



The Challenge of Incest in Zambia: A Christian Response

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ABSTRACT

The problem of incest is real and appears to be on the increase. Zambia has continued to record many cases. Many victims have not spoken out about their incestuous grievances because of the fear of the perpetrators or the stigma that goes along with the act. The research analyzed the problem based on available written information on the vice. The objective of the study was to ascertain the prevalence of incest in Zambia and provide a Christian-based response to the problem. It has been discovered that Zambia has the potential to record an average of 1,000,000 cases of incest cases in seven years despite many cases being concealed. The church can contribute towards reducing the cases by speaking against the vice, conducting awareness programs, and creating counseling platforms for victims of incest.

Key Words/Phrases: Close relative, Perpetrator(s), Victim(s), Taboo, Abomination.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual abuse of infants, children, and adolescents remains an unfortunate tragedy in all societies in the world. This includes the version of incest, which is not necessarily limited to the children under the age of sixteen, but most prominent in that age bracket.

Incest is a practice that has been there for ages. The whole world is affected by the evil. Zambia is not exempted. Even though it may not be easy to access the precise cases of incest, several cases are being publicized in the Zambian newspapers: "A woman of Makululu Township in Kabwe District yesterday testified to Kabwe Principal Resident Magistrate John Mbuzi how she rented out a room to a brother and sister who lived as husband and wife"¹; "The Mansa High Court has sentenced a 40 year old man of Samfya to 30 years imprisonment with hard labour for having carnal knowledge of his 15 year old daughter whom he had promised to marry"²; "The Kitwe High Court has sentenced a 56-year-old man of Chingola District to 20 years imprisonment with hard labour for incest with his minor niece whose details have been withheld,"³; "Women in Zambia experience a variety of forms of violence including battery, sexual abuse and exploitation, rape, defilement and incest."⁴

These and many other cases of incest have prompted this study. The study focuses on the Zambian situation though not for the benefit of the Zambian population alone but the whole world. The paper is written from the Christian perspective hence devotes a section on what the Bible and the church says on the evil of incest. The paper aims at exposing the reality of the existence of incest and seeks to provide the response of the Christian body towards eliminating the vice.

The study is dependent on written sources such as books, journal articles, encyclopedias, newspaper items, the Bible and the Bible Commentaries. The first section is an analysis of the statistical data of incest in Zambia, the second section examines the causes and effects of incest, the third section analyses the biblical concept of incest, the fourth section discusses incest in the Christian church and the Church's response, and the fifth section is the conclusion and recommendation.

¹ Lusaka Times, "Brother and Sister in Court for Incest," *Lusaka Times* (02 October 2014): Accessed 31 August 2021; <https://www.lusakatimes.com>.

² Christine Chihame, "Man Jailed 30 Years for Incest," *Zambia Daily Mail Limited* (23 August 2018): Accessed 31 August 2021; www.daily-mail.co.zm.

³ Chris Phiri, "Kitwe Man Gets 20 Years for Incest," *Zambia Reports* (04 September 2018): Accessed 31 August 21; www.zambiareports.com.

⁴ Banda Zulu, "Zambia: Fighting gender-based violence as fresh cases continue to emerge," *Africa Renewal* (30 April 2020): Accessed 31 August 2021, <https://www.un.org-news-zambia>.

THE DEFINITION OF INCEST

There are several definitions of incest. All the definitions identified provide a common understanding that incest is done when people closely related have a sexual encounter.

Traditionally, in Zambia, when such a thing happens it is a taboo, and the family members are likely to disown the perpetrators of the act. If a child is born from such an act that child among the Tonga people of Zambia named *Chilweza*⁵ which means “born out of a curse” or “born to be a curse” or “born out of a taboo”.

The *Marriam Webster Dictionary* defines incest as sexual intercourse between persons so closely related that they are forbidden by law to marry. Similarly, Roger Henderson states, “Incest can be defined as sexual activity with a person from within the immediate family. However, the exact relationships which can be construed as incest will vary from culture to culture.”⁶ Both definitions insist that incest involves sexual intercourse between close family members.

According to Yildirim, Ozer, and Bozkurt et al “Incest is a specific type of sexual abuse, defined as sexual relations between a man and woman, a woman and woman, or a man and man, who are close relatives, and as such are legally, morally and religiously forbidden from marriage.”⁷ This definition expands further by including the element of sex between a man and a man and woman and woman, a scenario which may not be common.

