

# AN INVESTIGATION ON GENDER DISPARITIES OF CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE: A CASE OF MBOONI WEST SUB-COUNTY IN MAKUENI COUNTY, KENYA

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## ABSTRACT

Gender disparities are prevalent in most churches around the globe. Ideally, the number of men who attend churches is significantly lower than that of women. Numerous past studies have affirmed this assertion by postulating evidence-based arguments that show that there are more women than men in the church. Gender imbalance in churches has proved to be a social problem that needs to be addressed in order to change the status quo. Remarkably, it is imperative to first examine the underlying factors that contribute to this imbalance. This study was conducted to investigate the prevalence of gender disparities in church attendance and membership in Mbooni West sub county churches. Primarily, the study was aimed at answering the following questions: What is the ratio of men to women in church membership and attendance? Which factors influence church membership and attendance? What is the theological foundation behind church membership and attendance? What is the role of the church leadership in mainstreaming church membership and attendance among men? The research design used in this study is majorly based on a quantitative approach as it relies much on numerical figures and statistics. For instance, the researcher selected a total of fifteen (15) churches out of the one hundred and fifty-six (156) churches that are located in Mbooni West Sub County. The sub county has three divisions namely Mbooni, Kalawani and Tulimani. Purposive sampling was used to select five main churches that were to be studied. These comprised of the African Inland Church(A.I.C),the Roman Catholic church(R.C),the Africa Brotherhood Church(A.B.C),the seventh Day Adventist Church(SDA) and the Salvation Army(S.A).One branch of each of the churches was identified through random sampling. Primarily, the researcher conducted interviews with relevant priests/pastors. Further, two women and two men are church goers were selected through subjective sampling in each of the fifteen churches. Open questionnaires were administered to the selected cohorts. Additionally, the researcher interviewed 30 men who are not church goers. The study findings indicated that there are fewer men than women in Mbooni West Sub county churches. Besides, it was established that cultural, economic, religious and natural attributes are some of the factors that contribute to the disparities. Consequently, the researcher recommended that creation of awareness and sensitization on the importance of church membership among men was necessary. Holding of seminars and workshops to remediate the disparities one of the strategies recommended in this study. Additionally, other scholars are called upon to examine the same subject matter and come up with alternative recommendations

**Key terms:** *Gender disparity, attendance ratio, theological foundations, church leadership.*

## Background to the Study

Church attendance is critical to providing spiritual nourishment to both men and women. However, a close look at the attendance and membership rates in most churches reveals that there are more women than men who attend church weekly and especially on Sundays. Remarkably, women outnumber men in weekly church attendance in every major Christian denomination. Most churches register more female members as reflected in their attendance at worship centers. Contrariwise, men are noticeably few in the pews hence; Churches need to reach out to men in order to strike a gender balance.

The U.S Congregational church survey (USCS) revealed that an average American congregation is roughly 61% female and 39% male. Likewise, a study conducted in Burma in 2007 showed that though 5/6 men consider themselves Christian and profess faith in God, only a fraction of this number attends church. Consequently, men are less than women in most churches.

Romania (2012) of Canada notes that there has been an alarming reduction in the number of men attending church and participating in church activities. He asserts that many men are ignorant of religion. David Murrow (2013) posits that though the church leadership is a man's club, nearly every other area of the church life is dominated by women. On the underscore, almost all branches of Christianity encourage church attendance in obedience to the fourth commandment about Sabbath day. Women are the majority in church membership, choir enrollment, Bible study and cell groups. Whenever large numbers of Christians gather, it is easy to note the striking gender imbalance in the congregation. Additionally, Murrow argues that almost every man has considered affiliation to the church but two thirds find it impractical. This is evident through activities such as baptism confirmation, prayer vigils, weekend challenges etc. Ideally, the average man agrees with Christian beliefs but fails to realize the need to attend church. Men's disinterest in church attendance is prevalent all over the world.

