

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO

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DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

**Cultural challenges faced by childless Basotho married
women: a theological reflection.**

By

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**A full thesis submitted in the Department of Theology and
Religious studies in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Theology and Religious Studies**

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Abstract

The study has explored the cultural challenges faced by childless Basotho married women. It explored the ways in which their culture may have oppressed and marginalized them because of their inability to bear children. It also looked into their emotional and psychological status. The literature review give an overview of female and male infertility.

A group of six Basotho childless women who offered to reflect on the cultural challenges faced by Basotho childless married women, demonstrated how Basotho childless married women are struggling. All these women are experienced primary infertility. The study did not include women faced with secondary infertility because they may presently be infertile, but they have previously experienced pregnancy. Therefore, primary infertility was chosen as the focus of this research because primary infertile women have never experience pregnancy and childbirth, so their challenge is severe.

The research is qualitative in nature. It was conducted within social construction theory. This theory proved to be relevant to this study because it give women seeking help a space to narrate their stories, as they were experts of their own life stories. Such conversations also helped women faced by this challenge to cope.

It is hoped that the results obtained from this thesis will enable pastoral caregivers to intervene effectively and to work collaboratively with other health professionals towards delivering services aimed at assisting childless married women in Lesotho.

Key words

Infertility/childlessness/barrenness

Sterility

Marriage

Culture

Social construction

Pastoral caregiver

Christianity

Depression

Polygamy

Declaration

I, Teboho Makama declare that, 'Cultural challenge faced by Basotho married women: a theological reflection' is my own original work. It has never been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes and all the sources used have been indicated and acknowledged in full in the references.

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Signature

Teboho Makama

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Date

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wife Makatleho Makama, my daughter Karabelo Makama, my sons Katleho Makama and Tlhohonolofatso Makama.

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Chapter one

1.1 Introduction and Background to the study

The issue of childbearing is very serious amongst Basotho. Their culture, customs and norms on childbearing dictate that, every married woman must bear children. A married woman who fails to bear children faces challenges from her husband. Some of the challenges faced by childless married Basotho women are polygamous marriage which sometimes a husband suggests as a remedy to continue the family lineage with another woman. They are also faced with divorce and some forms of violence which may present themselves as psychological and/or physical. The spousal family sometimes suggests claiming back *mahali*: this is the sum of money or animals that are paid to a girl's family when she is married which is also known as the bride price. Women also face challenges from the community as they receive names such as "nyopa" that are aimed at stigmatizing them, consequently lowering their self-esteem. "Nyopa" means someone who cannot bear children. Obi and Manus (2019:3), postulate that childless women are not invited to birthday parties of children, or weddings because the understanding is that they cannot pay back such invitations.

The following questions are asked: what does it mean to remain childlessness amongst Basotho culture? Are children a sign and seal of marital bond within Basotho culture? Within Basotho culture, childlessness makes marriage life very stressful and painful due to cultural expectations of automatic childbearing from married woman. My personal experience of working with married childless woman and being part of this culture that expects a married woman automatically to bear a child are the main motivations for this study.

The study will focus on women faced with primary infertility in Lesotho. Primary infertility is defined as, “the inability to become pregnant or conceive after 12 months of unprotected sexual intercourse” as asserted by Mazor and Simons (1984:16). Thus, the research does not include women faced with secondary infertility. Secondary infertility is the inability to conceive a child or carry a pregnancy to full term after previously giving birth.

According to Tran (2010:33), “infertility has become a problem that affects 10-15% of couples of reproductive age. In most cases, such couples live childless all their lives while some eventually bear children later in life”. World Health Organization (2018) also states that more than 10% of women suffer from infertility.

1.2 Rationale of the study

High levels of childless women are still a problem in Lesotho. This issue has brought about some challenges to the couples who are affected by it. But the blame is left with women because men deny being the source of infertility. This is because in Sesotho culture, to say a man is sterile is inconceivable. Men refuse to seek medical help, they rather engage in extra-marital affairs, so this consequently leaves families in a state of unhappiness. This being the case, this study discusses some cultural challenges that are faced by childless Basotho women.

1.3 Literature review

This study seeks to explore the key issues surrounding the challenges faced by childless Basotho women. Based on available literature, the study will chart out the following key issues, marriage, Christianity, culture and barrenness. These are the key issues that affect childless women in Lesotho. The study will show how these issues contribute to their challenges within society. The purpose of this study therefore becomes getting a better understanding of the issues surrounding their challenges of being infertile especially as they relate to Basotho women.

1.3.1 Marriage

Scholars' works on marriage show that, marriage is a vital aspect of human existence because it is a union between a man and woman for the purpose of procreation and rearing of children among Basotho.

According to Ekanjume and Kolobe (2012:10), “marriage is generally known to be a union between two people, usually a man and woman. Marriage is more than just a union between two

individuals. It can be considered as a union of big families that comprises of four sub families two from both spousal families”. Ekanjume and Kolobe affirm that: “Marriage is an important aspect of social establishment among Basotho culture. This is societal affair. Therefore, marriage is the continuity of the family lineage and pleasing the family ancestors”.

Semenya (2014:21), notes that, “marriage is considered the focal point of existence and it is the point where all members of the community meet the departed, the living, and those yet to be born, thereby repeating, renewing and revitalizing history”. He concludes that, “marriage among Basotho is viewed as a union between two individuals and also joining of a number of families. A union that is taken to be crucial moment in life history of the bride and the groom. A moment when the two families unite through the fulfillment of a variety of rituals”.

Obi (2019:3) says, “marriage is regarded as a great achievement in the life of a man and woman since it enables them to immortalize their names.” The social aspects of marriage reveal that, it is a socially recognizable form of union entered into by two people for the purpose of procreation and setting up the family. According to Correria and Bannon (2006:7), “marriage is a socially recognized partnership through which generational succession can be archived”. Nyirongo, (1997:8), articulates that, marriage is a means of gaining and enhancing the social status within the family and the tribe through rearing and bearing of children.

From the definitions of marriage mentioned above, it is also purposive to marry a wife. As noted by Baloyi (2017:3), the supreme purpose of marriage is to bear children to build a family as well as to extend life and to hand down the living torch of existence. Hence if there is not yet a child in marriage, people do not consider it to be marriage and there is no guarantee that the marriage will endure. Mabasa, (2000:61) is of the view that childbearing and bringing up children serves to perpetuate the family name and to maintain the link between the ancestors and the living.

From the above, we can conclude that the Sesotho marriage according to the culture is not considered as an isolated, self-sufficient unit, but is part of the wider kinship group within which mutual aid, security, obligations and responsibilities are strongly established.

1.3.2 Christianity

Is the form of a belief system based on belief in God and the teaching of Jesus Christ. As Christians, Basotho believe that marriage and fertility are gifts from God, and should not be

taken for granted. For Basotho, marriage is a good atmosphere to engage in sexual relations and to build a family life. In this kind of marriage, divorce is impossible because getting married in a church, in the presence of God, is an important engagement for Basotho. Thatcher (1999:9) is of the view that, Christian marriage is a universal institution which, theologically speaking, is given with creation. Marriage is held to be a sacrament of divine love and grace, which come from beyond the couple themselves and potentially endows their relationship with a non-natural bond of permanent and deepening affection. Burke (2015:1), affirms that, “Marriage among Christians is a natural reality and part of God’s creation”.

In the light of the above paragraph, the issue of childlessness is framed from the Christian perspective in Lesotho, as statistics below will indicate that the majority of the populations of Basotho are Christians. The Christian church in Lesotho, through pastoral caregivers, has the responsibility to take care of childless women facing a cultural challenge. According to Leanya (2014), “Lesotho’s population is estimated at 1,800,000 with 91% of the population being Christian while 8% is estimated to be African traditional and 1% is unaccounted for. For this 91% Christians, the estimate is that 900,000 belong to the Roman Catholic Church while 302,560 are Protestant, popularly known as the Lesotho Evangelical Church, and 110,000 being Anglicans while 254,060 are from independent churches which are mainly Pentecostal”. With these facts, the Church in Lesotho is affected by the challenges of infertility, so that is why the church/Christianity has to have a standpoint on the issue of childlessness. Pastoral caregivers need to help Christians who have infertility issues by assisting them to cope, either by prayers and relevant scriptural readings on infertility. As Pope Benedict XVI, (2008), asserted, marriage is the community of love and life which presents the only worthy place for a new human being to be called into existence. This is to say the challenges of childlessness should attract the attention of pastoral caregivers because the rate at which people are experiencing it is alarming. Ayankeye (2013:1) reported that, as far back as in 1995, the reported difficulties in childbearing were experienced at 10% to 15% of married women. This is a serious issue that must be addressed by pastoral caregivers, if the life of childless women is to be bearable.

The challenges of childlessness seem not to be a problem among Basotho only but even biblical texts attest to it. The first case of bareness is cited in Genesis (11:30, ESV). Here Sarah was barren and she was now too old to bear a child. Genesis 16:1-2, (ESV), reads;

Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children and she had a female Egyptian servant whose name was Hagar. So Sarai said to Abram, "now behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go to my maid, perhaps I will obtain children through her". And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai.

The story of the bareness of Rachel is also recorded in (Genesis 20:1-24, ESV). Rachel was in a polygamous marriage with her sister Leah. (Genesis 29:31) now the Lord saw that Leah was unloved, and He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. (Genesis 30:1, ESV), reads that, now when Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister, and she said to Jacob, "give me children, or else I die".

The story of Rebekah is recorded in the book of Genesis. She was barren and due to her old age she was hopeless to bear any child. (Genesis 25:21,ESV) "Isaac prayed to the Lord on behalf of his wife, because she was barren, and the Lord answered him. Rebekah his wife conceived". Manoah's wife was barren her story is recorded in (Judges 13:1-25, ESV). In the book of (Judges 13:2-3, ESV) there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah, and his wife was barren and had borne no children. Then the angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "Behold now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and give birth to a son".

The book of 1Samuel 1:1-20, (ESV) describes the story of Hannah, the childless wife of Elkanah, the hopeless man whose wife failed to bear him children to continue his physical lineage. Elkanah married a second wife due to the problem of Hannah of being childless, but this brought more challenges to Hannah because the second wife provoked her because she was barren. (1Samuel 1:2, ESV) reads; He had two wives, the name of one was Hannah and the name of the other Peninnah, and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children. (1Samuel 1:5-6, ESV) reads as follows, but to Hannah he give a double portion, for he loved Hannah, but the Lord had closed her womb. Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb. (1Samuel 1:15-15, ESV) the response of Hannah to Eli, but Hannah answered; No, my Lord, I am a woman troubled in spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for all along I have been speaking out of great anxiety and vexation". Then Eli answered; "Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition that you

have made to him”. And she said, “Let your servant find favor in your eyes, “Then the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.

