

A pastoral care of female teachers facing work-related challenges – A South African view



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In the last few years, South Africa experienced a mass resignation of teachers, specifically public school teachers. This could have been triggered by the heavy workload and intimidation and incidents of school violence that posed a threat to female teachers and their environment. This had a negative impact on the education sector which plays an important role in shaping the future of the country through educating and training children. This is a serious challenge for the education sector and requires urgent attention, not only from people in the teaching profession, but also from the church through pastoral work. The author is of the opinion that happiness in the workplace plays a pivotal role in a person's progress and production; if there is nothing that makes a person happy and there is a lack of excitement, it might lead to resignation. The objective of this article was to determine some challenges leading to the unhappiness of teachers in public schools, specifically female teachers. The research concentrated on some practical theological guidelines on what could be done to deal with the challenges. Although teachers from both gender groups resigned, this research specifically focused on the challenges of female teachers as a result of gender inequality.

Contributions: New knowledge towards promoting the rights of female teachers in context of gender equality. Researchers on gender as well as female teachers who were oppressed in their work environment will begin to understand women's right as a human right.

Keywords: female teachers; public schools; Department of Education; overcrowding; workload.

Introduction

An attack on a female teacher at Three Rivers Secondary School, Sedibeng in Gauteng that went viral on social media, resulted in MEC, Panyaza Lesufi, paying a visit to the school. Lesufi indicated that the lives of teachers, specifically female teachers, are still in danger in their working environment (Motau 2018). The purpose of this article was not to discuss what the motivation of the publicity or the attack was, but in relation to this study, the importance lies in the fact that it was a female teacher that was under attack.

In her article entitled 'The impact of the abolition of corporal punishment on teacher morale', Matsidiso Naong (2007:1) states that since 1994 teachers' passion for teaching, their joy and morale had been negatively affected. Although her article specifically focuses on the abolition of corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure, it is important to articulate that the unhappiness of female teachers receives most of the attention. Matsidiso is not the only one who is researching these challenges and it is important to acknowledge that several other scholars have prioritised teachers' concerns in their research (Baloyi 2016; De Wet 2010). Panyaza Lesufi has also confirmed the exodus of teachers in a report by Serrao (2014:1). Hoffman (2013:1) quotes a report by Makwabe (2009:7), who argues that the life of Tania Jacobs (a teacher at Rhodes High School in Mowbray, Cape Town) fell apart after she had been attacked by a 13-year pupil who hit her on the head with a hammer in the presence of eight classmates.

The unfortunate situation was fuelled by the boy's defence team that claimed in court that the teacher was to be blamed for the attack, because she could not control her class, but it is evident she was a strict disciplinarian. Instead of supporting the teacher, the school went on to claim that she failed to report attacks on teachers by learners to the authorities. This kind of situation is not encouraging for people who want to become teachers; and those in the teaching profession resign in pursuit of other options. The author is doubtful whether many people realise the value of educators in the world. Stapelberg (2017:271) articulates her respect for those wonderful teachers in this country, who are striving to continue with their work, sometimes without proper support and the required infrastructure; they are doing an amazing job. While Stapelberg's statements

emphasise the value of a teaching career for some, one can still ask if teachers realise their own importance. The researcher is of the opinion that this is not seen the same way by all teachers. The massive exodus of teachers, coupled with the statistics of their stress levels, is evident of the frustrations they must put up with. Nkosi (2020) reports that over 57 000 permanent teachers resigned between January 2012 and December 2019 alone. Boshoff et al. (2014:1) indicate that a significant number of the teachers were reported with high levels of mental health regardless of the stress, which signify the poor levels in which the teachers are coping or withstanding the stress. Besides resignation, many teachers' poor health resulted in them taking sick leave and in some instances, it resulted in their death. Some teachers have been suffering with ill health for some years. De Wet (2011:73) gives an example of one, Chares, whose health deteriorated gradually, and the doctor indicated that he should take chronic medication. Schulze and Steyn (2007) in their study, argue that the stress and deterioration of health among teachers are escalating. The purpose of the article was to discuss the work-related stress conditions of female teachers as a result of several challenges. This research identified and established how practical theology could probably be the answer to overcome the challenges by providing pastoral guidelines.

