

The quest for women's agency: An Africana Womanist's perspective of gender involvement in global pandemics, the case of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The paper is a qualitative exploration of the role and involvement of women in global pandemics, especially HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. Women are regarded as a biologically weak species yet so important that a family cannot run without them, thus the African proverb 'musha mukadzi' (A home can only be called a home with a woman around). Their gender makeup deprives them of so many opportunities, and it often makes them susceptible to being regarded as the 'other' compared to their male counterparts. Granted their central role in the home, let alone in responding to a global pandemic like HIV/AIDS, need not be overemphasized. Noteworthy, African culture and religion have given women the power to be at the center of their homes despite the patriarchal system that characterizes most African societies. Women in African culture play a central role by virtue of their connection with the Earth as healers and nurturers of life. Socially, politically, and economically, the centrality of a woman cannot be overlooked; hence, her participation in the global pandemic of HIV/AIDS has given impetus to this research. Using Zimbabwe as a case study, the research purposively selected women and girls in Gweru urban whose families have been affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic to assess their responsibilities and roles in handling the situation. Guided by the Africana womanist perspective, an African-centered paradigm on gender, the article argues that locating women's agency in the face of global pandemics gives them the respect that they deserve, hence the researcher's motivation to delve into the issue of gender participation in that regard. Thus, in the quest for women's agency, the paper gives African women the mandate to be at the helm of the family in the face of HIV/AIDS in Zimbabwe. Their role positions them as an important supporting system in communities that sometimes denigrate them.