A 2014 study conducted in Uganda revealed that the average weekly church attendance of men in Anglican churches went down by 0.3% compared with 2012. In 2013, the pew research center reported that 37% of all Ugandan males attended church on a weekly basis. Further, a survey body named Gallup estimated the weekly church attendance of Ugandan males in 2013 as 39%. Based on data spanning from 1990 to 1991, it was estimated that the country with the highest male church attendance in the world was Nigeria with 89% and the lowest being the Soviet Union with a paltry 2%. Nigerian data was highly congruent as the country is religiously diverse with a population of 50.1% Muslim and 48.2% Christian.

A survey commissioned by the Epoca magazine in 2005 showed that 29% of Tanzanian men attend church weekly and indicated that the percentage it is lesser than in Nigeria but higher than that of Uganda. In Kenya, we find the same phenomenon. The national church council of Kenya (NCK) acknowledges that men are few in the church as compared to their female counterparts. In the year 2014 for example; NCK records that the ratio of men to women in the church was 3:7 (NCK, 2014). In the Africa inland church (A.I.C), Bishop Yego (2012)

confirms that in the national prayer conference which is held annually at Kasarani stadium, the men have incessantly shown less attendance. Additionally, Pastor Justus Yumbya (2014) confirms that only 13000 men attended the last national conference, against 45000 women, making the ratio 22.41.

In the Roman Catholic Church of Makueni Dioceses, Bishop Martin Kivuva observed that in the annual church registration data (2011), the Catholic Men Association (C.M.A) were only 20 percent of the entire congregation while women formed 80 percent. In Tawa Holy Trinity Catholic Church, baptism records dating back to 2015 revealed that only 25 percent of all baptized members were men. In Mbooni deanery which portrays many parishes put together, the choir registers depicted a similar phenomenon whereby the men are 22% while women are 78 %.

Membership in the small Christian groups, commonly known as cell groups also depicted a similar trend. In St. Josephs Kilombani small Christian group, 33 percent were men while 67 percent were women. The researcher therefore sought to find out why Christianity in Mbooni West Sub County has not attracted as many men as women into church membership and attendance, resulting to creation of a severe gender disparity in the church.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Numerous researches about the gender disparity in church membership and attendance have been carried out in the past. The phenomenon of more women than men dominating the pews in every Sunday service is evident in almost all churches. Previous researchers have made enormous efforts to uncover the reasons why women are more in church as compared to men (Kinuthia 2003). However, nothing much has been established about the reasons why men do not frequent churches as women both in membership and attendance especially in Mbooni West Sub County churches. Therefore, this study sought to investigate the factors for the gender disparity in church membership and attendance in Mbooni west Sub County in Makueni County. The researcher attempted to answer the question: why has Christianity not attracted as many men as women to membership and attendance in church activities?

### **Literature Review**

The theoretical framework is based on the work of Talcott Parsons (1979-1902) on structural differentiation theory. Ideally, it postulates that differentiation involves thinking about the extent to which religious institutions become separated from secular institutions and spheres of influence. Parsons developed an explicit evolutionary theory of social change that he applied to the comparative analysis of society. He states that, by societies constantly adapting to their changing environments, they undergo structural differentiation. This change enhances functional adaptation; a society's subsystems become progressively differentiated, which then allows their more flexible mobilization for more varied purposes.

In the contemporary world, women attend church in larger numbers than men. In England, out of every 100 church attendees, 55 are women and 45 are men. The variation is most

evident in liberal non-conformist churches, such as the Methodist church, where the ratio of female to male is (60:40). Evangelical churches depict the same trend with independent churches having women to men ratio of 53:46 while the Baptist church has a 57:43 female to male ratio. On the underscore, the Roman Catholic Church has a general female to male ratio of 54:45(Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism).

According to Murrow Media Inc, (March 22, 2016), majority of church employees are women (except for ordained clergy, who are overwhelmingly male). He affirms the sad fact that over 70 percent of the boys raised in church abandon it during their teenage years. He also notes that more than 90 percent of American men believe in religion and five out of six view themselves as Christian. However, only one out of six attend church on a given Sunday.