According to the laws of Australia, incest is defined as sexual intercourse between a lineal ancestor and a lineal descendant.⁸ Meanwhile, from the perspective of New South Wales, the close family members are specified and include parent, son, daughter, sibling (including a half-brother and half-sister), grandparent or grandchild.⁹ We may have to include cousins. This definition will carry the scope of this study.

STATISTICAL DATA OF INCEST IN ZAMBIA

The actual data of incest in Zambia may not be easily accessed because of the nature of the act. The act is not easily revealed to the public, hence, what is available is just a tip of an iceberg. The data on record and hereunder provided is not to give the real figures of the incidents of incest but just to ascertain the existence of the problem.

According to Charity Moonga, the extent of incest and childhood sexual abuse is difficult to measure because of lack of reporting.¹⁰ The cases are many but very few get to be discovered. Sometimes the victims fear to be evicted from home in case of the perpetrator being a guardian or a stepfather, or an elder brother. On the other hand, if the abused discloses to a family member, the family member may not report the case to other family members or to law enforcement fearing that the offending relative may get arrested¹¹ or that it may bring serious divisions in the family. In cases of an incest case involving a father and daughter, the mother may decide to keep the matter as a secret in fear of being labelled as an uncaring mother or an incompetent wife or losing her marriage and the possible shame that goes along with the act.

The other possible reason for not reporting the cases of incest is the fear that the girl child may not find a husband in future. There is a general fear that once the matter is reported it will become public knowledge in the whole community. Should there be a man interested to marry the girl when she is grown up, people are most likely to tell the interested man of what happened between the girl and a close relative in the past. This is believed to automatically drive away the man and the girl may end up never getting married. Hence for the sake of the girl’s future life, the family members would

⁵ *Chilweza* is a CiTonga (CiTonga is one of the seven major languages of Zambia) terminology which means a taboo or a curse. When used as a name to someone it expresses the displeasure of the whole family concerning the way the child was conceived. The naming of a child with this stigmatizing name is intended to be a reminder to the perpetrators not to repeat the act, and the rest of the family members to abhor the act.

⁶ Roger Henderson, “Incest,” *Professional Articles*, 1042, 25 (27 July 2016): 1-3.

⁷ Yildirim, A., Ozer, E., and Bozkurt, H., et al, “Evaluation of social and demographic characteristics of incest cases in a university hospital in Turkey,” *Medical Science Monitor : International Medical Journal of Experimental and Clinical Research*, (2014), 20, 693–697.

⁸ New South Wales Consolidated Acts, “CRIMES ACT 1900 - SECT 78A: Incest,” (DATABASE STATISTICS 27 August 2021), Accessed 31 August 2021, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ca190082/s78a.htm.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Charity Moonga, “Incest, Sexual Abuse Still Rampant,” *Times of Zambia* (17 April 2016), accessed 11 September 2021, www.times.co.zm.

¹¹ The laws of Zambia are stiff on incestuous offenders. The perpetrators risk being arrested for not less than ten years with hard labor. See Ministry of Legal Affairs, The Government of the Republic of Zambia, The Laws of the Republic of Zambia Chapter 87, The Penal Code Act Chapter xv, Section 159-163.

opt to keep the case of incest as privately as possible. This is the general position in Africa.¹² Shame upon the family and the stigma to the abused child are serious concerns in Africa. The family's name should be defended at all costs in the African setup. More so, it is believed that every woman should get married if she is to be respected in society. To this end, incest cases are highly confidential in Africa.

In spite of the incest cases being concealed, in most cases, Moonga reveals that the available data in Zambia indicates that one in four girls (25%) and one in ten boys (10%) experienced an incestuous or some kind of sexual abuse.¹³ A study done by Chitundu, K., and Kwaleyela, C., on the cases of child sexual abuse and incest in Chawama Compound¹⁴ of Lusaka revealed a steady increase in the number of cases between 2007 and 2014. Though the study did not specify the cases of incest, it revealed that there were many cases of the same. The report reveals that in 2007 there were 852 cases, 2008, 1224 cases, 2009, 1676 cases, 2010, 8467 cases, 2011, 11,908 cases, 2012, 9,612 cases, 2013, 9,775 cases and in 2014, 12,985 cases.¹⁵ This gives a total of 56,499 cases in a period of seven years in a single compound of a city of fifteen densely populated compounds. If we took 25% as the estimated incest cases out of the total 56,499 then we have about 14,125 incest cases in just one compound of Lusaka. If we multiplied the result by about fifteen compounds, we have an estimated number of 211,873 cases of incest in seven years in one city. This does not include the low-density areas of the city. If this data would be used as a basis to determine the estimated cases in the entire country which has ten provinces, it would translate to more than 1,000,000 cases in the entire country in a period of seven years.