The last story of barrenness of Elizabeth and Zachariah is recorded in the New Testament in Luke 1:7,ESV, it reads as follows; Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. (Luke 23:36, ESV), reads that, for behold, the days are coming when they will say, “Blessed are barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed. According to (Luke 1:25, ESV), “this is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men”.

Hebrew women considered barrenness as one of the greatest misfortunes that could befall them, not only from a natural desire for children, but from their eager wishes to be the means of fulfilling the promise to Abraham and bringing forth that seed in which all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Rachel does not seem to have been chiefly motivated by this promise in her desiring of children, instate she was driven by envy of her sister; hence she says, ‘give me children’, a child would not content her because Leah had more than one. From this scripture, Rachel was living a life of shame and humiliation before giving birth to Joseph and she was said to be envious to her sister. (Genesis 30:22, ESV) “God remembered Rachel He answered her prayer and made it possible for her to have children. Sarah’s eagerness to build a family through children made her to suggest using her servant to have sexual intercourse with her husband on her behalf to bear a child. Rebeca seem to be very ashamed to the extent that she was not able to pray for herself, until her husband Isaac prayed for her and she conceived. Manoah’s wife was very close to God as she was a believer, she had not given up praying, the angel of God appeared to her and gave her a promise that God listened to her prayer and she will bear a child. Hannah the most vulnerable barren woman in the bible, who was hopeless without children, had her prayer answered favorably by God who gave her a son.

The stories of these five barren women are going to help to understand the cultural challenges faced by Basotho childless women in Lesotho and how important can be pastoral caregiver among Basotho women who are faced with childlessness.

1.3.3 Culture

According to Moleko (2001:34), “culture is an organized pattern of thoughts, values, beliefs and behavior that is learned and shared by a community”. Every community has their own different culture that guides them. For this study, focus is on infertility amongst women and how it impacts their culture, norms and traditions.

Childbearing is an important factor among Basotho and children are important to Basotho, to the extent that they are thought of as belonging to everybody in the community system, not to their parents alone. Hence the saying, “it takes a village to raise a child”. Mabasa, (2000:61) is of the view that, childbearing and bringing up of children serves to perpetuate the family name and to maintain the link between the ancestors and the living.

For Basotho marriage, there are requirements to be satisfied; *mahali* must be transferred. This practice has significant implications on the woman’s ability to bear children for the husband. Ziehl, (1994) points out that, the practice of *lobola* (*mahali*) implies transfer of a woman’s reproductive rights from her family of origin to the family of her in-laws. From this cultural idea, Basotho view *mahali* as compensation of the woman’s family of origin for loss of their daughter.

According to Letuka *et al* (1997:48), “*bohali* cattle signify the transfer of both uxorial and genetic rights to the man and his lineage, the transfer of *bohali* fixes the social position of the wife and children. A marriage where *bohali* has not been exchanged is regarded as null and void. Molapo (2004) is of the view that, *bohali* strengthens the mutual bond between the living and the dead of the two families of the bride and groom. This ritual invites both the living and dead to care, guide, protect, mentor and bless the new couple with a successful marriage.

For Boema and Mgalla (2001:62), “when a woman does not get pregnant fast enough and the husband or the in-laws become impatient, they can decide to divorce her and they will claim back the *lobola* they have paid for her”. Boema and Mgalla affirm that, a wife who is infertile is considered a loss to the in-law family, while a fertile wife’s children are seen as the profit gained for *lobola* they paid for her. The husband’s family invests the family’s capital *mahali* in a woman for her reproductive services. Practically speaking, she owes children to her husband and to her husband’s family. A woman who is unable to produce children is faced with a reality of polygamous marriage. A fertile woman receives all the respect and attention while an infertile

one is ridiculed and neglected. Infertile women have to cope with unfaithful husbands more often than other women have to, because these men are under pressure to prove their fertility outside their marriages (Boema and Mgalla, 2001:62)

After the transfer of *mahali*, the cultural practice is naming a daughter in-law. Upon her arrival to her in-law family, she is given a new name. Letuka *et al* (1998:50) articulate that, at marriage, a woman is given a name with prefix “Ma” (a mother of) in anticipation of the child she will bear”. This act is accompanied by slaughtering of a sheep to welcome the daughter in-law. Methekga (2001:67) notes that, when King Letsie III of Lesotho got married, SABC 1 TV news channel stated that his wife would not receive a royal name until she had given birth. This is an example on how Basotho value marriage based on the ability to give birth.

1.3.4 Barrenness

According to Obi and Manus (2019:2), “barrenness is when couples are unable to have children not by the choice, but out of certain biological and physiological factors”. Kenny (1967:703), describes it as, “the inability to effect conception after repeated acts that are normally suitable for generation”. Failure to bear children may lead to polygamy and divorce.

According to Marriage and family (1988:288), “the most common reason for a husband to take a second wife is infertility and barrenness and a family would need to be powerful to enforce this type of stipulation”. Marriage and family also argues that, divorce is another option available to the husband of a barren wife and is evidenced in many societies. The barren wife would lose the protection of her husband and this implies infertility as a possible cause for divorce.

Baloyi (2017:1) says that, “the problem of infertility is made a burden that sometimes entrenches wife-beating and even women killing. A childless woman usually encounters unfavorable treatment from their society”. Baloyi further affirms that, the fact that the husband divorces his wife or takes a second wife already points to the woman as a root cause of the childlessness. The issue of polygamy is potentially allowed as custom in these circumstances (Baloyi, 2017:2).

Sophanna (2006:88) notes that, “barrenness is one of the reasons why wives are beaten and battered in a cultural context”. Adding to Sophanna, Donkor (2008:22), asserts that, childless women usually encounter unfavorable treatment from their societies. A woman might be expelled from her husband’s house either by the husband himself or by his family. A husband

could be encouraged to take other wives if a wife is suspected of barrenness. Yamani, (2009:21), is of the view that, infertility is a valid reason for the husband to seek another wife. Kofon (1992:11) points out that the blame for childlessness rests with the wife.

1.4 Statement of the research

It is evident that there is an infertility problem that affects married couples and their families of origin. According to Moss and Baden (2015:10), “societies place just as high a premium on fertility and childbearing as was the case in ancient world”. Moss and Baden further point that, it is not long before friends, families and colleagues start asking when the couple is planning on having a baby. I agree with this opinion of Mass and Baden, as it is evident in the conversations that follow after weddings in Lesotho.

In the context of Lesotho, the inability of married women to bear children is often a topic for discussion while male infertility is never discussed. Regardless of whether it is the man or woman that is sterile, the blame is put on the woman. The literature about infertility more often than not portrays it as a female problem. Byron (2010:6) notes that, there are no biblical stories that center on infertile men. Byron (2010:87) further affirms that, “childlessness is predominantly a female problem”. The researcher views the problem statement for this study as follows; infertility is considered a women problem within Basotho culture. With this formulation of the research problem, the researcher intends to engage Basotho married childless women to understand their reality and how this challenge oppresses them by listening to their stories.

1.5 Limitations of the study and the scope

The study will not engage women with secondary infertility. It will not embark or give information on single or unmarried women, it will also not involve none Basotho women faced by the challenge of infertility. Due to time and lack of resources, the study will not be conducted country wide but will be conducted within Maseru district only.

1.6 Research question

After presenting statement of the problem, the study is intending to respond to the following questions:

Why are Basotho childless married women being blamed for this problem of infertility?

How can Biblical texts help to understand the problem of childlessness?

1.7 Aims of the study

The following aims are to be explored for this study.

The aim is to explore why Basotho childless married women are blamed for this problem of infertility: This will be presented in this research to make the reader understand the problem of infertility faced by Basotho married women.

By exploring how Biblical texts can be used to understand problem of childlessness: I will lay down this aim so that the reader can understand that all creation is for God and that God has a purpose with His creature.

1.8 Methodology

The research will adopt qualitative method to achieve the aims of this study. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) define qualitative method as a naturalistic method and can be applied to the setting of life as it happens to people. A qualitative methodology includes many disciplines, it uses a multiple method approaches such as in depth interviews. This method of qualitative research also allows participants to answer freely at length as it allows open ended questions. It is also used to gather highly personalized information and a researcher can gain invaluable information to inform a study.

My main sources will be the Bible and other literature from the relevant scholarly articles, journals and books. I will further interact with different childless women in Lesotho who are victims of the cultural challenges of infertility. For this study, six childless Basotho women will be interviewed, through telephone, computer and in person. All will be from different areas of Maseru.

This research method is suitable for this study because it is refrained from treating people, such as women, as objects of research which can reproduce a dominant patriarchal text. Qualitative research also emphasizes the value of the nature of inquiry. The reason behind the use of this method is to construct understanding within childless female participants in terms of the research questions and the aims above.

In this study qualitative methodology will assist me to help the participants in this study deconstruct those cultural practices, especially practices which are used to blame them. Qualitative methodology allows participatory approach in which women are given a voice to speak about their challenges of life, especially women in marital relations. (Reit 2004:4) articulates that, “participatory method is by nature qualitative”. For this reason, I decided to choose interviews, particularly individual interviews.

1.9 Theoretical framework

The study of cultural challenges faced by childless Basotho women is positioned within social construction theory.

1.9.1 Social construction theory

This theory helps us to interrogate and challenge the belief that gender roles are fixed and defined from birth. It assists us to see the truths that are socially constructed with Basotho culture. According to Smith (2000:45), this approach has been central to feminist research, in terms of deconstructing cultural beliefs about women and generating new knowledge about women’s lives.

Cressy *et al* (2000:221), assert that social constructionists worldwide offer useful ideas about how power, knowledge, and truth are negotiated in families and large cultural aggregation. It can be considered to be more important to approach people with attitudes supported by social constructionist ideas than it is to use any particular narrative technique, because in this way the researcher allows participants to construct their own truth about issues pertaining to their lives. Cressy *et al* (2002:218) articulates that, social constructionist approaches have encouraged the deconstruction of personal accounts as a means of explicating the social and cultural processes in the constitution of personal experience. Cressy *et al* (2002:218), conclude that; Narratives are the stories that provide information about people in relationship with one another and provide an explicit forum in which individuals make meanings out of their life experiences. Personal narrative stories can evolve from cultures, thus providing a framework for interpreting collective experiences.