The importance and relevance of the study

Although the focus of this study is specifically on female teachers, according to Harmsen et al. (2018) there is a wide agreement among scholars, that teaching practice is considered a stressful career. Research by the National Department of Education (2001) unveils that teacher absenteeism for more than 10 days at a time is the highest among female teachers and was counted among other causes such as tuberculosis, HIV, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes, anaemia and heart problems. According to Weil (1986:71), there are some teachers living with what he calls, 'silent cry', where they keep asking themselves 'why am I hurting' and 'when will this stop'. Chorney (1998:2820) in his investigation of the cognitive factors affecting the stress levels of teachers, discovers that being a good teacher, is usually associated with a strong need to teach. This results in many teachers blaming themselves for difficulties and circumstances that are beyond their control and part of the ills of the teaching and learning system. The inconsistent changing of educational systems by the government, for instance from Outcome Based Education (OBE), and National Curriculum Statements (NCS) to Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), also affected the educators, since they had to learn each system when it was introduced. According to Schmidt (2017:1) many scholars agree that South Africa's ambitious changes of curriculum policies revealed a number of failures and tensions in schools (South African Policy Brief 2010; Spreen & Vally 2006). Stapelberg (2017:5) in her research of teachers who abandon their careers, argues that they need to read a research like this one.

The struggles that teachers are facing, also have a direct or indirect impact on learners as the future of the country. If teachers are not happy with their work, it will have a negative effect on the quality of teaching that the employer and the country expect of them. The children will be the biggest losers; thus, the future of this country will be adversely affected. It should be noted that education, specifically for young learners, is the biggest investment for the country. Practical theology among other disciplines, must also play its role in addressing the crisis that is engulfing the educational sector of the country. The author is appreciative that other fields like psychology has engaged issues of teacher's stress, for instance Chirico et al. (2019), Ohaka in Nigerian context (Ohaka & Christopher 2019) and Stapelberg (2019). There are not much published from Practical Theological perspective on the topic, particularly in a gender violent South Africa. Furthermore, teachers deserve support from the government and other educational stake holders for the sake of the future of our children and the country. Clinebell (1984:9) is of the opinion that the church should adopt a creative approach to people who are afflicted with several challenges. The author suggests the pastoral care that will be contextualised into Africa, so that it relates to teachers in the context of South African education. As such, this study may prove to be relevant. Although the teaching sector (inclusive of males) has been overwhelmed with many challenges, this study concentrated on the challenges faced by female teachers, since the study aims to address gender inequality in the educational sector. This study maintains gender inequality as its perspective and female teachers are the focus of the research.

Background

The South African education system is in dire need of transformation and a contextual care model for teachers, to ensure that they continue to deliver quality education to the future leaders. This view is well-explained by Berkhout's (2007) research entitled: 'Leadership in Education Transformation'. Equality of education was denied to non-whites by means of the apartheid-era policies, which resulted in the 1976 uprisings, that in turn further disrupted education. This is in line with Morris and Hyslop (1991:1), who argue that the current catastrophic state of education demands explanation from a historical perspective. But recent research proves that even today, the education in our country is still unequal (Baloyi 2021). Baloyi (2021) in his article titled, *The paradox of the reopening of schools under the lockdown – An exposure of the continued inequalities within the South African educational sector,* indicates how COVID-19 exposed the inequality that exists particularly between the so-called model C schools and ordinary schools, where the majority of the poor children are sent to study. For example, when the reopening of the schools was announced by the Minister of Basic Education, the contestations included the fact that some schools lacked just water as confirmed by the education's spokesperson, Mr Mhlanga. Water is an important weapon, as we are all (including children) expected to wash hands

as stipulated in COVID-19 principles, while most model-C schools did not have any water problem (Baloyi 2021:9). However, the official end of apartheid brought the dawn of democracy with new hope for the South African Education system. The research by Damons (2016) by way of implication, suggests that the new socio-democratic political dispensation that dawned in South Africa in 1994, created expectations among parents and communities that peace can be restored in the education system. Unfortunately, the reality of violence and poverty remained with us to date (Van der Westhuizen & Swart 2015:1). The reflections show that the numbers of the poor did not decrease since 1996 (Msila 2013:193).