The dimension of religious life where the differences between males and females seem to be largest is in private prayer (Argyle&Beit-Hallahmi,1975:Ch 5). This has caused several researchers to wonder whether men engage in religious practices only when they are in public, but tend to shun private devotions where there is no social pressure. There is the fact that women are more likely to engage in private devotions than men.

Remarkably, men have always been the custodians of African Culture and region. In most African communities, men presided over religious functions. Sacrifices and offerings, which constitute some of the commonest acts of worship among African people, were offered by men. All these forms of worship were accompanied by prayers which were conducted by religious personnel or officials who were often men. For instance, when Abaluhya old men arose in the morning, they knelt down facing east and prayed to God, spitting and asking Him to let the day dawn well. They pleaded with God to pour upon his people His medicine of health. They burnt incense at the same time and believed that God would hear their prayers, stretch out His hand and free them from sicknesses. They also prayed before going to gather food and hunt. (Mbiti 2005).

It is evident therefore, that in traditional society men were more committed to religious activities than women. However, this commitment seems not to have been passed on to male children and thus most Churches are deprived of men in both membership and participation.

In many African societies, men are the breadwinners. They work outside the home and have their social lives in clubs or hotels either watching football matches or chatting with friends. On the underscore, women and children are often left at home. According to Okoye (2008), the economic theory of human behavior holds that since most women earn less than men, they tend to attach less value to their time. Consequently, they face no risk of loss by failing to pursue economic prosperity. This argument holds water and is seemingly valid. On the underscore, precepts of modern Christianity especially in the USA offer earthly rather than heavenly rewards. This is very different from the early church which in which persecution was portrayed alongside miracles of healing.

Traditionally, the African men were mentored to be providers. Men were trained on how to take care of their families just after initiation. The society therefore nurtures men to be the

sole breadwinners of the society. Subsequently, men seek employment in the urban areas immediately after school completion. They have their social lives in clubs or hotels either watching football matches or chatting with friends. Women and children are often left at home in rural areas. This leads to a low number of men in the local churches than it is for women who are left to take care of the homes. However, even in urban churches the same phenomenon has been observed where men seldom attend church. Thus, men fail to attend church in their rural homes and even in urban places where they have migrated to in search of jobs. Therefore, economic factors contribute to gender disparity, though not to a significant extent.

According to Christian (2012), the human sex ratio, conventionally defined as the number of males per 100 females, varies greatly between countries and regions. Differences in mortality by sex are now particularly advanced in age and also during the neonatal period. There is high biological frailty of the male infant with congenital defect and the birth process. In Western Europe and North America, female children typically have a substantial survival advantage that is rare in Africa.

Gender disparities in church membership are possibly propagated by nature functionalism Gray (1998) and Garai & Scheinfeld (1990). There are some obvious reasons for this. For instance, women are more directly involved in risky events that are matters of life and death and it is only in this century that birth rates and child mortality rates have reduced significantly.

According to Grace Nafula of the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics Wote branch (2015), the total population records of Mbooni west Sub County in the years 2012, 2013 and 2014 showed that, the general gender disparity is not as wide as it is evident in the church. For example, in the year 2012 the population was 66,460 males against 74,441 females. This shows that the ratio of men to women was 47.17% for the males and 52.83% for the females. According to this study it is evident that women slightly outnumber men. Therefore, this cannot be the reason for the clear disparity between the number of men as compared to women in church membership and attendance.

In the early church, the key followers of Jesus Christ were men. In Mathew 4:18, Jesus called four men as his first disciples as he walked along the shore of Galilee i.e. Simon Peter and his brother Andrew and he made them fishers of men. He later called eight more to follow him and be in his inner circle. All the twelve apostles were men. In the early and medieval church only men were allowed to ascend to the position of Popes, Arch bishop, Bishop, priests and deacons. Until recently, the leadership of the church has been dominated by men. Men preached, taught, baptized and gave sacraments.