Freedman and Combs (1996:109) point out that, realities are socially constructed. Thus, although infertile women individually construct a model of reality from their own individual experiences

of being infertile, this reality is influenced by their interactions with their husbands, families and society because within these interactions, their experiences are constantly constructed and modified into what society holds to be the truth. Freedman and Combs confirm that “realities are constituted through language. An understanding of language is essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life. Language is used to represent external reality and our internal representations are accurate reflections of external reality. Therefore, for the infertile woman, her internal representations of her experiences may be a reflection of her external reality, she may use the language used by those around her in order to give an account of her own experience”.

According to Terre-Blanche and Durrheim (1999), the social constructionist approach assumes that reality consists of people’s subjective experiences of the external world and that such subjective experiences can be understood through interacting with and listening to their stories. The narrative technique is employed to listen to stories of infertile women regarding their challenges of infertility.

Social construction theory is relevant for this research because it gives women seeking help a space to narrate their stories, as they are experts of their own stories. Such conversations also help women faced with cultural challenges of childlessness to cope.

1.10 Justification to the study

I have developed my interest regarding the issue of childlessness among Basotho couples, particularly women. As a Counselor and a member of Police Service in Maseru town, I am exposed to childless women in my work as a result of infertility. My interest arose when I realized that Basotho’s view on this issue is that, it is always the wife who is childless and as a result she is faced with a number of challenges, such as disrespect, divorce, violence and being called by the names such as “*nyopa*”.

1.11 Definition of working terms

Infertility: is failure to conceive a child after a period of twelve months having been engaging in unprotected sexual intercourse. This term is used interchangeably with childlessness and barrenness in this study. Obiyo (2016:10), assert that, “Childlessness is having difficulties to conceive by a woman, this is no conception after at least one year of attempting to achieve pregnancy”. While sterility is said to be a man-made problem of being childlessness to a male.

Greenhill, (1976:705), describes sterility as a man-made infertility, a process by which an individual is being rendered incapable of reproducing offspring.

Polygamy: according to (Baloyi M.E.,2013) polygamy is a form of marriage where a husband takes more than one wife.

Marriage: this is the legal or formally recognized union of two people as partners in a personal relationship. According to Kolobe(2012:11), “marriage is generally known to be a union between two people, usually a man and a woman”.

Divorce: the action of ending marriage.

Pastoral care giving; Louw (2008:15), defines pastoral care giving in a way that, “engages with human suffering and enable people to live with hope and human dignity”.

Children and offspring are used interchangeably in this research.They mean young humans below the legal age of maturity.These are the products of marriage.

1.12 Chapters outline

The thesis is broken down into different chapters which will consist of the following:

Chapter one will serve as introduction chapter providing the background of the study. It also presents the rationale of the study and addresses literature review of the study. Furthermore, the statement of research follows. Also included in this chapter is the limitation of the study. The research questions are formulated as well as the aims of the study. Methodology and theoretical framework are also presented in this chapter. Finally the justification of the research is presented.

Chapter two will form a foundation of the study. I will present history of infertility, types of infertility, and its causes from both male and female perspectives. The research also explores, albeit briefly, the cultural causes of infertility.

Chapter three: Present the reflecting team on the issues of infertility, their stories and challenges.

Chapter four: looks at the consequences and results of childlessness faced by married women in Lesotho. This chapter explores depression, polygamy, divorce, adultery and alcoholism and the impact they have on marriages in Lesotho from the perspective of childless married women.

Chapter five: will present spiritual aspects of infertility. It will define pastoral care, the approach of childlessness with prayer, the roles of pastoral care givers in spiritual approach to infertility and the use of scripture in pastoral caring for childless women.

Chapter six will present recommendations and conclusion.

Chapter two

2.1 Infertility/Childlessness: its causes and impact

It is a fact that, infertility is primarily a physical condition; however, it cannot be divorced from the cultural aspect that is inherent in Lesotho. Due to the fact that infertility has always existed, as women's reproductive roles, as documented in history are also discussed, so as to give clarity on why infertility is seen as a problem in Lesotho. Types of infertility, causes of infertility from both male and female, impact of infertility and importance of children will be explored to make a reader to see why childlessness is a challenge in Lesotho.

According to Obi and Manus (2019:2), "childlessness is a condition of being without children, or couples being unable to have children not by choice, but out of certain biological and physiological factors". Obi and Manus further opine that, sterility in marriage in describing childlessness in marriage is the inability to generate offspring.

Kenny (1967:119) describes infertility as the "inability to effect conception after repeated acts that are normally suitable for generation". Kenny further asserts that, childlessness is one of the most distressing problems that could be encountered in marriage. This is owing to the fact that marriage is seen as the medium through which offspring's are produced. Children are the supreme gift of marriage and contribute greatly to the good of their parents. This is affirmed by Genesis 1:28 that states, "be fruitful and multiply".

According to Greenhill (1976:705), "sterility is a man-made infertility, a process by which an individual is being rendered incapable of reproducing offspring. It involves interfering with the human reproductive system by way of surgical invasion, radiation with X-rays and sometimes by the use of drugs."

Baden (2011:17) is of the view that, there are degrees of fertility and degrees of blessing, but there is only one degree of barrenness, and it could be regarded rhetorically if not also in reality, as the curse that stands in opposition to the blessing of fertility.

Asamoah-Gyadu (2007:439), has a view that, “Childlessness is an issue of deep religious concern. Couples with problem of sexuality and childlessness make use not only of resources of traditional religions, but also of many Pentecostal/charismatic churches and movements throughout.” Asamoah-Gyadu, also affirms that, Christian response to childlessness is concerned; the new Pentecostals have taken on the challenge too. Based on the same biblical and traditional worldviews that events have causes, these churches mounted ritual context that wrestle with the issue of sexuality and childlessness.

White (2014:19), articulates that, “in Ancient near east the barren is the one who has not born children, her title is often simply WIFE if she is the first of multiple wives”. However, she is often distinguished as first ranking wife or wife of equal status. The most common reason for a husband to take a second wife is barrenness and a family would need to be powerful to enforce this type of stipulation. White concluded that, a barren wife represents a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to one of the primary functions of marriage to produce heirs capable of assisting with the subsistence and economic stability of the family. Dutney (2007), asserts that, in Ancient near east, an infertile couple is unable to perform some rituals which includes, slaughtering a goat to report the arrival of child to the ancestors, the couple is unable to enter into this commerce?? with the ancestors, the infertile woman loosens the whole community’s ties to the ancestors and weakens the protection those ties offer. A woman in traditional communities experiences a significant loss of status if they remain childless.

2.2 Types of infertility

According to Okonofua, (2000:208), “There are two types of infertility, the primary and secondary infertility”.

Cooper, (2009:26), observes that, “The term primary infertility refers to the situation where the couple has never achieved a pregnancy, while secondary infertility on the other hand refers to the form of infertility in which the couple has achieved at least one previous conception”.

Westerfield, (2012:498) adds that, infertility can further be classified or categorized based on gender, that is into male and female infertility. The latter being as a result of the medical condition of the male partner and the former due to the medical condition of the female partner. In this research, however, primary type of infertility will be used to elucidate the challenges faced by Basotho infertile married women.

2.3 Causes of Infertility

In this study, causes of infertility will be discussed as they relate to both male and female in order to help a reader to understand the problem of infertility. This area will explore infertility in a medical point of view not in cultural standpoint.

2.3.1 Male infertility

Kunhiyop (2008:93), Lewis (1998:12), Obi and Manus (2019:3) agree that, there are reasons for a man to be unable to impregnate his wife. The man may be unable to sustain an erection because of some accident or disease, or he may have a low sperm count that is difficult for enough sperm to reach the egg to fertilize it. Man may have a problem of ejaculation that is some men have a premature ejaculation; this takes place before the penis can penetrate enough into the vagina. They also agree on the blockage of the sperm tube. Alcohol and drugs cause inadequate production of viable sperm, especially when the user abuses them. Dietary deficiency, local injury, excessive heat, hormonal imbalance, or excessive exposure to radiation and other factors, also cause male infertility.

Obi and Manus further assert that, the semen may not contain any sperm, there may be abnormality in the male sperm production and sexual dysfunction like impotence. Lewis further argues that, use of lubricants, timing and frequency of intercourse, use of medication, exposure to chemicals or radiation and use of steroids can affect fertility in a man. Akinola (2021:6), says “erection and ejaculation problems are retrograde. Premature ejaculation, failure to ejaculate and erectile dysfunction leads to infertility. Spinal cord injury, prostate surgery, damages to nerves and use of some medicines may result in failure of a man to fertilize a woman’s egg. Akinola, (2021:9), concludes that, risk factors linked to African male infertility include, being overweight, smoking tobacco, using certain illicit drugs, being severely depressed or stressed, having

infection, over heating testicle, being born with fertility disorder, having certain medical conditions like tumors and chronic illnesses.

According to Simons (1992:19), the possible causes of male infertility include azoospermia, which refers primarily to the lack of or inadequacy of semen parameters, e.g. low sperm count, low sperm motility and or a low percentage of morphology. It can also be due to the inability of the male partner to deposit semen in the woman's reproductive tract, which may be because of weak erection or related problems, Another cause can be because of an obstruction in the passage carrying the semen. In addition, Simons (1992:103), affirms that, on a general note, poor health can be a cause of infertility in men. For instance, a man who is obese, malnourished or an alcoholic is incapable of producing good quality sperm and may at worst lose interest in having sex at all or at least in most cases. Furthermore, a serious illness especially one that is accompanied by a high fever can possibly affect semen production and semen motility and morphology. While this kind of problem is by nature temporary, if not taken care of or given the needed attention and or solution, it may persist for a long time and may never be rectified completely and can go a long way in complicating if not worsening the whole infertility problem of such a person.

Simons (1990:105), further points out that, on the whole, inadequate semen production or infertility has been proven to be linked or related to chronic fatigue, excessive use of tobacco, caffeine or marijuana. Similarly undeveloped (atrophic) testicles could fail to produce adequate numbers of sperm. Sperm motility can also be affected by varicocele. The term varicocele is a medical condition where the male has various veins around the testicles and such veins may develop into strong stands thereby unable to transport sufficient blood to the testis leading to weak or no erection at all. Varicocele may be associated with a sudden rise in testicular temperature and is mostly accompanied with pains in the scrotum.

