited by narrow, gender- exclusive schemes. Paul had already clearly established the validity of women in public ministry and wasn't going to allow anyone to contradict him at this point. The critics of women participating in the Corinthians Church had totally missed Paul's point (Luke 14: 27-39). Paul only wanted Christian women to focus on the virtues and not the outer adornment parse.

Wiesner [3]. She adds that, "Women had to choose between male political and religious authorities and sometimes even their fathers and husbands, told them to do and what they perceived as God's plan for their lives". She also adds that early modern women frequently argued that their religious actions were private and that only God could be the true judge. She says that Christianity contains streaks of misogyny and was in the early modern period totally controlled by male hierarchies with all levels of the clergy and especially the highest reserved for men. God was thought of as being male.

Wiesner adds that women were not allowed to have a say in financial affairs of the institutional churches. It was purely a male affair. Wiesner [3] further emphasizes that Christianity diminished the women opportunities in church. Women's actions upset the religious authorities in the first years of reformation. She therefore quotes Katherine Zell, a tireless worker in the reformation as requesting that her writings be judged not according to the standards of a woman, but according to the standards of one whom God had filled with his holy spirit. Unfortunately the wish was never granted. Wiesner [3] also quotes Teresa who in her quest for active ministry, she explicitly chafed at the restrictions on her because of her sex. She never let herself be looked down upon because she is a woman. Wiesner's work draws a parallel with this study in the sense that gender is constant but then she does not mention anything in Africa.

Tororeiy [7] asserts that while the preaching of the church proclaims that the "old things" have been eliminated; its practice clings to these "old things" instead of searching out the new things. "Indeed, it is new things where men are concerned, but the same 'old things' when referring to women," she says. She adds that it is a tragedy that the church is a liberative tool that

never liberates. She holds that liberation will not be possible as long as women continue to be excluded and marginalized. Tororeiy [7] adds that Kenyan women go through a lot of humiliation and scorn.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Christian scriptures do not seem to give a normative direction in matters of adornment in general and women's dress in particular. Where then do Christians get ideas on what women should or should not wear? Is it from societal culture or from the Bible? Is dressing in trousers for a woman considered to be dressing like men? Biblical writers like Paul are often quoted in the dress debate. But was Paul talking about the trouser? Did the early Christians wear trousers? Is the woman dressed in trousers symbolic of a liberated woman or a woman seeking liberation from the overly patriarchal society and church in which she finds herself? In this case it would appear that dress is symbolic of something deeper than just attire.

These issues raised in the introductory background informed the main problem of this study which was to examine the extent to which the attitude towards adornment in trousers during worship among women in the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya of Mumias sub-county constituted a gender issue rather than a Biblical requirement. The study generally posits in this respect thus; is the attitude towards adornment in trousers by women in Full Gospel Churches of Kenya of Mumias sub-county a gender negation or Biblical position?

Purpose of the study

To determine the extent to which the interpretation of the FGCK policy on women dressing is gendered biased rather than Biblical.

Objective

- i) To analyze the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya's policy on women dressing.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted descriptive survey design. According to Orodho (2008), descriptive survey involves studying the situation as it is an attempt to explain why the situation is the way it is. In descriptive survey design, the two crucial categories of respondents are important. This study was carried out in Mumias sub-county which is in western Kenya. The study population consisted of 540 [five hundred and forty] members of Mumias sub-county Full Gospel churches of Kenya, 14 clergy (Baseline survey across 6 branches of FGCK-Mumias LCA, 2015). The respondents for this study were drawn from members of the church. The respondents included the Mumias sub-county Full Gospel Churches of Kenya clergy as well as the laity.

The sample was selected using stratified random sampling, simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. The clergy provided data on the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya teachings on matters of dressing in trousers by women. The clergy are important to this study because they are the propagators of the Full Gospel Christian faith and practices in the church. Female members will be of importance because they are the ones affected by the dressing mode.