The New Testament depicts a continuation of this sense of corporateness. Jesus comes for the salvation of the people. He gathers a group of twelve disciples, corresponding in number to the tribes of Israel; clearly they are in his mind the nucleus of the new Israel, the new people of God whom He will bind to God in the new covenant through his redemptive mission. Jesus explicitly refers to the 'church' which will arise beyond the climax of his ministry and his

final commission clearly envisages a continual community of faith and witness. As the gospel spread to the Gentile world, the disciples grouped in churches in the different segments of the population (Acts 11:26).

The accessed literature indicates that followers of Jesus Christ have always comprised a large percentage of women. Scriptural teachings indicate that many women supported Jesus and His disciples during their ministry. Previous researchers have found out that the upbringing of men brings the difference. Ideally, most men are brought up by fathers who did not attend church services and so have no masculine role models for involvement in churches. However, this may not be the prime reason for gender imbalance in today's churches. On the underscore, sentimental church music tends to keep men away. Men need to be totally encouraged and motivated to attend the churches by all means. This research therefore comprehensively brings out the main reasons as to why the number of men is far less as compared to women in the church attendance and consequently gives suggestions on how to reduce the said gap.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

In this study, various methods of data collection were applied. These comprised of interviews schedules and questionnaires which were used to gather data. The researcher left the questionnaires to the respondent's and picked them later. Moreover, Face to face interviews were conducted with fifteen (15) Priests/ Pastors and thirty (30) men who do not attend church. The study was conducted in Mbooni west sub-county which has three (3) divisions namely: Tulimani, Kalawani and Mbooni. According to Magenta (2003), it is not possible to study a whole population. The five denominations had a total membership of 2108 followers. The researcher therefore selected the target population of a hundred and five (105) participants who included the men, women and priests (active members of the church) and thirty men who are not church goers. Purposive sampling was applied to select the five main denominations in Mbooni west Sub County namely; Africa Inland Church (A.I.C), Roman Catholic Church (R.C.C), Salvation Army (SA) and Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) and Africa Brotherhood Church (ABC). Random sampling was used to select three (3) congregations from each of the five (5) denominations, giving a total of fifteen (15) congregations. In each of the sampled congregations, the researcher administered interview schedules on fifteen (15) Priest/Pastor. Purposive sampling was applied to select two (2) women and two (2) men who are active in church activities in each of the fifteen (15) churches, giving a total of sixty (60) respondents, who were served with questionnaires. Snowball sampling was applied to select thirty (30) men who do not go to church. Two instruments of data collection were used to gather information for the research. These comprised of questionnaires and interview schedules. To ensure validity and reliability of the questionnaires, the researcher conducted a pilot study in three (3) churches which were not in the actual sampling to ensure they capture valid and reliable information. The questionnaires were administered by a drop and pick method while the interviewees were engaged by the researcher to ensure that exhaustive information was received. The research analysis was done using percentages and mean, which are the commonly used statistical methods. Data

presentation was done in form of tables, percentages and bar graphs for easy interpretation of collected information and hence aiding in decision making

### **Research Findings**

The pilot study was carried out as required, with the questionnaires and interview schedules being administered to the sampled respondents. The raw data was captured from a target population of one hundred and five (105) respondents from the three (3) divisions within Mbooni west Sub-county. To obtain quantitative data, the researcher administered sixty (60) questionnaires to the sampled respondents. Fifty-four (54) responded making a sample size of 90%, which is a reliable response rate according to Babbie (2003) who asserted that a response rate which is above 66% is reliable. Qualitative data, was obtained through one on one interview with fifteen (15) Pastors/Priests and thirty (30) men who do not go to church. Additionally, the data was coded and entered in statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) version 17 for analyses. The SPSS was used due to its high degree of accuracy and ease of generating representation and interpretation tools. Among the many representation and interpretation tools, the researcher adopted percentages and tables.