During a teacher's Indaba, hosted by the Department of Basic Education in Pretoria in 2015, Enoch Rabtopi argued that the high levels of sick leave by teachers indicated that they are not well (Rabtopi 2015:2). Rabtopi's perception was supported by Henry Hendricks (2016) who said that the heavy work burden on teachers negatively affected their mental health. Hendricks' (2016) statistical analysis points out that nine out of 10 teachers over the age of 35 were taking hypertension medication, while others may not be aware that they had high blood pressure. Themba Ndhlovu, the spokesperson for the South African Council of Educators (SACE), argued that research unmasked that teachers' (psychological) stress is becoming endemic. The latter also stated that 'nine out of 10 teachers are on anti-depressants', because of the depressing work environment in which they find themselves (Rabtopi 2015:2).

With this in mind, Crouch and Hoadley (2018:14) agree that the failure to transform education successfully since the inception of democracy, is seen as a betrayal of future generations and society. Stapelberg (2017) states the following in this regard:

Moreover, I could not explain to my fourteen-year-old son why his school's Grade One teacher, the Grade Four teacher and the deputy principal (all women) had died of cancer within three months of each other. Sadly, we did not even know that they were sick. The only sense that I could make of this, was that many teachers who suffer, do so in isolation, rejection and silence. (p. 5)

Things are so difficult that some teachers suffer in silence because whether or not they voice their concerns, they remain unheard. This implies that some teachers resign as a means of voicing their opinions, while others decide to 'drown in silence'.

Problem statement

It cannot be denied that the teaching profession is faced with enormous challenges, which are forcing teachers to either resign or suffer health conditions like stress-related illnesses. De Wit and Lessing's (2013) research unveils, among others that teachers are pressurised and expected to deal with disruptive and undisciplined behaviour, sometimes without the support of their seniors and the parental representation at school. The exodus of teachers, as confirmed by the

Gauteng MEC for education, is just another evidence of the unhappiness in this sector (Hoffman 2013; Serrao 2014).

Faulkner (2015:419) is correct by stating, that the traditional beliefs of the female roles as part of the patriarchal system cannot be ignored, since it is a stumbling block for female teachers' self-esteem; hence, they are still being marginalised and victimised. The research continues to show how female teachers are oppressed, let alone other issues, like being underpaid. This article attempts to flag that teachers' challenges in the profession, must be understood in terms of the challenges of the future, not only of our children, but of the country; and it is time that these problems are dealt with.

For the sake of this research, two questions can be asked, namely: What kind of challenges do female teachers have to face in their workplace, and why? What role must theology, particularly practical theology plays towards addressing these challenges? It is without doubt that most learners pass through the hands of the teachers before embarking on tertiary studies, but the education sector had been in a crisis for a long time now. Netshitangani (2019:22) concedes that violence is being perpetrated against both young and older female educators in the workplace. Learners and teachers are facing violence in most schools. Ngcongco (1995:18) and Zulu (1999:125) agree that violence leads to fear and insecurity, which subsequently prevent teachers and learners from carrying out their tasks.

Stapelberg (2017:44) explores the resignation of teachers and Osher et al. (2007:1263–1278) write about the classroom climate, that further contributes to teacher burnout. Since teaching is inherently complex by nature and a demanding task, it is logical to assume that these factors will not only affect teachers' job performance, but also their health. De Jesus and Conboy (2001:131) argue that teachers' stress levels are higher than those of people in other careers. Even before the dawn of democracy in South Africa, the authorities had been trying to change teachers' working conditions, but instead, they triggered stress among them (Van Zyl & Petersen 1999:74). Engelbrecht and Eloff (2001), Ngidi and Sibaya (2002) and Olivier and Venter (2003) are also of the opinion that the work-related challenges of South African teachers are overwhelming.

Research methodology

This research followed a theoretical method by reading existing written material like books, articles, newspapers and others. In reflection, the author is also an observer and analyser of the reading material. This is what Morley (2013:166) understands as the methodology that enables researchers to develop and improve their work through reading. When some TV or radio news are found to be relevant to this study, it was included. Critical analysis of all that already have been written and published, are considered as primary sources for this project.