Payne and Gainey [8] points out that it is impossible, exceptionally expensive and simply not necessary to study every individual or family in a population. Maltz and Zawitz [9] state that sampling has the following three main advantages: One, information can be collected at a fraction of the cost of interviewing everyone in the entire population. Two, the time to collect the data for the study will be reduced drastically. Three, the burden for interviewing the respondents is placed on few people. The Purposive sampling method was used to select the Full Gospel Churches of Kenya, Mumias LCA clergy and their wives. Simple random sampling was used to select respondents for Focus Group Discussions and stratified random sampling will be used to select some church adherents as respondents for in-depth information Ogula [10]. asserts that

purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the choice of sampling units depends on the subjective judgment of the researcher. The study used interview schedule, questionnaires, focus group discussions (FGD) and document review as instruments of data collection. Validity of the research instruments was established through content validity by experts from the MMUST social sciences and education department. Reliability is a measure of the degree to which a research instrument yields consistent results or data after repeated trials [11]. The research instruments are therefore reliable to the extent that they measure whatever they are expected to measure. To ensure the reliability of the data to be collected, a pilot study was carried out and the instruments revised accordingly. The data for this study was analyzed using descriptive methods.

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS
FGCK Policy on Women Dressing

Data on FGCK policy on women dressing during worship was collected using a questionnaire. It was later coded, analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The results were presented in Table 9 and 10.

Table-1: The FGCK Policy on Women Dressing in Trousers

Policy on women dressing		Male F (%)	Female F (%)	Total F (%)
1	No policy	12 (6.67)	10 (5.56)	22 (12.22)
2	I don't know	26 (14.44)	37 (20.56)	63 (35.00)
3	Women should not put on trousers	37 (20.56)	37 (20.56)	74 (41.11)
4	Be modesty, be neat don't be provocative	00 (00.00)	07 (3.89)	07 (3.89)
5	I think it is allowed since some put on trousers	01 (0.56)	13 (7.22)	14 (7.78)
				180 (100)

Key: f- frequency, %- percentage

From Table 9, 35% of the sampled respondents indicated that they were not aware of any policy on women dressing in trousers during worship. This indicates that the church leadership may not be keen on making its position clear on this issue for fear of losing some members. Seventy four (41.11%) of the sampled respondents disagreed with other respondents on this issue and insisted that women should not put on trousers. This was according to church policy.

A sizeable 22 (12.22%) of the sampled respondents said there was no policy on women dressing in trousers in their church. 14 (7.78%) were not sure whether the women were or were not allowed to wear trousers in church.

FGCK in Mumias and Women Adornment in Trousers during worship

In this study 111 members out of the 180 study population had a negative attitude towards wearing of trousers by women during worship. Again, out of the 180 respondents, 50 neither knew nor had a clear picture of what the Bible says about dressing in general and for women in particular especially during worship. This latter category quoted the scripture but ended up with interpretational difficulties or went against it unknowingly. The 104 female respondents were further subjected to an instrument that went thus; would you dress in trousers during worship? In this regard, 85% of the female respondents vehemently responded in the negative, while 13.33% responded in affirmative. The remaining 1.66% of the female respondents indicated that they would occasionally dress in trousers during

worship. Several key respondents corroborated this general position in observing that a woman who adorns herself in trousers during worship in FGCK, Mumias LCA is not allowed to minister; be it in praise and worship, ushering, intercessory, interpretation or even teaching Sunday school since these are the major ministries in operation on Sundays in this church. Such a woman was deemed to be unfit for ministry and a bad example to the rest of the church. It must be borne in mind however that FGCK, Mumias LCA is a church in a township where the expected norm, based on the diffusion of innovations theory, would have been that women would be dressing in trousers during worship

services since this was a growing trend worldwide. This however was not the case hence raising questions of its own.

Reasons against Trousers for Women during Worship in Mumias FGCK

The 111 respondents in this study had varied and diverse reasons why they loathed trousers for women during worship in Mumias FGCK. In a research item asking them for the reasons behind their negative response towards the wearing of trousers by women during worship, the categories of response were as indicated in Table 8.