If under difficult circumstances of getting data we have such a high number of cases, it is probable that the actual figures could be double or triple the known. These high figures demand for a voice that will defend the voiceless children who are undergoing physical and emotional pain.

I. THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF INCEST

This section examines the causes and effects of incest. Under causes, the study endeavors to answer the "why" question, while the par effects tries to answer the "what" question.

The Causes of Incest

It may not be easy to establish the real causes of incest just as it may not be easy to establish the cases of the same. The reason to this is that incest is basically practiced by individuals in different places, cultures, and situations. It is also often kept secretive because of its embarrassing consequences and its being punishable by law in most countries. Of the similar view concerning the data on incest is Osman Celbis, İsmail Altın, and Nusret Ayaz, et al who submit, "The exact data of prevalence are not known. It is thought that the data that are available are only the tip of the iceberg as incidents are not reported for reasons such as remaining a family matter, the victim's fear, the thought that they will not be believed and societal pressures."¹⁶ Additionally, incest tends to remain hidden because of the predominance of the traditional family type, the value placed on the family by most people, and protection by keeping events in the family within the family, the conservative nature of society especially in the eastern regions, fear of stigmatization, not knowing where to report the incident, lack of knowledge, being seen as an internal family matter and fear.¹⁷ Since incest is viewed as a taboo in many cultures and since it is punishable by law, many cases, if discovered by other family members, are kept as family secrets. This makes this study complicated.

The other reason that may make an establishment of the actual causes of incest is the diversity of the types of incest. There are cases of incest which are father-daughter, mother-son, brother-sister, uncle-niece, grandfather-granddaughter, cousin- cousin, and more. All these may have their own unique causes which may not be thoroughly covered in this study. This section, however, attempts to provide some of the identified causes according to various sources. These causes may not be absolute and exhaustive.

II. Poor Sexual Activity Between Couples

One of the causes of incest is a lack of sexual activity between couples in marriage. There are several reasons why there are sexual starvations in marriages. Among others are health, emotional, and psychological reasons. Unfortunately, sexual starvation of a spouse may lead to sexual scandals such as incest.

¹² See Meursing et al., supra note 49, at 1694; Juma Dwayera, When Fathers Make Wives of Daughters. *Girl Who Banished because Pregnant by Father Must leave to Avoid Stigma*, DAILY NATION (Kenya), May 3, 2000, reprinted in Cynthia Grant Bowman & Akua Kuenyehia, Women And Law in Sub-Saharan Africa 375– 76 (2003) (stating that mother did not want to report sexual violence because her daughter would never get married).

¹³ Moonga, 2016.

¹⁴ A Compound (locally known as a *komboni*) is a typical of informal housing shanty town commonly known to Zambia, particularly the capital city of Lusaka. It is characterized by a low income and high population density. It is estimated that 80% of the population of Lusaka live and work in these areas.

¹⁵ Kabwe Chitundu and Concepta Kwaleyela, "Perception of the Community towards Child Sexual Abuse: A Case of Chawama, Lusaka, Zambia," *Open Journal of Psychiatry* (July 2018), Vol. 8, 3.

¹⁶ Osman Celbis, İsmail Altın, and Nusret Ayaz, et al., "Evaluation of Incest Cases: 4-Years Retrospective Study," *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* (05 August 2019): Accessed 05 September 2022; <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wcsa20>.

¹⁷ Ibid

Lande R. G. ascertains, "Lack of spousal sexual activity is a common preceding factor. The sequelae of this breach of family integrity are significant."¹⁸ One of the reasons people get married is for sexual satisfaction. Paul admonishes sex should be restricted in the marriage set up and partners should not deny each other of the act (1 Cor. 7: 1-5). If sexual need is to be satisfied within the confinements of marriage, then spouses are advised to be committed to ensuring that their partners are not starved sexually. However, this may not be the only cause of incest. There are people in good marriages, with responsible partners who provide all the sexual needs and yet still get into the act of incest.

III. Poor Mothering of the Daughters

The second possible cause of incest is poor mothering of the daughters. By poor mothering we mean absence or scant availability of motherly nurturing, especially for the girl child. This situation is sequential. It begins with the mother herself not having had appropriate emotional support from her parents and consequently carries it on to her children. It is posited that the "mothers of incest survivors come from a family background where their own mothers deprived them of emotional support. The relationship with their mothers is described as hostile and rejecting, hence they could not learn good mothering skills, and because they did not have positive role models to learn from, they are unable to fulfil their parenting roles."¹⁹ On this account, it may be deduced that parenting, especially for teenagers is quite critical in curbing incest. Since incest begins slowly, if a child is free to share joys and pains with the mother, it would be easy for the child to disclose any strange advances or touches from either the father or any other close relative.