Causes of stress in female teachers

The qualitative research of Pelser and Van Wyk (2016) in the Mahikeng area, unveils the reality of the stress among teachers, by indicating that there are many factors contributing to the teacher's stress. The study manages to show that nine of those stressors include relationship with work, job dissatisfaction, work success, remuneration, communication, leadership and management. For the sake of this study, only a few stressors are selected and discussed below:

Some effects of the fourth industrial revolution

The fast-changing technology that accompanies the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is part of the teachers' challenges. Although these changes, as a result of globalisation and the technological revolution, have been noted in the last few years, they remained potential stressors influencing the way teachers perceive and experience their own competence and ability to keep up with current trends in technology (Pareto & Willermark 2013:1). Although most educational activities are taking place online, many educators presented face-to face classes for the greatest part of their careers, and their online teaching skills have not been developed. Their training did not prepare them for the changes they are currently facing; and they can therefore not adapt to the rapid changes. Bernadine's (2019) research entitled, 'Challenges faced by educators in the implementation of Continuing Professional Teacher Development' (CPTD), confirms that strengthening the issue of continuing professional development for teachers, will be an issue for another study.

Menopause among female teachers

Besides acknowledging menopause as a physical or biological condition, it is also important to view it as a social construct that communities view and deal with in various ways. It is important to keep in mind that menopause is not associated with any time or age limit, therefore within the context of this study, women who are currently working in public schools, may also be suffering from menopause. Baloyi (2013:4) says the following regarding menopause; 'The implications are that the way other people in the surroundings view menopause, makes it an expression of harassment to some females.' This influences female teachers' self-esteem, as their gender is undermined or subjected. Generally, this traditional view of menopause would invite some difficult questions and concerns from gender activists. The reason is that when a woman reaches menopause, she is often viewed as of less value, particularly in the African patriarchal society. This also has a detrimental effect on her self-esteem and confidence to teach the learners. This is supported by the following quotations, presented by Stapelberg (2017:217) in terms of the experiences of menopausal teachers:

- The principal always says that we need more younger female teachers, I feel so insecure and frightened that I will lose my job.
- My husband says I am old and over the hill, he wants to trade me in for a younger model – that is hurtful.

- My doctor has given me anti-depressants and sleeping pills, but I feel terrible in the morning.

It is argued in a *Daily Mail* article (2014), that principals at some schools, target older women with disciplinary hearings and threaten to replace them with younger teachers, if they do not cooperate. The sentiments expressed above, emphasise how menopause is potentially used to hurt, demoralise and even dehumanise some female teachers.

Avis et al. (2004), Lopez et al. (2010) and Tanaka (2010) argue, that many menopausal women claim that they experience menopause-related symptoms that have a detrimental effect on the quality of their work lives. Stapelberg (2017:221) calls this life stage 'a conspiracy of silence', because many societies regard it as a taboo; consequently, women may continue to live feeling unloved by their husbands without receiving the necessary counselling. This is supported by Baloyi (2013:5), who indicates that some women may require counselling during menopause. Menopause affects all women, but due to the different perspectives, some unjust practices towards the menopausal women may be observed in accordance with social and traditional views.

Overcrowded classes within insufficient resources

Although the levels of overcrowding may vary from one school to another, there are enough evidence that resources for learners in public schools are not enough, according to learner statistics. Stapelberg (2017:54) argues that the apartheid policies, which largely opened disparities, are to be blamed for the current situation, since they did not make provision for the influx of multi-lingual people into the so-called module C schools. In 2018, the Gauteng DBE battled to find schools for the many applications. In her report entitled, 'No school places for too many children', Swanepoel (2018) argues that the estimated 40 000 children in Gauteng and Western Cape were faced with a possibility to stay at home for a year or two, because of the lack of room in schools. Hlantsheneni and Okoye (2018) confirm, that by 16 January 2018 about 30 000 Gauteng children still had not been placed in public schools. This resulted from the overwhelming number of applications, because of the growing number of people migrating to South African cities. Poor school infrastructure and inadequate school facilities are also challenging for teachers.

In the apartheid-era, policies dictated the schools to be attended by the various race groups, nowadays the deciding factor is what families can afford. However, various legal cases are being presented by non-governmental organisations. Veriava (2012) states on record that:

Equal education aims to reduce the infrastructural disparity between poor and middle-class schools and thereby move the country a step closer to the promise of equal opportunities in education.

This is a step in the right direction, since equal education is commendable and will reduce the stress of teachers in a

certain sense. One of the slow transformational projects in democratic South Africa, is gender equality. The government is trying, through its Commission on Gender Equality and other stakeholders, to reverse the gender inequalities of the past, but the number of incidents keep on skyrocketing. According to Shriya Chitale (2021), there is big increase in femicide in South Africa, as 51% of the women have experienced physical violence and one woman is killed every 3 hours in the country. Female subjection is a topic that appears in newspaper and is broadcasted on TV, as taking place in South African schools.