The total number of respondents who filled the questioners was fifty-four (54). Twenty-six (26) were men, making 53.7%, while twenty-eight (28) were women, making 46.30%. This shows that there were more females than males who participated in the study. Purposive sampling was applied to select the five (5) main denominations in Mbooni west Sub County. Random sampling was used to select three (3) congregations from the five (5) main denominations, in every division as shown by table 4.3. In the sampled churches, two men and two women were purposively sampled out and issued with questionnaires. This distribution was important in order to present a balanced perspective on gender disparity in church membership and attendance in Mbooni west sub-county churches. The pastors and the priests were interviewed to obtain in depth information on how to establish mitigating measures, which can be used to restore gender balance in churches. Fifteen (15) respondents were drawn from all the selected churches i.e. Africa inland Church (A.I.C), Roman catholic (RC), Salvation Army (SA) and Seventh day Adventist churches (SDA) and Africa brotherhood church (A.B.C). Thirty (30) men who do not go to church were interviewed, ten (10) from each of the three (3) divisions to determine why men do not attend or participate in church activities.

The study was set to explore the ratio of church involvement of men to women in Mbooni west sub county churches. It showed that men were few compared to females. Ideally, the African Inland Church had the smallest number of men as compared to that of women. In the study area, the researcher examined several group activities in the church: The Choir, youth fellowship, Bible study and Baptismal classes.

All the groups presented a depiction of fewer males compared to females in both numbers and percentages.

The ratio of males to females in church indicates that men are few compared to women in church membership and attendance e.g. in African Inland Church, the number of males was two hundred and one (201) while the females were four hundred and thirty four (434). All the other denomination portrayed a similar trend in church membership and attendance.

The study as well agrees with arguments postulated in the (nationwide Initiative in Evangelism) which show that most churchgoers are women. Generally, the number of men who are affiliated to the church is relatively lower than that of women.

The study examined the factors that influence membership and attendance in church. Consequently, it was found out that cultural factors are some of the contributors to gender disparity in the church. The study findings indicated that men are more likely to get involved in cultural rituals than women. Out of 54 respondents, 42 agreed to this, giving 78% ,2 were not sure, giving 3% and 10 disagreed, representing 19%. According to informant 5, the Kamba traditional culture recognized men as the custodians of the tradition. Men were the ones to pour libations and perform other cultural rituals, i.e. going to shrines, consulting mediums, administering sacrifices, works of magic and witch craft etc. It was evident that most cultural practices are carried out by men. Informant 10 argued that women were not supposed to come near to the place of worship until they reached menopause. Women were considered as a property to men and a source of entertainment. Further, the informant added that men were too proud and the culture gave them an upper hand which increased their dominion over women. Essentially, men were allowed by the culture to punish their wives to the extent of chasing them away. Women who were chased by their husbands were considered as a disgrace to the entire community and this made most women within the Kamba community feel alienated.

The study findings agree with Mbiti (2005) who argued that sacrifice and offerings constituted the commonest way of worship among African people. He asserted that the kind of religion observed in traditional society involved all genders in the society but the men played a crucial role compared to women. Remarkably, cultural rituals are inherited from father to son and those sons who inherit them at an early age tend to shy off from church activities.

Pragmatically, Christianity has its own traditions which are not in harmony with the Kamba community traditions. It is imperative to note that Christianity is against any form of traditional worship. Ideally, most of the churches condemn any its members who gets involved into traditional activities such pouring of libations to ancestors, consulting medians, herbalist, medicine men, magicians, traditional dentists or any other aspect of idol worship in Africa traditional religion. On the underscore, economic factors have proved to contribute to gender disparity in church membership and attendance. The study findings indicate that men are the bread winners for their respective families. Subsequently, they tend to move from rural areas to urban centers in search of greener pastures. Most men find it difficult to integrate into the churches located at the urban areas where they work. Besides, the findings indicated that men who are economically challenged tend to keep off the church. Moreover, the argument that regular church contributions bar men from attending the church is



postulated. On the contrary, women are deemed to be more supportive to church projects. They participate actively in church contributions and other affiliated agendas.

As noted earlier, more men than women work away from home. Out of 54 respondents, 36 (67%), agreed with this argument, 6 (11%) were not sure, whereas 12 disagreed, representing 22% of the total respondents. The study findings concur with Mcleod 1981:31 who argued that the burden of poverty is generally born by women who have to cloth and feed families while men are away working urban centers. The findings indicate that gender imbalance in Mbooni West Sub County churches is attributed to the movement of men from rural to urban centers for economic reasons. The women, who are left at home, form a greater percentage of the church population in the area of study.