2.3.2 Female infertility

Getting pregnant and carrying a pregnancy to term are actually very complicated processes. Females may face some challenges to bear a child. According to Thompson (1994:3), 30 percent of female infertility is due to tubal causes, 20 percent ovarian causes and 15 percent cervical.

Simons (1990:5) suggested some causes as follows, ovulation difficulties, blockage of fallopian tube, endometriosis, cervical factors, and uterine abnormality. Simons further opines that, the inability of an ovary to release an egg or to produce an adequate amount of hormones can result in infertility. In addition, inability for a fallopian tube to pick up an egg because it is blocked can also result in infertility. He also asserts that, failure of cervix to secrete mucus during the mid-cycle could hamper fertility. Enough mucus is needed for the sperm to swim to the uterus. Failure to produce a healthy ovum, and for a woman's uterus to provide implantation and nurture embryos results in infertility.

Simons (1990:5), articulates that, the inability of the ovary to release an egg or to produce adequate amount of hormones can result in infertility. An ovulation and ovarian dysfunction can result from stress but may also be caused by dysfunction of the entire hormonal system. He further states that, an endocrine dysfunction in the ovaries usually affects the endometrium (lining of the uterus), which requires adequate hormone production for fertilized eggs to be implanted. Discussing how blockage of the fallopian tube relates to infertility, Simons says that this problem results in the inability of the fallopian tube to pick up an egg simply because it is blocked or as a result of adhesions caused by inflammation or other diseases in the reproductive system. Concluding on endometriosis, cervical and uterine factors as they relate to the problem of female infertility, adequate mucus of a specific quality is needed or necessary for the sperm to swim to the uterus. This problem may either signal a hormonal defect, inflammation of the cervix, damage from earlier cauterization or it may be psychologically influenced. It may also result from the excessive use of drugs and thereby worsen the infertility dilemma.

Furthermore, another real but neglected factor responsible for this problem is poor communication between the partners, or a lack of understanding of human sexuality which can result in sexual problems often leading to infertility. In related developments, when both partners work and have different work schedules or when one partner has to travel on business, the duo may not be having intercourse during the woman's fertile period. Similarly, in a situation where a woman did not remain in bed for a short while preceding sexual intercourse, it can be difficult to achieve pregnancy as laying for some time aids the semen to travel through her system instead of standing up immediately as doing so can reverse its journey backwards or downward.

As asserted by Eisenberg (2011:6), a range of other factors such as a problem with ovulation, blockage of fallopian tube and physical damage to uterus, sexually transmitted diseases, advanced age, smoking and excess alcohol use, cause infertility which finally leads to childlessness.

For Vergin (1991:61), “psychogenic factors can cause infertility among couples. These refer to or point to psychological factors that may play a role in the origin as well as the duration of the problem of infertility”. Vergin (1991:61) concludes that, the overwhelming assumption on the role of the woman in the psychogenic aspect of infertility has been that if the couple fails to achieve pregnancy, and there are no identifiable organic causes, the woman is probably subconsciously refusing pregnancy. On the other hand, few studies have been done on psychogenic dynamics in men which could affect their own or their wives and the bulk of the research points more to the woman than their husband.

Most Basotho women attributed their problem of infertility to witchcraft. Mabasa (2002:71), is of the view that, “infertility is attributed to witchcraft, relatives’ jealousy and neighbors’, co-wives’, past lovers or former husbands and in-laws, can use witchcraft”. In this situation, Basotho believe that, women are usually bewitched. According to Makoba (2005), “A woman was not able to conceive because she lost her panties or had her panties stolen, and the witch performed a ritual on the panties to block her reproductive ability”. Makoba concluded that, the blood incompatibility of the two people involved in sexual intercourse is also believed to be the cause of an inability to conceive.

Boema and Mgalla (2001:31), discovered that women need to take care of their menstrual cloth. They reported that women must not leave their menstrual cloth out to dry it after washing as anybody can come and steal it with the purpose of baring it in a place where grass cannot grow and this can block a women’s menses thus her fertility.

Boddy (1989:75) points out that, fertility is also believed to be susceptible to other types of witchcraft medicines which might be put into the food of an unsuspecting woman, placed at the cross roads where she is likely to pass or placed on a chair on which she is likely to sit.

Among Basotho, ancestors occupy a very significant position. Metuh (1999:90) describes ancestors as, the messengers and representatives of God who is the Supreme Being that resides in

far away heaven. The infertility may be the punishment from the ancestors due to the mistake that one committed. Okafor (2015:6) indicated that, when a woman goes against the rule of ancestors or trespassed into an area forbidden of her, the ancestors may punish her by preventing her from having children.

Metuh (1999:142) stated the other causes of childlessness as adultery. In his words this is regarded as, “both a social and moral crime which can attract some supernatural punishment on the offenders”. He further affirms that, adultery is condemned, whether it is committed by a man or a woman, though the law is more severe on women. This is because prostitution destroys fertility in women and fertility threatens the existence of the community.

2.4 The impact of infertility

Women have been identified with their reproductive organs. Historical papers that discuss infertility and its causes are almost always centered on women. Infertility is a problem that has always existed as a women problem in Lesotho. They have tried to solve it in different ways, from faith, magic and miracles. Mazorand Simons (1984:78) articulate that, because the woman carries the child, she serves as an indicator of the infertility of the couple. According to Johnston (1963:6), “the role of the male in reproduction was poorly understood and consequently, many primitive communities considered conception to be exclusively a women’s responsibility”. I agree with the above scholars because this is the same view held in my community.

Earlier in Lesotho, a large family was an asset in a labour intensive agricultural economy and infertility impacted this negatively. Women seem to become victims of oppression due to childlessness and they get oppressed by their husbands and even their in-laws. Kinothi (2000:102) is of the view that, if there is not yet a child in the marriage, there is no guarantee that the marriage will endure. Marriage and childbearing are regarded as a unit applying pressure on the barren couple. Barrenness is not only unacceptable, but also a disgraceful and abnormal state.

According to Baloyi (2017), the extremely harsh language used regarding women who do not conceive brings shame on the stigmatized wife. Barrenness makes a woman feel worthless. They lose their self-esteem and feel unlovable. They cannot sustain happiness, they feel discouraged and lose passion for living which may contribute to social withdrawal.

2.5 Importance of children in a family

Children have a significant place in a family and society, as we already noticed that fertility is a key requirement of married women in Lesotho. Therefore, a childless family is not considered as a complete family. Such a family said to reject the society and society rejects it.

In Lesotho children guarantee the marriage. In the Basotho context, children play a major role than anything in the family, they even ignore other aspects of union of family in a case where there are no children. Baloyi (2017:2) affirmed that, “children legitimize the marriage”.

According to Obi and Manus (2019), “a child gives joy and happiness, a child is valuable than money, a child brings honor, family lineage will not be closed, my child will never deny me, and my name will not be lost”. Obi (2007), affirms that, a child is more precious than money, a child is money (girl), what I long for (boy), a child is the honor of its parents, there is nothing like child. Children are obedient to their parents, and that is their duty. Children are priceless and no man can have too many, the more he has the more he will be respected by the community.

Traditionally, when parents become old and weak, it is the duty of the children, especially the sons, to look after the parents and the affairs of their family. When parents die, it is the duty of their surviving children to bury them properly, to remember them, to look after their graves and respect them. Bearing children is to invest in joy. Children are obliged to care for the old. Children are seen as new growth that brings promise of future crops and plenty in days ahead,

The Psalmist declares; “Children are heritage from the Lord, a reward from Him. They are like arrows in the hands of warrior. Blessed is the man who’s quiver is full of them, they will not be put to shame when they contend with their opponents in court”. (Psalm 127: 3.)

2.6 Conclusion

From this chapter the definition of infertility was explored so that the reader can understand the study, types of infertility, causes from both male and female, the impact of infertility and the importance of children in Lesotho all this were explored to give a reader a direction of the study.

Chapter three

3.1 Reflecting team

This chapter will present the views of participants in the study. The names of participants are not their true names. The participants were responding to the issue: the impacts of being in a childless marriage in Sesotho culture.

One member in the group who was aged 30 years and 8 years in marriage, named Palesa, expressed her views as follows. She told us that she is still called by her maiden name, Palesa in her marriage because she does not qualify for the prefix (MMA) a mother of someone due to childlessness. *Moo kenyetsoeng teng mosali o fua lebitso la lelapa leo ha feela a ena le ngoana.* (In my in-laws family, one receives the name after bearing a child). A child gives a wife a name because they are naming their child after someone who is the member of their family. They recognize one as their family member after bearing a child. She went on to say, “I always ask God what wrong I did in the world”.

Another member who was the oldest in the group was (40) years agreed with Palesa that, she has been married for 20 years and still is being called *ausi* (sister) Matseliso because she is childless so she can't earn any family name because she is going to break down their family lineage. She explained that her husband's aunt told her that: “*kaha ntatao o jele likhomo tsa ngoaneso mahala rekeke ra ufa lebitso hore u tlo letimetsa*” (your father took our cattle for free, we cannot give you a name because you're going to discontinue it). The other member going through the same dilemma agreed that, the in-laws instructed their children to call her *rakhali* (aunt), this simply means that you are a sister to your husband because he cannot bear any child out of her. Even when the in-laws are called they forget you purposely. The other experienced member who is aged 38 and with 10 years in childless marriage shared her experience saying: “*nyopa ha ena*

lehae ha matsale”(a childless woman doesn’t have a home at her in-law’s family). In short married women among Basotho are expected to bear children for their husband’s lineage, because those women who cannot bear children risk rejection by in-laws as one member indicated.

Mpho, one of the participants is 39 years old. She is worried that she is aging and she is thinking about her future. In her words she said, “I am 39 years old and as I am not getting younger. I feel anxious about my opportunities of bearing my own child. You all know that when one reaches the 40s and above childbearing becomes more difficult, I can’t because am anxious about future. I don’t know what my future will be like without any child and husband as I was divorced due to the problem of infertility. I don’t know who will take care of me in my old age”. She was worried that she can’t rely on other people’s children because sending one’s child to do errands was very difficult and it was a problem, so what about in older age? Mpho feared that she might not be supported socially if she grows without any child.

Neo is also childless and equally worried about the situation. She said, “I am at the point where I feel hopeless, I have struggled for 13 years looking for a kid to make my marriage complete “*empa ke hlotsoe*”(without any success). She further told us that she better be single rather than being in such a fruitless marriage, “*ha kene kele mong kesa nyaloa, nkebe kesa siteloa motho*”(if I was alone I could have not hurt anybody).