The effects of patriarchy and gender stereotypes have not left any sector of the society unaffected. Even though teachers, as educated people, know and understand that the patriarchal discourse that subjects women is wrong, male domination in schools continues and is evident in various forms. The author does not refer to numbers in this article, but traditional and cultural values will make women feel objectified, regardless of their numbers. The objectification of women have always been the order of the day, even though there were more females than males in each household, for instance one male decides for many women who live in the same family or community, without being opposed, even in the church. Freedman and Combs (1996:32) argue, that constrictive power of dominant discourse in many cultures has an impact on the preferred customs. According to Gergen (2001):

[T]he woman's identity is closely tied to her physical condition ..., to be in a certain bodily condition is to be oneself. Or is to be in the totality of one's self-in-body. (p. 82)

This implies that women are affected by the way they are viewed and perceived in their workplaces.

Stapelberg (2017) is of the following opinion:

Taking into consideration that the age for promotions to senior positions in education is between 41 years and 55 years, it is no wonder that women of that age group are deliberately overlooked. For many women, these years also usher in perimenopause and menopause. The time a woman starts to pass from her childbearing years can start as early as 35 years and ends as late as 58 years. Is this why women are perhaps seen as not fit to hold top positions? (p. 202)

To close this section, Bowen (2016:1205) confirms that teacher's working conditions in South Africa are not conducive.

Bullying in the workplace

It can be argued that bullying in the workplace knows no gender, but the author argues that because of gender disparities in South Africa, women are most likely to be bullied. Scholars contributed different definitions to the concept of bullying; for instance, Koonin and Green (2004:72) call it a pattern of brutalising and dehumanising a person, while Leymann (1996) uses the term 'mobbing' to describe ganging up on someone. According to De Wet (2010:1451), concepts like offensive, abusive, intimidation, insulting,

sanctions and so forth can also be used in the context of bullying. In his article entitled, 'The reasons for and the impact of principal-on-teacher bullying', De Wet (2010) presents extensive and informative qualitative research on the issue of principal-on-teacher bullying. It is unfortunate, that abusive principals often use official avenues to bully their teachers; hence, the decline in the quality of teachers' work is accompanied by perpetual absenteeism (Baloyi 2016:4). The daily violence that is often accompanied by vandalism, has turned schools into unpredictable places in South Africa.

Van den Aardweg (1987:175) testifies that violence is one of the determinants on the morale of schoolteachers. Dealing with the constant disruptive behaviour of learners, has become an unavoidable condition for stress in teachers, resulting in a low morale (Squelech & Lemmer 1994:52). The excitement brought by the unbanning of liberation movements, and the release of political prisoners was so overwhelming, that it even affected some children's consecration at school.

According to Kubeka (2004:52), teachers indicated that in the absence of corporal punishment it is difficult, if not impossible, to keep children disciplined. Netshitangani (2019:23) brings in another trend, namely that of the young schoolboys trying to challenge the female educator's authority and position, in order to subordinate them according to the gender order in school and society. This stems from the socialisation and cultural upbringing, where male children are taught and socialised as superior from early age. The author of this article understands this as another form of bullying, when the schoolboys are trying to bully the female teachers.

The effects of the teachers' stress on learners and the community

There is a reasonable amount of evidence that what teachers go through, usually have its own ways of affecting the children they teach. The author supports Ramphela (2010) who states:

Afflicted with social pain and suffering from depressive states manifested by apathy, helplessness and hopelessness ...The greater the sense of one's humanity being affirmed by others, the higher one's sense of worth and self-esteem will be, and such affirmation are at the heart of the well-being of human beings who are creatures meant to live in the community. (p. 162)