Additionally, natural factors were found to contribute to the disparity in church membership and attendance in Mbooni west sub county churches. These are occurrences or phenomena that are beyond human control. The researcher observed the birth rates in three consecutive years i.e. 2012-2014. The study findings indicated that in the three years the birth rates featured births of 306 boys and 423 girls. In each of the years, fewer boys were born compared to girls. Statistics from the registrar of births records indicated that males are fewer than females in the general population structure. The findings were congruent with information obtained from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, Wote Branch. In essence, gender imbalance in the general population is equally depicted in the scope of church attendance and membership.

The study findings on total population indicated that in the years 2013 and 2014, men were few compared to females. In three consecutive years, men were 211,407 which is 47.63 % and women were 232,437 which is 52.37%.

It is paramount to note that the disparity in the church is worrying. This is evident through observation that men are many in the population compared to the men in the church. This agrees with informant 10 who argued that there are many women who have a golden ring on figure but the man who gave the ring does not attend church service.

Further findings indicate that men have high mortality rates than women. Out of the total of 54 respondents, 20 respondents agreed which is 36%, I was not sure which is 0.3% and 33% disagreed which 61%.

The study findings on death rates show that boys were 240 while girls were 202. This indicated that in the three consecutive years more baby boys died as compared to baby girls. This is because they are more predisposed to diseases. However, boys have high mortality rates as compared to females. Men should be sensitized to go to church service since they are fewer than women in population.

Baptism is among the church practices that bar members of the church from officiating the main church traditions e.g. Holy Communion. Most men do not attend church functions but are locked out from officiating unlike women. This agrees with informant 16 (2016) who

argued that church baptism records portrays that few men are baptized as compared to women. The findings indicated that most men do not attend small Christian groups. Out of 54 respondents, 47 agreed which is 87%. Most men are ignorant of religion and instead of doing so, they spend their leisure time relaxing either at home or in clubs. Some men do not even register in small Christian group to avoid follow ups. This agrees with Romania of Canada (2015) who argued that men are ignorant of religion. He added that men internationally reject Christian faith since some of them are proud and want to be their own god. The gender parity in the church is worrying since the growing boys will lack good role models if strong measures will not be taken.

The study findings agree with informant 5 (2016) who argued that spiritual characteristics are inherited from parents. Families where parents are committed bring up children who are morally upright. However, if parents especially the fathers are not a committed Christian; the growing boys will emulate their fathers. Gender parity in the church is a strategy of the evil one to weaken the church. Arguably, if the church would be dominated by strong men who are true worshippers, the church would be too strong and the devil will have no chance of ruling people out of the congregation.

The study findings indicate that men are the custodians of the Kamba tradition. They lead others in administering of traditional ways of worship which are not in harmony with the church. The church should organize for evangelism through crusades, seminars and workshops. There should door to door visitations with the aim of spreading the gospel of churches as directed in Matthew 18:20; for where two or three come together in my name I am there with them. The church leader should preach on the importance of faithful church attendance as part of holistic annual stewardship commitment. The church should not be judgmental to those who fail to meet their pledge targets but rather encouraged to give next time. On the underscore, men should be encouraged to minimize their Sunday commitments. The men who fail to come to church due to job commitments on Sundays should be encouraged to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy as in Exodus 20, "God did His creation work for 6 days and rested on the seventh day. This is in line with the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment.

The pastor /priest should organize and conduct cleansing prayers since men are custodian of the Kamba culture. This will disconnect and break bondages between them and ancestors. The church clergy should direct the men to Jesus Christ. The men should be reminded every time that God loves them. Such evangelism will bring men closer to God.