Table-2: Reasons against Women Wearing Trousers during Worship

Gender	It is a good moral	It is un-African	It's a Biblical command	Any other	Total
Male	14(12.61)	09(08.19)	22(19.82)	2(1.80)	47(42.34)
Female	21(18.92)	12(10.81)	29(26.12)	2(1.80)	64(67.66)
Total	35(31.53)	21(18.92)	51(45.95)	4(3.60)	111(100)

Key: f- Frequency- frequency, %- percentage

Table 8 shows the reasons for or against the wearing of trousers by ladies in church. 35(31.53) of the respondents said when ladies avoid trousers in church it expresses good morals. Another 21 (18.92%) said it is not African for the ladies to wear trousers in church during worship. This argument is again not valid because as much as these respondents feel it is not African for women to adorn themselves in trousers during worship, we may as well argue that the other dressing codes which have been embraced are also not African. They were only introduced into Africa with the advent of colonialism. In fact, traditional African used to adorn more scantily as compared to the trouser for women which is loathed by the society on decency grounds. Furthermore, the church should instead embrace the Bible rather than African cultural positions.

A majority of respondents 51 (45.95%) observed that wearing trousers by ladies in church was against Biblical teachings. This standpoint can be understood since the study was being carried out in Church and they had to use the Bible to defend their standpoint. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier on, the

study population was largely non-literate and thus depended on the top leadership who include the pastors for interpretation of the Bible. The leadership had in turn socialized the congregation to believe that what they believed was right and Biblical.

The study revealed that only 21 (18.92%) of the respondents said it is un-African for ladies to wear trousers in church. The 38.33% of the 180 respondents were in support of women adorning trousers during worship is an indication that some church goers (both male and female) no longer think that dressing has any influence on one's faith. This position showed that there is a part of the Church membership of FGCK in Mumias that already sees that belief and dressing are two different things.

Perception of the Extent of Biblical Influence on Women Dressing in FGCK in Mumias

The extent to which these positions were influenced by the Bible was one of the items in the questionnaire. Responses were rated and analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The results were presented in Table 10.

Table-3: Perception of the extent of Biblical influence on women dressing in FGCK in Mumias

Gender	Women shouldn't wear trousers F (%)	Women should wear trousers F (%)	Women should be decent F (%)	Freedom of choice F (%)	I don't know F (%)	Total
Male	11 (6.11)	01 (0.56)	41 (22.78)	05 (2.78)	18 (10.00)	
Female	21 (11.67)	00 (00)	47 (26.11)	06 (3.33)	30 (16.67)	
Total	32 (17.78)	01 (0.56)	88 (48.89)	11 (6.11)	48(26.67)	180 (100)

Key: f- frequency, %- percentage

The responses on the extent to which FGCK, Mumias LCA had been influenced by the Bible on women dressing in their policy were varied. The study revealed that 88 (48.89%) of the sampled respondents were of the opinion that the Biblical position was that women should be decent in their dressing. Another 48 (26.67%) of those sampled had no idea whether or not their church policy on dressing for women had been influenced by the Bible or not. Another 32 (17.78%) of those sampled maintained that the position that women shouldn't wear trousers was Biblical, while the remaining 11 (6.11%) thought that women had freedom of choice in the way they dress in church was Biblical.

The Society, Church, and the Bible on Wearing of Trousers by Women: A Discussion

Further interrogation of these positions on women adorning on trousers during worship points out diverse interpretation of the scriptural texts as challenged by the changed contexts. For example, the scripture is quoted to say that a woman should not wear a man's clothing. This does not necessarily imply the trouser even though many respondents in this study maintained so. The study points out in relation to context that when the Bible was being written, there were no trousers whatsoever. Furthermore, dressing varies from one culture to another yet all religions including Christianity are culture bound. When a flowing robe may be a woman's dressing in one culture, it may be a man's clothing in another culture; while a skirt may be a woman's clothing in another, and it may be clothing for men in another culture as is the case of kilts for Scottish men [12].