IV. Divorce and Remarriage

The third possible cause to incest is divorce and remarriage. The men and women who get divorced and remarry tend to put their children, who they got from the earlier marriage, in danger of sexual abuse by their new spouses (stepparents) and their stepchildren. Patricia D. McClendon observes, "Women, in an attempt to get partners, they remarry or cohabit, and by doing so they expose their children to sexual abuse by their partners."²⁰ This observation could be very true, especially in cases where the daughters are teenagers and are in dire need of financial support for their school and groceries for their appearances. The mother, being a widow or a divorcee might not be able to meet all the needs of a girl child. The stepfather may not feel that he is abusing a daughter since there is not direct biological connection to the girl. The girl may also not be courageous enough to tell the mother fearing to be blamed as being a competitor for a man, and because of the possible financial and material benefits from the stepfather.

V. Background of Broken Homes

The fourth possible cause of incest is the background of coming from broken homes, on the side of the perpetrator. Fathers who come from broken homes have a tendency of being victims of incest. Singh Harman observes that incestuous fathers have strong sex drives with little or absent shyness, which makes their sex lives with their wives to be aggressive, demanding and lacking emotional bonding or affection and that in most cases these fathers come from broken homes, seldom completed their education and are more likely to be alcohol dependent.²¹ This behavior may be as a result of poor emotional blending with parents in childhood, eventually affecting their bonding with their spouses. Consequently, they have higher demand of affection which their wives may not meet. They end up being alcohol dependents and developing an incestuous behavior.

VI. Too Busy Mothers

The other possible cause of incest is the absence of mothers. The mothers are key figures in the protection of the girl child against many behavioral vices, including incest. It is unfortunate that many mothers are too busy to be with their daughters. This absence creates room for the fathers to spend more time with their daughters and consequently become sexually weak and attracted to their own daughters. On the other, it makes daughters to seek closer parental attention from the fathers or any available elderly male figure in the home.

This puts the girls at risk of sexual abuse. Patricia Beezley Mrazek and C. Henry Kempe are of the view that the sexual separation between the mother and the father is driven by the mother's absence from home as well as her coldness and hostility towards her husband. They add that this coldness and hostility makes the father to experience weak sexual relationships with their wives and to turn to their daughters for sexually affectionate activities.²²

¹⁸ Lande R. G. "Incest: Its Causes and Repercussions," *Postgrad Med.* (June 1989); 85, 8: 81-86.

¹⁹ Browning, D. H., and Boatman, B., "Incest: Children at risk," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, (1977), 134 (1), 69-72.

²⁰ Patricia D. McClendon, "Incest/Sexual Abuse of Children," *Clinical Social Work* (23 November 1991): Accessed 8 September 2021; <http://www.clinicalsocialworkers-incest>.

²¹ Harman Singh, Sharma Luv, et al., "The What, Who, When and with of Incest," *Indian Journals* (June 2005): Accessed 13 September 2021; <http://www.indianjournals.com>.

²² Patricia B. Mrazek and C. H. Kempe, "Sexually Abused Children and Their Families," *Elsevier* (2014): Accessed 14 September 2021; www.books.google.com.

VI. Individual Moral Weakness

Finally, though not exhaustive, incest may be caused by the perpetrator's individual weakness. There are people that have no moral strength to control their sexual drives. They are slaves of their sexual appetites. They lack self-control. Terry Trepper and Mary J. Barret opine, "Some rationalizations of incestuous behavior include individual personality or psychopathology. These individual personalities and /or psychopathology include the dominant style of an incestuous father, the daughter and the mother's passive dependent personality style and the father's poor impulse control."²³ Trepper and Barret include the daughter and the mother's passive dependent style to be responsible for incest. However true this might be, I take the father's poor impulse control to be most critical in this case.

The causes of incest that are easily traceable are those of Father-daughter incest than those of other relatives. Some of the causes for incest by other relatives could be similar to those of the father-daughter. However, drug abuse, alcoholism, mental illness, stress, and others could be responsible for much of the behavior. Whatever the reason for incest, the evil may not be justified, and it has some grave consequences. The next subsection examines the effects of incest.