Tseli a 37 years old Mosotho married woman for 6 years but she never experienced any pregnancy, not even once. Academically Tseli studied until class 5 and then dropped out of school. She is currently working as a shop keeper. She in a polygamous marriage and she is the first wife. Her husband has two children with the second wife. The second wife is staying with the children in Ha Abia. Tseli told us that her husband used to come late at home claiming that he is from his children and that makes her jealous and unhappy. Tseli told us that, her husband’s family, is excluding her from family activities; especially when there is a newborn child in the family she is not notified. When she asked about that, her mother in-law once said, “*molemo oa ho tsibisa tlhaho ea bana ke ofe ho oena*”? (What’s the use to notifying you about the arrival of newborn child?). My husband followed-up what her mother had said by saying, *hahona mohlang u tlatsibisa babang ka tlhaho ea ngoana oa hau*, (even in a single day you will not notify anyone about your child’s arrival/birth). My mother came again *mosali ke mosali ka ngoana Phokeng*

mona ausi, nna ngoetsi eaka ke eane Ha Abia koana, (you are a wife because you bear a child in *Bafokeng* clan sister, my in-law is at Ha Abia). She was very angry when relating this story.

It is this thinking of Basotho which does not allow them to see other purpose of marriage as suggested by Christ. As was said to be love, companionship and strengthening life. (Genesis 1:28) reads, “be fruitful and multiply”. This biblical text was not meant to curse any human being. We have seen how childlessness experiences shaped Basotho society towards childless women and how childless women are affected by the way Basotho think about them. We have seen that fertility is dominating in Basotho community, while infertility is seen as a curse and the stresses that are brought by such curse.

Looking at the first participant’s story, one gets the sense that she is unhappy to be called by her maiden name due to childlessness and this made her to be sad. The issue of naming the daughter in-laws is not the problem of our first participant only. Even the second and third participants encountered similar problems. This practice of Basotho naming daughter in-law has serious consequences. It is seen to be a serious issue which contributes to psychological problems of childless married women in Lesotho because married women are identified not only by their husbands but also by their first born. If there is still no child she will remain sister “someone” for the rest of her life or *rakhali* (a sister to our brother), as is the case in our session with our participants. This is a part of a socially construction in Basotho culture.

The other problem was raised by Mpho, it is very difficult for a childless woman to request a child of someone to do errands, because the childless woman cannot compensate it in a same way as she has none to be sent. She further thought of aging period where she will need a serious help of children, this seems to depress Mpho and other participants because as she was talking others were shaking their heads showing that Mpho is not alone on that point or problem. Some of the participants opine that, dying childless is very painful because their properties are inherited by strangers. The issue of polygamy was also raised as a problem by Tseli who was a participant, she stated that jealousy and unhappiness are major challenges in polygamous marriage because every wife wants to have her enough time or quality time. As was a problem when her husband told her that he is from the other wife when he arrived late at home.

Chapter four

4.1 The consequences of childlessness faced by married women in Lesotho

This chapter highlights the issues of infertility that affect Basotho women and their families. Here, the study reviews the impact of depression, divorce, alcoholism and adultery as consequences of childlessness amongst married Basotho women and their families, as well as to explore the impact of not having an heir or heirs to inherit the family's possessions and extend family lineage.

4.2 Depression

Villines (2018:1), defines depression as, “a complex mental health condition that causes a person to have low mood and may leave them feeling persistently sad or hopeless”. Domar and Seibel (1990:12) asserted that, “Depression is a common consequence of childlessness. Depression is twice as prevalent in women as it is in men because women are at the receiving end of the problem of childlessness”.

Depression is associated with different consequences that Legg (2019:2), describes as, “overwhelming sadness, grief, crying, feeling tired all the time, having trouble sleeping at night, irritability, anger, loss of interest in things that used to bring pleasure including sex and sense of guilt, inability to concentrate, feeling of emptiness, decision making and hopelessness, that some people may find difficult to put them into words”. These symptoms may cause a physical reaction. Legg further asserted that, depression causes headaches, chronic body aches, and pain that may not respond to medication. It is also an effect of certain neurological diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease, epilepsy, and multiple sclerosis.

The researcher agrees with Legg on the point where the depressed childless married woman may not be able to concentrate, have memory problems and difficulty in decision making. Due to all these symptoms of depression, the depressed childless married Basotho women, at times may have trouble maintaining a normal work schedule or fulfilling social obligations. These women may find themselves preoccupied with thoughts of death or hurting themselves.

The belief of Basotho about marriage as constituted primarily for procreation and a duty of a woman to bear children to perpetuate family lineage, frustrates childless married women because failure to fulfill these causes serious challenges that produces depression among such women.

Here is some literature from different authors and cultures about childless married woman. According to Abasili (2015:589), the most important duty of a married woman is the begetting of offspring for her husband, otherwise she will be viewed as a disgrace. An infertile woman is given little regard because she cannot provide an heir for her husband and the society. Ademiluka (2019:4) and Mbiti (1969:132) agree that, when entering marriage, Africans have a high expectation for children, so much that marriage is constituted primarily for the purpose of procreation. Failure to bear offspring for the husband is a stigma and disgrace. Ademiluka further affirms that, procreation is a group survival issue for the primordial public and that involuntary childlessness may be seen to threaten the existential nature of their primordial public.

From these scholars a reader can see that married women are expected to bear children no matter the situation. So failure to bear children is a stigma, disgrace, threatening existence, and such women who are unable to bare children are given little regard. So any normal person must get affected psychologically, which could manifest in depression.

Egede (2015:66) is of the view that, “a childless wife is the dead end of human life, not only on a genealogical level, but also for herself. She bears a scar that nothing can erase”. The view expressed by Egede is a source of depression for Basotho childless women as they are always asked by their families and friends when they will have children. They also face some psychological threats as they are told by their in-laws that they are useless, and they receive harsh words in their marriages. Vahakangas (2009:10) asserted this by stating that, “the extremely harsh language used regarding women who do not conceive brings shame and stigmatizes her”. Owing to what Vahakangas has pointed out that, childless woman may withdraw from social life due to that shame and stigma that may come along with stress and depression.

Basotho and Ancient Near East cultures associate marriage with childbearing. So these cultures overlap.

De-Whyte (2018:26) postulates that, fertility and marriage are inseparable in Ancient near East. Marriage in this context is the union that perpetuates a husband's lineage. A married woman should become a mother, preferably more than once and with many sons. Furthermore, children are seen as the best source of financial security. De-Whyte further asserts that, marriage is not legitimized until the presence of the first child. Thus, the consummation of the union is not complete until it produced offspring to carry on the father's lineage, the birth of a child validates marriage. De-Whyte concluded that an infertile woman would possibly have been regarded as a liability since she would not be providing an heir who could inherit and therefore continue the legacy of the husband.

De-Whyte essentially points out the fact that a childless marriage is not legitimized and women are seen as liability. This is the main source of depression for such women because that saying lowers their self-esteem as it stigmatizes them and this can result in suicidal thoughts among such women.

In light of the above, Baloyi (2017:33), is of the view that, "people with a low self-esteem do not regard themselves very high and do not think they are valuable and they are seen as people who use crutches to walk". Obiyo (2016) argues that, "childlessness becomes a greater contributor of stress than any other life problem". Obiyo further asserted that, women are left feeling empty, defective, incomplete, undesirable and unworthy. Some women find it necessary to endure the pain of childlessness through social isolation in order to protect themselves. As a result of loneliness, childless women often have difficulty expressing their feelings of sorrow and grieve in private because they feel as though no one can truly understand their feelings of despair and hopelessness. Obiyo concludes that, childlessness is associated with emotional responses such as depression, anxiety, social isolation and decreased self-esteem.

The research shares a common view with Baloyi and Obiyo that childless women with low self-esteem, lose their value of self-worth.

According to Dutney (2007:171), ancient near East marriage is contracted primarily between two clans rather than between two people, the children of a marriage are called a generation. That is, a couple does not simply form their own family and fulfill their own aspirations by having children, but they produce a generation to inherit all that is precious to the community and

perpetuate the community. Dutney further asserts that, in Ancient Near East, an infertile couple is unable to perform some rituals which include, slaughtering a goat to report the arrival of a child to the ancestors; they are unable to enter into this commerce with the ancestors. The infertile woman loosens the whole community's ties to the ancestors and weakens the protection those ties offer. A childless woman in traditional communities experiences a significant loss of status.

The researcher agrees with Dutney that a marriage is not between two married people but between two clans. An infertile woman is made to feel that she has failed such a clan by not extending its generation and she does not belong to them. Consequently, she becomes depressed.

4.3 Polygamous marriage

Polygamy as the practice among Basotho is a form of marriage where a husband marries two or more wives. There are different reasons for polygamy among Basotho, but for this study the focus is on infertility as a valid reason to enter into a polygamous marriage. Its impact among Basotho childless married women. Molapo (2005) states that traditionally, for Basotho polygamous marriages were the norm rather than the exception. This kind of marriage is still practiced in Lesotho, but at decreased rates. Maseribana (2003:38) is of the view that, "Lesotho experienced a decrease of polygamous marriage from 2.6% to 1.7% between 1996 to 2001".

Okorchukwu (2000:37) defines polygamy as a form of marriage in which an individual has more than one spouse. According to Konof, (2013), polygamy is a recognized culturally determined, socially acceptable and legal form of permanent marriage where a man has more than one wife at the time. In this case the acceptability of marriage is determined by social customs of the people concerned.

Cairncross (1974:69) asserts that, if a wife is barren it is her duty to give consent and even to exhort the husband to take another companion as Sarah did. Maillur (1988:8) is of the view that, polygamy is the kindest solution in the case of a wife who is infertile, because this is preferable to being expelled from the household, and having to look for another husband.

Yamani (2008), observes that, a wife's infertility is a valid reason for her husband to enter into a polygamous marriage by taking up other wives. Nhlapo (1992:143), notes that, "begetting

children guaranteed eternal life”. A traditional man needs many children especially boys to ensure survival of the lineage and increase his power within the clan.

According to Obi (2019:5), “traditionally polygamy is a widely accepted form of marriage”. It is unfortunate that today among Basotho; polygamy is rarely practiced because it conflicts with Christian teachings as noted in Chapter Two that Lesotho is a predominantly Christian country with approximately 90% the population being Christian believers. But some individuals among Basotho being followers of Christianity still adhere polygamy as a response to childlessness even though it goes against their Christian teaching. Although polygamy was seen as good, it has some negative effects to polygamous married women.