The church leaders should intensify preaching on the importance of faithful church attendance all year round. Moreover, the church should maintain a loving international relationship with those who have been absent for five or more days. The church should see the need of men to participate in Holy Communion. It should therefore organize for special Catechism classes to accommodate men. The men should be taught the key areas and if possible, it should take the shortest time possible unlike for youths to avoid embarrassment. The men's faithful Catechism attendance will enlighten them and make them aware of the church doctrines and become active members of the church.

The church should organize for motivational activities to encourage men to come to church. This should be through organization of games, church trips to spiritual sites, organizing for men clubs and Christian videos. There should also be community development programs with the aim and bonding men together. This will create the interest to come to church. It will also be a way of spending leisure time.

The church also should as well as organize for honor ship of Memorial Day whereby they can have goat eating for men. This should go along with trips and games so that those men excelling well in participation of diff leadership responsibilities can be motivated through awarding of certificates as well as incentives.

The men who rely on television to watch service programs should be discouraged through evangelization and be shown the importance of faithful worship with other congregants.

Men should be involved in all the church groups and sensitized that every man needs a father. God is the loving father for all. The church clergy need to point men to the father beyond every other action. The church leadership should be given guidance and counseling on how to draw missing men back to church .The findings showed that pastors should be good role models because men see their churches through pastors.

## **Conclusion**

The absence of men in the church is worrying and some policies ought to be put in place to minimize the gender disparity. From this study, it is evident that Christianity in Mbooni West area is short of men. Churches report a gender gap of up to nine women for every adult man in attendance. The study findings confirmed that cultural factors, economic factors, natural factors and biblical doctrines contributed greatly to gender disparity in church membership and attendance. The reports are clear that men are commonly bread winners and they travel to towns in search of greener pastures hence leaving rural churches short of men. However, Mbooni west Sub County being a rural area has no exception. At the same time men are custodians of Kamba cultural traditions which are not in harmony with the church policies. Truly, the church is good for men, thus the need to be motivated to go to church. The disparity between men and women in population is minimal as compared to the disparity between men and women in the church. Church attendance moves people out of poverty as it is correlated with less depression, more self-esteem and greater family and marital happiness. Religious participation leads men to become more engaged husbands and fathers. Teens and children with religious fathers are more likely to say they enjoy spending time with their dad and that they admire him. On the other hand, men are members of the body of Christ, the church and without them the body is incomplete. A study from Hartford seminary found that the presence of involved men was statistically correlated with church growth, health and harmony. Meanwhile, a lack of male participation in the church is strongly associated with congregational decline.

## Recommendations

Principally, the church leadership has a major role to play to solve the problem of gender imbalance in churches. It is prudent for church leaders to start putting more emphasis on relationships. The basis for this suggestion is that Jesus was incredibly relational. Whilst programs are brilliant tools for ministry, they need to be used in the context of relationships. All the congregations in church have continued to be 'spectator oriented'. There has to be a monumental shift in prioritizations. Spiritual growth via personal relationships and interaction of ideas and experiences during service of worship has to take center stage. The current spectator model is responsible for a situation where more than 40% of church going Christians do not even read the bible and about 60% of the population does not even pray before meals. They just don't know how to and expect pastors to do the Bible reading and praying for them. The church must start to make meaningful contact with people. This way, more people, especially men, will be attracted to the church.

Christians who regularly attend church and participate fully in its activities have a great role to play to mitigate the gender disparity. Ideally, they should seek to approach the men who are not church goers and make attempts to convince them to come to church. They should apply a charming and welcoming approach to persuade non church goers to change their perspective regarding church membership and attendance. For instance, women whose husbands don't go to church are tasked with the responsibility of helping their men find their way back to the church.

On the underscore, stakeholders have a part to play in mitigating the disparities. Primarily, they should work in liaison with the church leadership to device strategies and mechanisms that can draw more men to the church. Incentives should be offered to men who prove to remain dedicated to church membership. Besides, stakeholders should sponsor programs that create awareness and sensitization on the relevance of gaining a church membership.

## Recommendations

This study has found out that the issue of gender disparity is a highly prevalent phenomena in the contemporary church and might be more in future. Therefore, it recommends that more researches should be carried out on other factors leading to gender disparity in church leadership.

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