Effects of Incest

The effects of incest may not be easily traced but quite evident and can be tragic in some cases. They may be like the effects of any other sexual abuse. Effects may vary depending on several factors such as the age of the abused, the age difference between the abuser and the abused, the frequency of abuse, the treatment offered to the abused after the incest act, and the closeness of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim. While some of the effects may be physical, mainly, they may be social, spiritual, and psychological. This section examines these.

i. Physical Effects of Incest

The physical effects of incest include bruising or wounding of the girl's private parts which are obvious due to age difference and immaturity of the girl's womanhood and several others. The World Health Organization points out that gastrointestinal disorders, gynecological disorders, and somatization may result following sexual abuse, which includes incest.²⁴ Similarly, Diana E. H. Russell, a South African scholar, ascertains that there are several physical effects of incest on the victims which include vaginal pain, vaginal bleeding, anal pain and/or tearing, vaginal infections, cystitis, vaginal scarring, vaginal numbing, sleep disorders, for example, nightmares and insomnia, and sometimes eating disorders.²⁵ Many of these effects are initial effects which are diagnosed shortly after the incident.

ii. Psychological/Mental Effects of Incest

The fact that incest is a sexual act within the family tie, and that generally the act is a taboo in many societies, and more so that it is an illegal act in many countries, it is obvious that it has mental effects both to the perpetrator and to the victim. The focus in this paper is on the victim. In as much as there are immediate mental effects of incest, many of these are long-term. There could be some people who are able to overcome the long-term psychological effects of incest, however, the majority tend to suffer from these for the rest of their lives.

One of the psychological effects of incest is disassociation behavior. This behavior can show itself in different versions. In Russell's perspective, disassociation behavior can present itself by the victim talking about incest to the spouse but presenting the scenario as if it is another person who was a victim. She further explains that the victims also tend to disassociate themselves in sexual intercourse with their spouses. They will be having sex with their spouses but their minds far off from the act. Russell quotes one of her sample member testifying, "When, I have sex with my husband I am never there, and I don't remember it afterwards, I am not there when it (sex) is happening. I make grocery lists. I don't feel like a human being, I just role-play being one."²⁶ This experience may have other consequences in the marriage of the victim. Say, for example, if the husband becomes aware that she is not concentrating in the sexual act in their home, he may react in some an unpleasant way. He may suspect that she is not in love with him, or he may think she has another man she is going out with in an adulterous relationship. Depending on the spiritual maturity of such a husband, he may opt to find another woman who may be more interested in sex. This unexpected reaction from the husband may cause more pain to the survivor of incest.

The psychological effects may include poor self-image, promiscuous behavior, lack of trust of the husband, negligence of parental responsibility, and many others. According to the findings by L. Potter, psychological effects of incest include feelings of isolation and stigma, anxiety, dissociation, low self-esteem, difficulty in trusting others, tendency towards revictimization, and sexual maladjustment.²⁷ These effects will certainly affect the victim's ultimate social life. She may become dysfunctional in many areas of life, including marriage.

iii. Social Effects of Incest

²³ Terry Trepper and Mary Jo Barret, *Systemic Treatment of Incest: A Therapeutic Handbook* (England: Routledge, 2013), 25-26.

²⁴ World Health Organization, "Child Sexual Abuse," *Resources* (1999): Accessed 14 September 2021; www.who.int-resources.

²⁵ Diana E. H. Russell, *Incestuous Abuse: Its Long-Term Effects* (Pretoria: Human Science Research Council, 1995), 54-58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁷ L. Potter, "How Does Childhood Incest Affect the Interpersonal Relationship," *Scholar Works*, (2002): Accessed 15 September 2021; <https://www.scholarworks.uni.edu>.

The other dimension of the effects of incest is social. In a case where a child is born out of an incestuous act, the victim is stigmatized for the rest of her life. The existence of the child will always remind people of what happened the victim years back. Because of the same, the victim may never be married.

It is also alleged that victims of incest have a tendency of developing difficulties in future sexual relationships. According to D. J. Gelinias, the problems most often encountered by victims of incest are sexual dysfunctions and difficulty with sexual contact. He adds that periods of promiscuity or prostitution may result, and there is an increased risk of adolescent pregnancy. Other clinical symptoms among incest victims are depression, intense guilt, and drug/alcohol abuse. Incest victims tend to have marital difficulties, and there is an increased risk of their physically and emotionally abusing their children.²⁸ Gelinias' observation could be the most suiting explanation for the growing numbers of prostitutes and women who cannot sustain a marriage relationship. Prostitution is a serious concern in many societies. With Gelinias' finding, women who are victims of incest usually find themselves into social challenges of prostitution and alcohol dependency.