Peschke (2004:506) says that polygamy is contrary to the ends of marriage since it disturbs the union of love between a man and a woman. Polygamy also lowers the dignity of a woman, this is because a man goes for a second wife purely on the grounds that the first wife did not give him any child. Peschke further argues that, the second wife is married not out of love but as a tool to bear children. For Basotho, the central purpose of marriage is childbearing to increase the number of labourers at farms as Nhlapo asserts, not necessarily out of love as Peschke argued. It is a fact that in polygamous marriage one cannot have peace because this kind of marriage is not premised on peace and love but on childbearing.

The researcher is of the view that women in polygamous marriage are only used by their husbands to extend their family lineage, because according to Peschke the purpose of this kind of marriage is begetting as many children as one cannot love for those married women and their peace of mind.

There are social effects of polygamy which include competition of co-wives in the family which in turn may sour relations in the family. A polygamous husband is likely to spend twice as much. Sabila (2021:4) and Tabiet *al.*, (2010:130) agree that, “social effects of polygamous practice emanate from perceived unhealthy competition by co-wives. They give birth to as many children as they can, as a way of getting a large share of the common resources that get shared by family when it comes to inheritance. This increase of childbearing from a productive wife produces jealousy and pain to the childless woman”.

Sabila further notes that, “polygamous marriage affects the psychology and social functioning of polygamous women, the discriminative behavior and unequal treatment of their husband causes several mental health issues in their wives. These include poor marital satisfaction, and lack of trust”.

According to Al-Krenawi (2001), “infertile women in polygamous marriage were found unhappy, had low sense of self-image, lonely and dissatisfied with their husbands. The main contributor of dissatisfaction in polygamous marriage is the unfavorable relationship with their husbands after the husbands marry second wives”. Al-Krenawi further argues that, in the eyes of a community, these women are usually perceived to have failed to carry out their responsibilities and neglected their husbands. Al-Krenawi (2008:66), asserts that, “husbands in polygamous families struggled to interact or sustain relationship with the family members, thus causing them to be unhappy with their marriage”. In these families the conflicts seem to be very high due to the unhealthy competition and the need of love.

Al-Krenawi (2012:45) further adds that polygamous marriages affect wives at workplace and reduce their productivity. Adding to this, women in polygamous marriages have higher risk of experiencing mental health problems and low self-esteem, thus impacting their work and production.

Basotho culture overlaps with Hebrew culture. In Hebrew culture a man is allowed to engage in polygamy in a case where his wife is suspected of bareness. According to Clarke’s Bible Commentary, in 1Samuel 1:1-2, “Elkanah had two wives, the custom of those times permitted polygamy but wherever there was more than one wife, we find the peace of the family greatly disturbed by it. Hannah, being barren, is reproached by Peninnah, especially in their going up to Shiloh, at which she is sorely grieved”. Clarke’s affirms that, Peninnah provoked Hannah constantly striving to irritate and vex her, to make her fret, to make her discontented with her lot, because the Lord prevented her to bear children.

The scripture in 1Samuel 1:5 tells us that, Elkanah loved Hannah unconditionally although she failed to bear children for continuity of his lineage. The special treatment of Hannah by Elkanah induced Peninnah’s jealousy, which we always see in polygamous families. The scripture in 1Samuel 6-8 describes Hannah’s miserable, maltreatment by her rival (Peninnah), who always

made her “angry, disturbed, offended, irritated and provoked her during times of annual festival at Shiloh. Peninnah knew that Hannah’s reason for being at the festival is to seek the face of God for childbearing.

Abasili (2015:581) is of the view that, Hannah’s desperation for a child of her own can be understood against her social context where childlessness had grave negative social implications. In her context, being a mother conferred a high degree of honor.

The challenge of being in a polygamous marriage were felt by Hannah who was always miserable due to her rival Peninnah so this disturbed the peace of Elkanah’s family.

The book of Genesis (30:1-24), has a narrative of a barren mother, Rachel. She was married with her sister Leah to Jacob. Rachel like other childless women in the bible, has a painful story. She was continually frustrated and desperate to have children, this is seen when she said to Jacob “give me a child, or I will die”. These words came from Rachel because she had a pain of being childlessness in a polygamous marriage where the other wife was able to bear children. Rachel was described by the scripture as jealous of her sister Leah who was bearing children.

From the facts above, polygamous marriage due to childlessness is not favored because it does not bring peace in the family. Some wives in polygamy suffer a lot. The story of Hannah’s suffering as she was provoked by Peninnah and how Leah suffered a love of his husband yet she was able to bear him some children, but Jacob loved Rachel who was childless. This proves that in a polygamous marriage there is no love but women are being used by their husbands to only extend their family lineages. This is the case among Basotho where the polygamous marriage brings jealousy, stress, and unhappiness, as it is not founded on love.

4.4 Adultery

In this case we cannot talk about infertility ignoring adultery. Miller (1981:151) defines adultery as, “act of sexual intercourse between a married man and woman not his wife or between woman and a man not her husband”. Leviticus (20:21) reads that, if a man takes his brother’s wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother’s nakedness, they shall be punished. Adultery is a very serious moral issue within Basotho culture that causes divorce and even in the courts of law stands as a valid ground for divorce. In a biblical culture it is condemned as it is explained as impurity and it can result in childlessness.

According to Metuh (1999:142), “extramarital sexual intercourse is a sin in the eyes of the Lord”. Metuh and De Bruyn agree that, adultery is against the law of God, subject to God’s punishment on the offenders. Extramarital sexual intercourse completely disregards God and His commandments. Metuh (1999) is of the view that, any mode of cohabitation outside marriage is cursed in God’s sight and that conjugal relations were ordained as a necessary means of preventing man from succumbing to unbridled lust. The curse of God lies on every man and woman who cohabite outside marriage. The book of (Hebrews 13:4) reads: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous”. Within a marriage, partners are meant to be faithful to God and each other.

When couples do not accept their childlessness situation adultery may take place and result in divorce, ancestral punishment and even God Himself may punish such individuals. A childless woman may get involved in adultery with the purpose of proving her fertility. For adultery, the laws seem to be too harsh when is committed by women no matter the cause. Women get ill-treated by their husbands and community.

Lake (2021) asserts that, adultery affects the other partner both physically and mentally. It increases stress levels, depression and anxiety. Adultery or infidelity undermines the very foundation of marriage in many ways. It causes heartbreak and devastation, loneliness, feeling of betrayal, low confidence, low self-esteem and confusion to one or both spouses in marriage. Some marriages break after one of the partners discovers that the other has been cheating on him or her. Lake further argues that, the unfaithful partner may spend much time communicating with someone outside marriage, the unfaithful partner can discuss family problems with an outsider neglecting their partner. The cheated partner feels unappreciated, undervalued, as a result they experience poor performance at work and socially. The cheated spouse loses trust in the cheating spouse, they may feel helpless or trapped in marriage, and they may also feel blame themselves because of their infertility.

The researcher shares a view held by Lake that communication becomes scarce in childless marriage when a husband is cheating and committing adultery. The problem of childlessness is that, the cheated wife has no child to keep her busy while the husband is busy with his extra marital affairs.

Looking at the discussion above one can conclude that extramarital intercourse no matter the circumstance (for example childlessness situation) is not permissible among Basotho society, because whoever engages in such activity disrespects their family and ancestors. Basotho do everything to avoid adultery or extramarital affairs no matter the circumstances, thus they practice polygamy as a solution to infertility. They also practice other forms of marriage like *se-
ea-ntlo* (a female replacement marriage).

4.5 Divorce

Divorce like adultery is another distress in a cultural childlessness marriage in Lesotho. Divorce is a permanent termination of a marriage contract among married couples. It is believed that, the rate of divorce among Basotho in 1960s was low. According to Grath (1981:928) divorce is a legal or customary decree that a marriage is dissolved. In this section, the study explores the effects of divorce, either social or psychological amongst childless married women.

The consequences of divorce affect various areas of one's life and depend on several factors. According to Galarneau and Sturroch (1997:198) divorced women are often affected socially, economically and financially. Emotional distress increases, which also affects mental and physical health. Instability, vulnerability, feeling loneliness, self-confidence and lifestyle are negatively affected. Social network may also change.

According to BosandBalen(1995:8), the status of divorced woman is lost, including no respect and being a social failure in community. The divorced infertile woman is faced with verbal abuse, stigmatization or recognizable marginalization and isolation including exclusion from ceremonial and social gatherings. They can also expect psychological abuse from the community. BosandBalen(1995), further assert that, a divorced woman receives no cost of treatment (biomedical or traditional), no economic security, including no care in old age, no economic support from others, is unable to find work, no connections and restricted land use. She is harassed and rejected by society.

There are some problems that are associated with divorce. Stigma is one of the problems that is associated with women who are divorced because of their inability to have children. This woman is no longer marriageable due to the stigma attached to her. Stigma in this case is defined by Obi and Manus (2019:4) who say, "nobody will find it easy to marry someone who has been married

and divorced”. Divorce affects emotions and psychology of the divorced woman. The divorced woman experiences low self-esteem and she becomes embarrassed and more often than not blames herself. Oforchukwu (2010:73) observes that, when couples are divorced, they may be crushed by sense of shame, hatred and fear. The divorce may lead a divorced woman into unfulfilling life styles such as sexual promiscuity and alcoholism.

4.6 Alcoholism

An infertile wife who is overwhelmed by challenges relating to childlessness may resort to excessive alcohol consumption which eventually may lead to addiction. She may spend much of her time and resources on alcohol. This means that such a woman spends less time caring for the family. According to Okorchukwu, “excessive drinking is detrimental to the maintenance of the family”. An alcoholic woman may hardly have sensible ideas for the growth of her family, because she spends almost her resources on alcohol. The effects of alcohol may be harmful and cause the woman to disrespect her husband. An alcoholic woman may unnecessarily quarrel with the husband and not live in harmony with him as conflicts arise. Obi and Manus (2019:5) assert that, “childlessness brings about constant quarrels and diminishes the love couples have for each other”. Alcohol is of a myth that the users will relief a stress or some psychological problem.

Infertility is the most depressing problem faced by childless Basotho married women. It may influence them into the use of alcohol which may results violence in the house. According to Legg (2019:5), “some people who are depressed may turn to alcohol or drugs, which may increase instances of reckless or abusive behavior.