With the research the author attempted to highlight the stressful challenges teachers must cope with in their classrooms, in their relationships and gender, power and many other related issues. This implies that the South African education system is under severe pressure. Since no individuals can perform to the best of their ability under stressful circumstances, teachers are advised to develop and keep physical, psychological, spiritual and social-emotional health in their personal and professional lives. This will help

them to avoid stressful factors that compromise their health. When the productivity of teachers is compromised, it will result in a generation of young people not being properly educated to play their role in the economy of this country. Some female teachers often feel isolated and rejected, because they are likely to be among those uneducated. In his book entitled, *'The wounded healer'*, Nouwen (1990:84) says that there is no experience that makes one feel more isolated than illness. When teachers experience illness, they become isolated and feel lonely. Anyone isolated due to illness feels easily rejected. According to Baloyi (2010:729), loneliness affects everyone and has almost become another kind of illness, which still affects many of us today. In her book entitled, *'Alone in America'*, Louise Bernikow states that one of the most difficult things for any human is, to admit loneliness (Fagerstrom 1996:33). In Monaghan (1991:23) Christopher Martins speaks of loneliness as the leprosy of the day. He argues that it affects the young, the old, the middle-aged, the bereaved, the healthy, the victims of AIDS, the divorced and singles. The stress that affects teachers will also impact the performance of students and their outcomes (Sangenito 2016).

Professional development as an area of improvement

The fact here is that it is not only South Africa that demands CPD, but it is a global trend to improve from what the teacher had before, into what they should have to face the current challenges. In supporting the CPD Bernadine (2019) says:

Teacher professional development should therefore, be looked at as a continuous process. This is true because learning is a lifelong process. If teachers do not keep up with the global changes, especially those that come with technology, then they will not fit in this era. It is on this basis that continuing professional development (CPD) is prioritised. (p. 2)

It is within this context where the author argues that there are areas in which teachers were lacking, hence they need this kind of development as a catch up. It is for this reason that Leach and Humphreys come up with research suggesting some ways teachers can cope, by identifying areas of development:

In South Africa, a training manual for teachers entitled, *Opening our Eyes*, has been introduced to address the very high levels of gender violence in schools (Mlamleli et al. 2001). It starts from the belief that teachers must first possess the knowledge themselves in order to implement a curriculum of change. The eight interactive workshops show school staff what is happening in their schools and how they can respond to gender violence. The manual aims to heighten awareness of what constitutes gender violence and why it exists, increase awareness of the links with HIV/AIDS, provide tools and strategies for addressing gender violence, and contribute to 'whole school' strategies to develop a safe learning environment. (Leach 2007:5)

Theological-pastoral interventions

Practical theology is theology of relevance and must not shy away from dealing with the issue of female subjection, even in the context of the workplace. This is what Marshal (2019:9)

is referring to when arguing that pastoral theology must stay close to the lived realities of people. If theology fails to address human challenges within their situation, then such a theology is rendered useless in pursuit of human liberation (Juma 2015:3). It is for that reason that Vanhoozer and Strachan (2015:21) define a pastor as a public theologian who among other things should help, point, direct and facilitate people towards living an identity of their own even outside the church. Magezi and Manzanga (2019:7) demand that practical theology must be interconnected with the public issues of people's lives, including addressing gender imbalances in all corners of life. The author's argument is that theology must cease to confine itself to the church environment only, but also deal with all challenges affecting human beings in their circumstances and different contexts. One Practical Theologian Botha (2013:5) laments that teachers, female teachers in this context, must firstly be able to identify and understand that teaching is also God's calling. For another practical theologian Chisale (2020:13), pastoral care and counselling must be liberative for both sexes, and thus the reinterpretation of the Scriptures in a more relevant way to our lives is important. She goes on to connect her argument with that of the Reformation age, where she indicates that when Reformers fought that everyone must be allowed to read the Bible themselves, in realising the priesthood of all believers, it was a step towards liberating even women.

It is partially the duty of pastoral caregivers to reverse and unlearn the traditional tendencies that patriarchy has used to objectify women. Practical theology must also be a theology of liberation, that liberates women who live in fear, or were made to believe that they are inferior to men. Liberation theology must deal with male teachers and principals, so that they will develop a better understanding of gender equality, which is enshrined in the constitution of this country.