It is therefore evident that the negative attitude towards trousers for women during worship in FGCK, LCA though Biblically baseless, had influenced the dressing practices of women in the very church. Women fear adorning themselves in trousers for fear of stigma, segregation and false accusations hinging on sexual morality. The irony in this regard is that a majority of women were also against fellow women adorning themselves in trousers during worship and even beyond this. The latter category of women it would seem, assist in perpetuating the evil of oppression against fellow women as opposed to supporting those women seeking liberation in church as the Bible commands and as the dressing in trousers may express. Trouser for a woman is increasingly considered as a symbol of freedom since it enables the woman to move about freely and go about her daily concerns with ease. The trouser has got nothing to do with one's spirituality. Phiri [13] cautions that issues of holiness and impunity should not be used in the Church to undermine the humanity of women. Any type of clothing can be both decent and indecent based on one's culture, beliefs and convictions.

Forbidding of trousers for women during worship in FGCK, Mumias LCA is creation of society (Church implied) and not the Bible parse. Needless to say, the church is a collection of people from the society so they carry on their peculiarity even in the church. This means that male domination as a phenomenon common in many societies is also practiced in church albeit indirectly. Forbidding women from adorning in trousers in general may have many interpretations including amounting to oppression of women right inside the church. These very rules that are dictated by men have their roots right from the society all the way to the church under the rubric of male domination. Women who want to be considered as faithful adherents of church have to dress in a way that is acceptable to the dominants males. Worse still, even after dressing in an acceptable manner, they are still not considered for any meaningful leadership positions. This study proved this fact where in overall only 18 of the female respondents held leadership positions as opposed to 26 male respondents in such leadership positions despite the latter's inferior numbers.

SUMMARY

The church under study exhibited resistance to the cotemporary trends and is rigid to modernization in the changing world that in many ways implied freedom and equalization from ties of community and tradition that occasionally weighed down the woman

This church's constitution does not contradict the Bible at all in matters of dress and especially for women. It does not whatsoever dictate the kind of clothing that should be adorned by either sexes of its adherents neither does it have an official dress code for worship services. Unfortunately the clergy who are all men do not propagate the true position of the church policy on dress to the faithful. The study further revealed that some of the clergy are at variance with the FGCK constitution [14] in regard to dress. Instead they have imported patriarchy into the church which either frustrates or thwarts the effort of women to be equal members with men in church. The women are voiceless since they don't have any representation in the church leadership nor the decision making bodies of the church under study.

CONCLUSIONS

The issue of gender and dressing in church is an important topic that has generated widespread debate. This debate is healthy and addresses the concern of women in the contemporary society. The use of trousers by women emerges as a symbolism of freedom for the woman in her pursuit of acceptance, equality and happiness. This freedom ought to be extended to education and participation in leadership and decision making in the church as revealed by the study.

To this end, the study finds that indeed there was considerable negative attitude towards adornment in trousers by women during worship in FGCK, Mumias LCA. It was clear that this church had effectively used prohibition against trousers for women during worship as part of the general barrier against women engagement in Ministry and thus limited or thwarted their participation in church rituals and activities. This fits well in the general scheme of exclusion of women from church activities however adept they might be just because they are women. As it were, the women in this church are voiceless because all the top leadership are men who speak one language; the societal patriarchal language against women. In this language it is men who make rules and interpret the church policy. The women in FGCK Mumias LCA lacked freedom that includes participation in leadership and decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed a glaring lack of understanding and or a complete ignorance about FGCK church policy on the issue of dressing by the members of the church. It is recommended that this church should make the church policy public. This can be done by making the documentation easily accessible to members. This policy can be availed in libraries and in book stores in form of text and or in electronics devices. The clergy should enlighten the adherents on the content of the church policy on dressing which is not biased against the woman in anyway. The faithful should be made aware that this church policy does not prohibit women from adorning themselves in trousers during worship neither do they have a particular dress code for women and the church as a whole. All these pointed towards gender bias against women in the church.

To this end the study recommends that the church reconsiders its position on the empowerment of women toward realizing universal equality of sexes which is today one of the global social goals. These recommendations fits in well with the general mandate of the church which is to try as much as possible to bent the society towards the vision of Jesus Christ of a free and just human societies. In this vision, women like the rest of the oppressed in the society, must be liberated.

Theological training for pastors and church leaders will be of great importance. They should be trained in areas related to exegesis and hermeneutics for better leadership skills and better teaching of church members.

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