3.7 Summary

This chapter discussed the consequences of infertility. It included that depression is a psychological factor that lowers self-esteem of childless women. It also showed the consequences of divorce due to childlessness and it was recovered very harassing action to childless woman who are divorced. It explored the consequences of polygamy on the childless woman. Adultery was discussed and was found as a serious stress contributor to cheated spouse and it can result divorce. Finally, this chapter discussed the consequences that are associated with alcohol due to the problem of childlessness and the study has revealed that alcoholic partners are likely to be reckless and abusive.

Chapter five

5.1 Spiritual aspects of infertility

Chapter three above, has revealed that infertility has effects on childless women such as, polygamy, adultery, divorce, depression and alcoholism. This chapter is going to address those challenges through the help of pastoral caregiver from scriptural perspective. Addressing the challenges of infertility through prayers and the roles of pastoral caregivers.

This chapter will identify spiritual needs of couples faced with cultural challenges of infertility and seek a deeper or broader understanding of pastoral care towards infertile married women. Infertility can be a cause of spiritual crisis among couples who believe in God who is all loving and omnipotent. There are various approaches to the challenges caused by infertility among Basotho women. There is also pastoral care which is the point of focus of this chapter, the approach that has to deal with prayer and scriptural approach, as a way to approaching childlessness.

Social construction theory has been employed in this study to primarily care and listen to the stories of women as it helped us to understand their reality and experiences. According to Gergen (1985:266) “social constructionist orientations provide useful understandings of the politics of making meaning about individual interaction and experiences”. Therefore, it allows participants to express their own feelings about issues of childlessness.

5.2 Definition of pastoral care

According to Louw (1999:2), “theologically speaking, the term pastoral care refers to the consoling and supportive function of God’s empowering and transformational presence through His Holy Spirit in this world”. Muller (1996:34) says of pastoral care that, it operationalizes the will of God in crises and suffering. According to Pattison (1993:15), “pastoral care is understood as caring for all vulnerable people, Christians and non-Christians”. Sevenhujisen (1998:131) articulates that, “pastoral care is about repairing of citizens so that they can once more take part in their normal participation”. Pastoral care requires us to care for people who need care, such as the childless women in Lesotho.

5.3 Approaching issues of childlessness with prayer

Prayer is a curative or healing means in regard to the problem of childlessness and infertility. It requires practical manifestation of the power of God. It is generally believed that Christians are taught in churches that with prayers, fasting, giving the needy and other services to God no true believer will be barren. Believers in God always live with a firm hope that with God everything is possible, as evident by the stories of people such as Isaac, Jacob, John, Joseph and Samuel who are products of divine intervention.

According to Romerio *et al.*, (2017:2); “Prayer is needed as a coping mechanism for infertility. The coping strategy incorporating spirituality can enhance the ability of couples to overcome childlessness and suffering. Effective prayer can support childless women in finding meaning in their lives and health conditions”. Romerio *et al.*, (2017) argue that prayer and meeting of the spiritual needs have been seen to be of great benefit amongst involuntarily childless couples. It has helped them cope with their failed procreativity (Romerio *et al.*,2017:5).

According to Lartey, et al., (1994:71) “prayer is a way through which contemporary pastoral caregivers can help childless couples facing the challenges of infertility. Pastoral approach is rooted in the scriptures through prayer as a therapy”. Prayers of thanks giving present our request to God, Lartey et al., (1994) argues.

A very prominent case study regarding prayer as therapy is in Genesis 25:21. It is Isaac’s prayer to Lord on behalf of his wife, who was barren, but later became pregnant (Lartey, et al., 1994:71).

For Inhorn (1996:76), “prayer and faith play a positive role in supporting infertile couples through traumatic experience. It is not to detract them from the fact that there are negative depictions of childlessness within the religious practices of African churches”. Inhorn also affirms that, prayer and faith reduce stigmatization and stress in childless believers, particularly barren women. In a predominantly Christian society, there is literature which indicates that a woman who fails to attain the status of motherhood is viewed as parasite. De Whyte (2018) is of the view that, childless women are seen as liabilities.

Although childless women are being criticized, prayer is the resource to be taken as best tool to avoid such criticism, stress and depression.

According to Van der Merwe (2009:101-102), “prayer is communion within the personal relationship between God and man, it describes the influence between God and the person who prays as therapy. Prayer is pastoral therapy. Prayer is more than just a straightforward instruction to God. Prayer as therapy consists of quiet time with God in meditation, through God and by means of prayer, man is capable of the seemingly impossible”. Van der Merwe argues that, the fact that one may approach God boldly brings inner peace. The function of prayer is not only to ask for what is predictable but also what seems to be humanly impossible. The focus is not on the quality of the person who prays, but rather on the content of faith. The value of a therapeutic prayer is that the person who prays is won over to God, as they trust in God.

Stephen (2013:101), observes that “pastoral caregivers need to take up the challenge and pray earnestly that God may grant the couple children before long. Their prayer should include the fact that the will of God should prevail. For a pastoral prayer to be efficacious, the caregiver needs to let the childless couples realize that it is the homes which are ruled by Christ which are the happiest, a home in which all grief and worries are taken straight to the Lord in prayer”. Stephen concludes that, the prayer is not a matter of going to prayer house for candle and incense burning. What is needed is to ask in the name of Jesus Christ and belief that it is so. The efficacy of prayer is not limited to successful childbirth in the family of the childless couple.

For Karen and Westerfield (2012:498), “prayer for and by childless women might be offered in private, but they could also be said during public prayer gatherings. It is important to state without mincing words that prayer has a therapeutic function. It is important to view fertility and infertility as a matter that does not in any way elude the knowledge or intervention of the Creator of heaven and earth who alone has power to create and destroy, give and take away life”. Karen concludes that, most prayers offered by the church are supported by the accounts of God opening the wombs of Sarah (Genesis 11:29), Abimelech’s wife and female slaves (Genesis 20:17-18), Rebecca (Genesis 25:20-21), Leah and Rachel (Genesis 29:30-31), Manoah’s wife (Judges 13:2-24), Hannah (1Samuel 1:1-20), and Elizabeth (Luke 7:5-7).

The stories of these biblical women seem to demonstrate that bearing a child was a sign of God’s mercy and favor and that the Lord gives or withholds such gifts to or from the one that he chooses and cannot be questioned because of the fact that he is a sovereign God.

Many childless couples find the situation emotionally complex and extremely traumatic, irrespective of whether the problem lies with the husband or the wife. Some feel God is punishing them. Others end up thinking that they are not worthy of raising children, they are failures or that there is sin in their lives preventing God from blessing them with children.

5.4 The roles of pastoral care givers in spiritual approach to infertile couples

Pastoral caregivers are the most trustworthy people who can understand the problem that causes the pain expressed by the childless or people with life challenges. It is their duty to comfort the childless and to teach them how they can cope with the pain of the childlessness.

According to Kunhiyop, (2008), “there is a need for good understanding of marriage rather than viewing it as merely a means of procreation. There is also a need to help couples to understand infertility in the light of the scriptures that will be explored in this chapter. There is also a need to avoid jumping into conclusions on the causes of infertility and a need to avoid judgment or stigmatization as well as the need to consider other options. Kunhiyop concludes that, infertility is extremely stressful for both individuals and couples. They hesitate to talk about it for fear of getting insensitive advices and unhelpful comments but pastoral caregivers are better placed to create a safe environment to discuss such matters.

Wood (1977:49) stated that “it is the duty of pastoral caregiver in Africa to educate the intended married couple about the expectations of marriage toward issues of sexuality. Couples have a common expectation that in nine months naming their children will take place. The pastoral caregiver can educate couples to enter into marriage with an open heart that is ready to adjust to life situation”. Cultural beliefs may cause problems to couples by insisting that they must have children. However, it is the duty and responsibility of pastoral caregiver to assist couples to confront a cultural position on childbearing from a biblical and theological standpoint.

For Nancy (2013:33), “pastoral caregivers help childless couples to cope with their situation, assist couples with their developmental crisis, communication, conflict resolution, decision making, sexuality, finances, dealing with friends and family. Pastoral caregivers are in a unique position to help couples to deal with their challenges of faith, how to understand and accept events beyond their control. Infertile couples deal with extreme powerful issues, hence the need of caregiver”. Nancy (2021), affirms that, in any case, Christian couples need to understand that

God has promised never to leave them nor forsake them, no matter their circumstances. Pastoral caregiver must rally round childless people in a bid to minister to them by trying to alleviate their pains, struggles and troubles by giving them hope.

Pastoral caregivers acting as teachers and shepherds of God's people are responsible for informing and guiding God's people away from misery and making people aware of the theological issues involved in procreation.

According to Louw (2008:185), the role of a pastoral caregiver, is of the utmost importance within the cultural setting. In a sense, a pastoral caregiver could assume the role of a prophet healer. The task of a prophet healer is to scrutinize the past in order to identify the spiritual and human agents responsible for the human and communal misfortune. A pastoral caregiver must play an interpretative and listening role, taking into consideration the unique culture and religious culture. Listening patiently to the story of the afflicted and their environment makes an important contribution. Louw, (2008:185) further affirms that, doing the above will go a long way in calming their troubled hearts and assuring them in the light of God's word in the Scriptures that it could be a matter of time as seen in the case of barren couples in the Bible who were eventually given children later in life.

Marrazzo (2009:28), asserts that "pastoral caregivers must utilize the bible in their quest to help in caring for infertile couples. This helps childless couples to look beyond their own circumstances while trusting in God. Pastoral caregivers correctly give hope in the light of scriptures to infertile couples. Pastors sensitize childless couples, that God in his sovereignty has power and can take away their infertility". Marrazzo concludes that, for a pastoral caregiver, it is important to emphasize to the believers not to judge childlessness as a curse or assign stigma to it. It is important that pastoral caregivers help the infertile to know that like all other issues of life, childlessness is a faith matter, requiring that we involve God and God's people, accepting encouragement and ultimately fulfillment can be gained.

Stigger, (1983:100) is of the view that, no matter the challenges, the duty of pastoral caregivers is to support childless couples. Pastoral caregivers should remove the pain that childless couples suffer, enlighten the community of believers that they are privileged as Christians to act as God's emissaries to infertile individuals, and pastoral caregiver should work as encouragers for infertile

couples. Stigger concludes that, the pastoral caregivers should therefore exemplify the continuous presence of God by being available.