Cole P. M. and Putnam F. W. are of the view that incest has its unique negative effects in the domains of self and social functioning, specifically in jeopardizing self- definition and integration, self-regulatory processes, and a sense of security and trust in relationships. They also add that studies with clinical samples indicate that diagnostic conditions associated uniquely with a history of incest reflect serious self- and social impairments.²⁹ This submission supposes that the victim of incest gets socially impaired. This means the original identity of the individual is lost. The individual can longer fit well in society due to a feeling of security, loss self-definition, and loss trust of other individuals.

This development can be associated to the psychological effects of incest as earlier pointed out.

The social effects of incest can be very detrimental to an individual's existence, they affect the morals, the marriage relationship, the interpersonal relationships, and the general behavior.

iv. Biological Effects of Incest

In animal breeding, inbreeding is discouraged for it reduces the immunity system of the off springs. Sometimes the kids may be born with deformities. This effect should be true of the children born of incest among human beings. Though not all children born out of incest may show some defects, but chances are very high. Hal Herzog argues, "The problem with having sex with close relatives is that there is an astonishingly high chance that your offspring will be born with a serious birth defect."³⁰ He further warns of autosomal recessive disorders, congenital physical malformations, or disabilities, and higher chances of early death.³¹ The chances of having a child with disability in an incestuous child is a reason enough to conclude that incest is wrong even before considering the biblical counsel on the matter.

THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE OF INCEST

The problem of incest can be traced in the Bible. However, to some extent, examining the biblical account has led many to justify the act, or to tolerate it. On the other hand, some have developed serious reasons to condemn the act. Those who justify the act tend to debate that in the early stages of human history, marriage among kinsmen was not deemed immoral. The fact is that such was a necessity from the nature of the situation. The children of Adam and Eve must have married kinsmen, for there were no other people on earth except those descended from the original pair. Even in the case of Abraham, who married a half-sister, the situation was shortly after the flood which destroyed humanity, leaving only Noah's family. The Bible records familial marriages during the Patriarchal period that do not appear to have been censured by Jehovah, but which were prohibited in a later epoch of law.

There is another factor that must be considered. In the early days of the human family, before sin, disease, and genetics took such a deadly accumulative toll, Adam's offspring were much more physically vigorous than they now are. And so inter- family unions would not have resulted in the debilitating effects that are characteristic of such relationships in the modern world. Adam himself lived to be 930 years of age, yet by the time of Abraham, 175 years was a "good old age" (Gen. 25:7-8). Eventually, human longevity would level out at approximately 80 years on average (Ps. 90:10).

The Old Testament View

The word incest does not appear in the Bible. However, the concept is there. The term that may be used to refer to incest in the Bible is "prohibited sexual relations". There are several clear cases of incest in the Old Testament. Lot, Abraham's nephew, had two sons by his own daughters while in a drunken stupor (Gen. 19:30-35). Moses recorded the sordid act as a matter of history, but there is no sanction of the sin in the sacred text. In fact, it is placed in a decidedly negative light. Ruben was intimate with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22) — a shameful act that was condemned and penalized (Gen. 49:4). Amnon, one of David's sons, committed rape with his half-sister, Tamar (2 Sam. 13:7-14). Consequently, he was later murdered by Absalom, Tamar's full brother (2 Sam. 13).

²⁸ D. J. Gelinias, "Persisting Negative Effects of Incest," *Psychiatry* Vol. 46: 4 (November 1983), 312-332

²⁹ Cole P. M. and Putnam F. W., "Effect of incest on self and social functioning: a developmental psychopathology perspective," *J Consult Clin Psychol*, 60 (2) (April 1992):174-184.

³⁰ Hal Herzog, "The Problem With Incest," *Psychology Today* (11 October 2012): Accessed 21 September 2021; <https://www.psychologytoday.com>.

³¹ Ibid.

None of these incidents is presented in a positive way. Incest, though common in Scripture, is by no means justified by God. Many of the incest accounts had negative consequences.