Theology of gender affirms among others, that gender equality is built on biblical principles, like in Genesis 1:31 which affirms that the goodness of creation included the female also. Inclusion of men and women in creation, demands respect and dignity so that these diverse gifts can celebrate one another. The verse above is the foundation of the theology of the 'Image of God', which had been a topic of discussion on different platforms for many centuries. The uniqueness of the creation of human beings, apart from all other animals or creation, is that only with the creation of the human being, the phrase 'Image of God' was uttered. Vorster (2007) argues that it is the correct theology to accept that human beings are entrusted with gifts, talents and potential bestowed on them by God. For this reason, the argument is supported by African scholars Waruta and Kinoti (2000:130), who argue that the stewardship and accountability that God bestowed on human beings makes them so unique. From this, anyone can realise that no human being is inferior. This is the theology which preachers and pastoral caregivers should use to assist broken women with an inferiority complex, even in their workplaces. The author of this article

concur with Dickson (2020:108) on the fact of 'How we image God determines how we relate to God'. The image of God in this context, is that of friendship; hence men must be educated to claim women as companions or friends in the workplace.

According to Waruta and Kinoti (quoted in Baloyi 2012:5), the relevance of theology must be tested by teaching that the dignity and worth of women, as human beings, had already been illustrated by the words, *imago dei* in the Bible. Women, just like men, were created in the image of God; hence, they should be treated equally to men, even in the workplace. The theology of Jesus teaches among others, that women deserve to be treated as equal to men. This could be demonstrated by the way Jesus conversed with women over and above the traditional barriers that barred him from talking to a Samaritan woman in the well (Jn 4). The big question to ask in order to open the discussion is: Why did Jesus Christ allow his disciples to go to the town first so that He could start talking to the woman in the well? This brings one to an understanding that Jesus Christ had two things in mind, firstly, to have a good narrative conversation with the woman alone, without other people knowing her story. He did not intend to humiliate the woman in front of the crowds but wanted to speak to her alone. Secondly, uninterrupted listening was what Jesus had in mind when the woman responded to Him. These are some basics of pastoral care and counselling: One's problem must not necessarily be everyone's problem, listening without being judgemental is the key. One of the things that set off White's narrative approach from that of other authors, is what Dickson (2020:109) calls 'externalisation', by which many people believe that their problems reflect their identity. Caregivers should help their clients (female teachers in this context), to avoid seeing themselves as a problem, then there will be a breakthrough in pastoral sessions. A conversation, like the one of Jesus and the Samaritan woman, gave her an opportunity to distance herself and reflect on where things went wrong, instead of always seeing herself as a problem or part of the problem. The cries that teachers have, need someone like a pastoral care giver, to lend them an ear. It is evident by resigning that some of them already believe they are the problem.

The fact that Jesus' ministry was inclusive of men and women (Lk 8:1-3) should teach us to accept women as equal partners to men in all spheres of life. Theology only teaches about the differences that exist between men and women and not about their superiority or inferiority complex. Even when it came to the point where the patriarchal Jews would want him to judge a woman who apparently committed adultery, Jesus did not fall into that trap, but released her (Jn 8:11). Jesus waited for all people to leave the scene, so that He could freely address the woman alone without humiliating her. Once they had left, He told her the actual problem, which is 'sin' as He said to her: 'Go now and leave the life of sin' (Jn 8:11). It cannot be imagined as to how the crowd would have reacted if Jesus made this statement in their presence.

Isolation and externalisation of issues, are what can make narrative therapy more successful, including marginalised female teachers. The context in which we make sound, truthful statements often determines whether they will be acceptable.

Nowadays, there is also a need that men become the voice of the voiceless women, which means that where women are scared to speak for themselves, some men should step into their shoes and speak on their behalf. This understanding was well exemplified by Simon Peter, the disciple of Jesus, who always wanted to give answers on behalf of the disciples, whenever Jesus posed a question.

Although I agree with De Klerk-Lutting (2008:513-514), who states that there are no easy solutions for the problems faced by South African teachers, it is my argument that there are things that can be done to minimise and eliminate such stressors. Safe spaces of well-being must be created and provided for teachers in their working environment. According to De Klerk-Lutting (2008:513), these spaces must among others, allow them to raise their work-related issues openly.