Evans (1990:580), says pastoral caregiver should be a source of help within a community of faith where the vulnerable, suffering of childless people can be shared in a context of God's incarnational love. Evans concludes that, to achieve this goal, the pastoral caregiver must educate the church community so that they become aware of their role in the society regarding their crisis situation. Pastoral caregivers are to draw attention of the community to the fact that the individual is not only important to the nation or society but to God and to their families as well.

There is need for pastoral care givers to help couples who are childless when they are making procreative decisions. This is because Christians have more than technological questions to ask.

5.5 The use of scripture in the pastoral care for childless couples

There are many biblical texts to comfort and encourage childless believers to navigate through childlessness issues. The need for support structures for infertile couples by way of scriptural encouragement cannot be overemphasized. The biblical picture would not be complete without the recognition that God can and does intervene in the lives of childless couples.

The bible teaches that man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), man belongs to God, and children are gifts from Him to their parents. Children are the joy of their parents (Psam 127:3) "children are the gift of God, they are a real blessing". The text of (Deuteronomy 7:14) says "you shall be blessed above all other people, there shall be no sterile male or female among you". Genesis (29:25) reads; "it is your father's God who helps you, the almighty God who blesses you with blessings of rain, blessing of many cattle and children". Therefore, fertility is a divine blessing. In (Genesis 20:17), the emphasis is that barrenness is out of humanity's control, it is in God's control.

The book of 1Samuel (1:1-20) gives us a clear picture of Hannah's issues of barrenness, the story of Hannah has closer affinity with Basotho contexts in respect to the issues of barrenness. Hannah's story of infertility is unique. This instance puts her desperation to be a mother of someone at the place where she did not value living with her own child but instead dedicated him back to God, 1Samuel (1:12). Her fellow religious sisters mocked her and that puts religion in a spotlight when the issue of barrenness in Christian religion is raised.

The scripture in 1 Samuel (1:5) tells us that, Elkanah loved Hannah unconditionally although she failed to bear children for continuity of his lineage. 1 Samuel (1:11) shows Hannah's promise to God. "If you give me a son, I will dedicate him to you for the rest of his life. 1 Samuel (1:4) says Hannah was taunted, despised, and provoked by her rival Peninnah and was in great grief until the Lord granted what she asked from Him.

A similar story is recorded in Genesis (30;1-24). This is a narrative of a barren mother Rachel. She was married with her sister Leah to Jacob. Rachel like other childless women in the bible, had a painful story, she was both frustrated and desperate to conceive.

Judges 13:1-25 recorded the story of Manoah and his barren wife. His wife was barren and had no children. The Angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, "indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. The woman came and told her husband that, a man of God came to me, and His countenance was like the countenance of The Angel of God, very awesome, but I did not ask Him where He was from, He did not tell me His name. He said to me, behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. Drink no wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean, for the child shall be a Nazarite to God from the womb to the day of his death".

Luke (1:14) says that John the Baptist was a joy and delight to his parents when he was born. John (16:20-21) "You will turn into gladness", and (Luke 1:14) "he will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth". According to Luke 1:7, "they had no child because Elizabeth was barren and they both were now well stricken in years and there was a double obstacle in the way of their having children, both the natural barrenness of Elizabeth and the old age of them both. The Benson Bible Commentary is of the opinion that the parents of John Baptized were sinners as all are, and were justified and saved in the same way as others but they were eminent for piety and integrity. They had no children and it could not be expected that Elizabeth should have any in her old age.

Samuel (2008:54), is of the view that, Zachariah and his wife were too old, when Zachariah was given the promise he did not believe, and as a results God punished him, He closed his mouth until the promised day when his wife bore a child. Samuel further affirms that the Lord said to Abraham, "why did Sarah laugh and say, will I really have a child, now that I am old? Is

anything too hard for the Lord? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son". Samuel Concludes that, Zachariah the priest and his wife Elizabeth belonged to priestly families. They lived a good life as they believed in God. They were old and they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, but they hoped that God will answer their prayers and give them a child. They always had to put up with a public shame attached to bareness.

The stories above are obviously used to support the idea that all who were barren among the people of faith and they were miraculously blessed with babies by God.

For Basotho context, bearing children is beyond satisfaction of the parent instinct because it is viewed as a way to preserve one's lineage. It also about security in old age and they price childbearing above all achievements in life. The scriptures such as (Genesis 1:28) which reads "He blessed them, and said have many children so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under the control" (Exodus 23:26) "In your land no woman will have a miscarriage or be without children". All these are supporting Israel cultural position on procreation

In the Ancient culture, bearing children was seen to be evidence of divine approval and blessing from God. The simple conclusion, is being in need of children to attribute it to obedience to the Creator's injunction in the book of (Genesis 1:28) "be fruitful and multiply" and this was reiterated to Noah (Genesis 9:1) and to Jacob (Genesis 35:11), they are all used to support the procreation. Such an idea is seen in (Psalm 127:35) which promotes a rapidly growth of population, where a man is surrounded by many children to care for him in old age, to increase his fields and animals as well as to expand the tribe. This behavior was favoured to preserve the family name and lineage thereby ensuring inheritance and continuity in the universe. This is because failure to bear children to carry on the family name was viewed as a misfortune.

According to Marrazzo (2009:30), scripturally speaking, even the barren can be joyful as Isaiah 54:1 notes; "Sing, oh barren woman, you who never bore a child, burst into song, shout for joy you who never in labor because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband". Marrazzo concludes that, in Luke 1:6, both Zechariah and Elizabeth were upright in the sight of God yet they experienced years of barrenness and social disgrace, because they were too old.

It is a fact that the gift of children to the barren brings joy and blessing, not only to the parents but also to the society at large and many of the biblical heroes in such as in 1 Samuel, Jacob, Genesis John and Luke, are children of childless couples.

Hebrews 11:11-12 reads; “by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise”.

5.6 Summary

This chapter was intended to bring hope to Basotho childless women who are facing cultural challenges; it also discussed the spiritual aspects of challenges of infertility. It defined who pastoral caregiver is. This is where the reader will see that it is not everyone who can be a pastoral caregiver but someone who can be able to console and be supportive and interpret God’s empowering and transformational presence through the Holy Spirit. It lay down how prayer can be useful to the issues of childlessness. The researcher has indicated that prayer can be of in mans benefit to couples dealing with infertility challenges. The chapter also discussed the roles of pastoral caregivers to couples living with infertility. Finally, it presented the use of scripture in the pastoral care giving which

Chapter six

6.1 Recommendations

Pastoral caregivers can be helpful to assist Basotho childless women faced with cultural challenges. There seem to be some myths about marriage and childbearing, so there is a need for providing information at community level to correct the misconception and myths about childlessness. It is a fact that childlessness in women increases chances for psychological problems which result in depression, and may finally lead to suicide. In view of this, Lesotho Government through Ministry of Social Development can endeavor to provide adequate preventive measures by providing counseling services to improve health of childless women in Lesotho. When a woman is unable to conceive it is necessary to find treatment for her underlying causes of the problem. Childless women may adopt a motherless child to build her family with such a child.

Childless women may establish their own social groups to support one another. Through pastoral care giver's advocacy churches may be made to be more sensitive to the plight and challenges of childless women who are rejected by families and communities. So, counseling and prayer may be used as tools for healing and to provide hope to childless women and their families.

6.2 Conclusion

The study has reveals that childlessness causes instability in Basotho marriages. Childlessness has affected peace and love which married women must enjoy. It was discovered from this study that childless married women in Lesotho bear the pain and burden of the problem of childlessness to the extent that their life becomes meaningless as Sesotho culture and society put emphasis on childbearing.

From this study the research revealed that, the problem of childlessness lies with women not men. But from this study there is discussion on causes of female and male infertility which clearly indicates that men like women can suffer infertility or sterility. The study also revealed

that infertility may be separated in two types which are primary and secondary infertility but the focus of this study was on primary infertility, which means that a woman has never experience any pregnancy. The study also pointed out the importance of children, as children give joy, children are more valuable than money, children bring honor and family lineage will never be closed. For these reasons the childless woman faces a great challenge in life, because every society needs children. Childless women are faced with some consequences in life, for this study only four were discussed and they are depression, divorce, polygamous marriage and alcoholism. These consequences and sufferings are in many ways similar to those of childless women in other cultures as the study showed. Low self-esteem is the shared feeling of childless women in different cultures due to their childlessness. They are described being empty, hollow and useless or waste. Commonly the feelings of guilt and distress have been found in this study as a problem faced by childless women.

Divorce: abandonment and remarriage by husbands are consequences experienced by childless women. The women remain strangers in their in-laws until they bear children, this was proven by one of our participants in our session. Not having a sense of belonging makes one insecure. In societies where motherhood is the synonym with womanhood, childlessness destroys the identity of a woman as a woman. Women are ostracized from the community and are blamed for their infertility. They are seen as less worthy than other women, due to their barrenness.

Depression: the childless Basotho women in this study had become sad, and developed a sense of guilt, isolation and they become lonely themselves. Childless women had been verbally and mentally abused by their husbands, their in-laws and the society, they are also faced with family or marital disruption, throughout their lives.

Polygamy: women are always experiencing insecurity and feeling that their husbands might abandon them as they married a new wife. They suffer from loss of identity and self-esteem. The women were stigmatized, deprived from food, and provoked by fertile polygamous wife, such as Peninnah provoking Hannah.

Alcoholism: this is two way, it can affect either husband, wife or both. The purpose was to reduce the stress resulting from the problem of being childlessness, but it is unfortunately that it does not remove the attached stigma of being childless. It is only a waste of money and lot of

time is being spent drinking beer not on productive activities. Alcohol also creates a dependency where users who try to escape their reality find themselves depending on this substance as a way to cope with challenges brought about by the problem of childlessness.

The spiritual aspects were also explored in this study as to find a deeper and broader meaning of pastoral care for wives. Pastoral care was defined as a consoling and supportive function of God's empowering and transformational presence through His Holy Spirit in this world. The study revealed that due to this definition pastoral caregiver will be able to support childless person with prayer as pray is needed as a coping resource for infertility. The study also discussed the roles of pastoral caregivers to infertile women, that was found by the study as a helping person, who can help childlessness to cope with their situation. The use of scripture to bring hope to childless women were also seen important and discussed in the study. Child was described by the scriptures as a gift of God.

Finally, the study explored the stories of childless women in Lesotho, where it revealed that childlessness is a very serious problem in marriage. One cannot receive the in-law's name until she bears a child, childless women were seen as a disgrace and were ill-treated by both family and society.

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