The main Old Testament texts that have been identified by many Bible students as providing information against incest are Leviticus 18: 6-18 and 20:11-21. The two texts identify the prohibited sexual relationships by God. Though there are several accounts on incest in the Old Testament, the study considers only these two since they provide the necessary data for this study. The two passages provide the bigger picture of the act and how God looks at it.

i. Leviticus 18: 6-18

Leviticus 18:6-18 gives much detail on the subject. The account begins by declaring that it is not acceptable before the eyes of God to have any sexual relations with any close relative. This is the basic prohibition of incest, restricting the uncovering of the nakedness of a close relative. Thereafter, it gives the list of the precise relationships that are prohibited. The list includes father-daughter, mother-son, stepmother-stepson, brother-sister, grandfather-granddaughter, stepsister-stepbrother, nephew-aunty, father in-law- daughter in-law, brother in-law-sister in-law, stepfather- stepdaughter, and brother in-law-sister in-law.

The fact that God abhors such sexual relationships, incest should be considered an abomination by all. By this, the common view of incest as a taboo becomes relevant and applicable both to Christians and non-Christians. From the context of this Bible account, incest is a sin. It defiles the perpetrator and the nation. Commenting on Leviticus 18:6, Andrew Robert Fausset, David Brown, and Robert Jamieson submit, "This verse contains a general summary of all the particular prohibitions; and the forbidden intercourse is pointed out by the phrase, "to approach to." In the specified prohibitions that follow, all of which are included in this general summary, the prohibited familiarity is indicated by the phrases, to "uncover the nakedness"³² The act of incest, in all its forms, is abominable.

The *Pulpit Commentary* provides the degrees of kinship in explaining the prohibited incestuous acts. It submits the list in first, second, third, and fourth degrees.³³ These degrees are representative of the distance in relationship between the individuals prohibited from having sexual relationships based on kinship. Incest involving a father and a daughter, a brother and a sister, an uncle and a niece, an aunt and a nephew, a cousin and a cousin, being in the first degree of kinship, are most unacceptable. Nevertheless, incest, in all its forms, should be avoided at all costs.

ii. Leviticus 20:11-21

This passage, unlike the previous one, prescribes the kind of punishment to be given to the perpetrators. The text lists the incestuous relationships that are prohibited, and these are stepson and stepmother, father in-law and daughter in-law, son in-law with mother in-law, brother and sister, stepbrother and stepsister, nephew and aunt, brother in-law and sister in-law.

The punishments for incest, as pronounced by God through Moses in this passage, include killing both the man and the woman that have been involved in the act either by stoning or by burning them, being cut off from among the Israelites, and childlessness. What may be questionable here is the fairness of God on the victim in a situation where the act of incest happens without consent. Why should the victim of incest in a sexual abuse act be killed or be punished together with the perpetrator. A thorough and independent study needs to be undertaken to explain this paradox.

What is clear from the passage is that God is never pleased with incest. Relatives are expected to stay away from having sexual encounters with each other. This should be adhered to, not only from the cultural and tradition perspective, but more precisely, from God's perspective. Incest attracts God's instant judgement.

The New Testament

The New Testament does not discuss much on incest. There are only two clear instances of incest in the New Testament. Herod Antipas married Herodias, his niece, and the wife of his brother Philip who was still living. John the Baptist was imprisoned because of his condemnation of Herod for marrying his brother's wife (Mk 6.17–18). The incident is reported in all the three synoptic gospels, probably to indicate the intensity of the matter or because it is the cause to the martyr of Christ's forerunner, John the Baptist. Whatever the reason, all the three accounts indicate that John condemned the act. Herodias was closely related to Herod Antipas in two dimensions, she was a brother's wife and also his niece to him, "When Antipas and Herodias had to marry, Herodias had to divorce her uncle/husband Philip in order to marry her uncle/brother in-law Antipas. She moved back to Israel with her teenage daughter Salome and the three settled in Tiberias near the Sea of Galilee."³⁴ The marriage was incestuous and therefore unlawful. More so, Philip was still alive hence Antipas had no right to marry the brother's wife.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1–12, Apostle Paul excommunicates and delivers to Satan a man sexually linked to his father's wife, probably his stepmother. Paul condemns such a sin as an "immorality ... not found even among the Gentiles," and a corrupting influence on the sacred community. He also blames the Corinthian church for not having already excluded the man.

³² Andrew Robert Fausset, David Brown, and Robert Jamieson, *Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary On the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 216.

³³ Joseph S. Exell, Spence Jones, and Henry D. Maurice, "Commentary on Leviticus 18," *The Pulpit Commentary* (1897): Accessed, 22 September 2021; <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/eng/tpc/leviticus-18.html>.

³⁴ Sandra Sweeny Silver, "Herod and Herodias Affair," *Early Church History* (n.d): Accessed 21 September 2021; <https://earlychurchhistory.org>.