People often expect encouragement from others, but sometimes such encouragement will be missed. The Department, the government and communities from which teachers may expect praise and encouragement, might be quiet about this; but this is not enough reason for teachers to keep on blaming themselves. For the sake of African pastoral care, which is not individualistic but communal, it is important to take the advice of Schulze and Steyn (2007:705), who advocate for the involvement of parents in improving children's attitudes towards education. The research by the late Dr Phaswana (2008) entitled, 'Communal pastoral counselling', speaks much to this within the VaVhenda context, in which he argues that the culturally gifted care resources that involves family and clan, can still be useful to deal with challenges faced by people pastorally. This will assist in handling school discipline and will undertake the journey towards identifying the changing conditions inside schools with them, to improve children's learning. This is in line with Hendricks' (2016:127) suggestion, that some teachers believe in the critical value of families, specifically parents who should be a component of the children's learning process. Some feminist literature supports the role of women belonging to a group, which may help them persist in reshaping their cultural and personal narratives (Dickson 2020:102). This agrees with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who emphasised that 'people become people through other people' (Morrison, quoted by Russell & Carey 2002:25). It also resonates again with Gergen (quoted by Russell & Carey 2002:25), who argues that it is the relationships that create us, not us creating relationships. It is sometimes very calming to make someone feel that he or she is not alone when facing a challenge, but that it depends on how one expresses it without humiliating or exposing other people's privacy.

Although it is uncommon for Africans to openly share their issues pertaining illness and healing for many reasons, suspicion of witchcraft included, it is important to suggest projects like Letsima Circles of Healing, particularly because modern people can understand it. This kind of philosophy can also be seen in the African saying, 'I am because we are, and, since I am, therefore we are' (Mbiti 1989:145). This implies that wounded people in a community need a space where they, as a group, can share their pain and sorrow as a way of healing themselves. In narrative thinking, sharing ideas has always been a way to facilitate healing. The discovery that one is not alone in a certain kind of suffering, is a positive step towards healing among many African societies.

Whenever misunderstandings and misinterpretations of menopause become a weapon to marginalise women, women teachers need to consult their pastoral caregivers and medical practitioners to assist them by counselling and advising them. Perhaps they may have ways to intervene and advise the oppressors to also move forward. Male colleagues need to know about menopause to help them accommodate women in that situation and taking the journey through the transition with them without being judgemental. According to Mboya (2010:125), the voices of church leaders in our traditional communities are highly respected and esteemed to an extent, that their theological influence stand a better chance of changing these misunderstandings. If pastoral care givers stand by the truth to teach against the wrong teachings on menopause right from premarital counselling up to the situation of elderly women at schools, the author is convinced that half the battle will already be won. Gupta, Holloway and Kubba (2010:218) is of the opinion that pastoral caregivers need to have therapeutic interventions, to assist with this female orgasmic disorder that degrades women and make them feel unworthy. This is in accordance with what Eskin (2007:304) proposes, when he suggests that the practice of stretching and breathing, as a therapeutic exercise, will help to mend the mind and body of menopausal women.

It is in this framework, that narrative therapy becomes another way of helping people to move away from claims of identity associated with problems (Epston & White 1992:82; White 1997:7). In addition, Epston and White (1992) suggest:

It is through stories that we obtain a sense of the unfolding of events of our lives through recent history, and it appears that this sense is vital to the perception of the 'future' that is in any way different from the present. (p. 80)

The narrative approach to individual cases of teacher frustrations, would be helpful to identify their actual problems and suggest the best solutions to their problems. Narrative will help them unfold each complainant's challenge without confusing it with those of others. Female teachers deserve a pastor with attentive listening skills, so that they have time to express their feelings. The very same pastor needs to be confidential and be able to be trusted. The author's advice is that theology could rectify what tradition

has done wrong. Lastly, these challenges expose the need to have the so-called 'school pastors' or caregivers. This is what Baloyi raises in his article: The church's pastoral role concerning challenges faced by teachers in South-African public schools, is one of the ways forward. There is a support to this view from Mushaandja et al. (2013:82) who advocates that for teachers and children's lives in the school environment, pastoral caregivers are needed.

Conclusion

With this study, the author managed to unveil that the mass resignation of female teachers, while the ones remaining in the profession are still unhappy, is evidence of the educational sector that is experiencing challenges. It is this situation that motivated the author to conduct the research, since the unhappiness of the teachers affects the country directly or indirectly in many ways. Technological changes to teaching and learning and African traditional objectification of women, a patriarchal trend, are not absent in the workplace. From Unions, departments, educational managers and the parent component to School Government Body's, pastoral caregivers and other stakeholders need to hold hands, to ensure that each party plays its relevant role in the educational crisis, which is slowly killing the future of our country. The study recommends that pastoral caregivers from theology, walk that extra mile to assist the female teachers in retaining their happiness in a stressful career.

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Author's contributions

M.E.B. is the sole author of this article.

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