From the foregoing biblical accounts, incest is not acceptable in the eyes of God. The cases of incest that are found in the Bible do not justify the act. Though the patriarchal period is full of marriages of people who were closely related, God gives clear instructions against incest to the Israelites through Moses (Lev. 18: 6-18). The New Testament equally condemns the act in the case of Herod Antipas and Herodias as well as in Paul's condemnation of it in 1 Corinthians 5: 1-12. Though the Bible does not provide clear reasons for the forbidding of incest, modern science has discovered several reasons which have been provided above.

THE RESPONSE OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH TO INCEST

The vice of incest is not practiced only by non-Christians, it is also practiced in Christian families. Julia C. S. Vernon ascertains, "Even if it isn't happening among your members right now, chances are good that incest is still having an effect on someone in your congregation."³⁵ Miroslav M. Kis submits, "Incest is repulsive . . . It confuses relationships between close relatives and becomes especially traumatic for abused minors or nonconsenting adults. It violates human freedom, cheapens human dignity, and may cause mental and emotional trauma which not infrequently leads to prostitution and sexual imbalance for the rest of life."³⁶

The number of cases in churches may not be easy to know as among non-Christian families due to Christian affiliation which may not tolerate abusive members. It could be more difficult to discover cases in the families of senior church members such as the clergy and elders due to fear of bringing shame to the name of the Christian body.

The church cannot afford to be silent about incest when the vice affects its members and their salvation. Vernon observes, "Even after an incest victim has accepted Jesus, her faith relationship can remain crippled. Guilt remains; she feels somehow deserving of punishment and shame. Often she fears that her sin is truly beyond the forgiveness of Christ or that Christ may reject her for it."³⁷ Similarly, Tim Pierce adds, "For the sake of the children, pastors need to be aware that such abuse does happen within the church. Pastors also need to know how to recognize the symptoms of such abuse and what to do by way of intervention."³⁸

To fight incest, two approaches could help. The first one is to come up with programs that will address the victims of incest, endeavoring to provide healing to them. The second is to come up with preventive measures.

In the programs intended to provide healing to the victims, the church should work hand in hand with social workers as well as with other independent support organizations that work to fight sexual abuse and other social vices. In countries where the governments have policies and ministries that address the problem, it would be ideal to work with the government. Zambia does not allow incest and has a lot of non-governmental organizations that fight against sexual abuse. This gives an open door for the church to participate in the fight against incest alongside the government. However, the church needs to have its unique programs which allows it to communicate the Gospel to the victims and perpetrators at the end of the programs.

To prevent more occurrences of incest, the church could try the following six step initiative:

1. Come up with awareness campaigns against the evil of incest by having radio and television programs. Posters and hand bills may be incorporated.
2. Run seminars for young people in pre-schools and primary schools where the subject of incest will be shared. Children should be made aware of what incestuous abuse involves and how to react in case of experiencing such.
3. Come up a system of gaining private contact with victims who might be looking for help after listening on radio or television or reading the posters.
4. Train pastors, elders, and mature women on how to handle cases of incest with the aim of restoring both the victim and the perpetrator.
5. Develop a fund for supporting the victims who might be evicted by their guardians or parents on grounds of coming out to report the matter.
6. Nurture the victims into the Christian family and help them to recognize their potential to serve God, either by being counsellors of the newly identified victims or any other role which may suit their spiritual gifts.

³⁵ Julia C. S. Vernon, "Incest Victims Need Your Help," *Ministry*, 1989-01, (January 1989): 11-13.

³⁶ Miroslav M. Kis, "Christian Lifestyles and Behavior," In *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 696, 697.

³⁷ Vernon, *Ministry*, 11-13.

³⁸ Tim Pierce, "Victims of Trust," *Ministry*, 1989-01, (January 1989), 14-16.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that the problem of incest is real. The whole world is affected by the evil. Even though it may not be easy to access the precise cases of incest, there are several cases being publicized in the Zambian newspapers and other news media. The data available, though not accurate, proves that incest is rampant in many families though many cases are kept as family secrets. Reports are not easy to access for several reasons; stiff punishment by the law for those found guilty, the stigma to the family, the future lack of marriage to the child, fear of divorce on the side of the mother in cases where the act involves father-daughter relationship, fear of being a destitute in case where the perpetrator is the guardian, and fear of suicide either of the abuser or the abused.

The study has also revealed that there are several alleged causes to incest. Some of which may be factual and yet others mere speculative. Among the alleged causes we have poor sexual activity in the marriage, poor mothering of daughters, background of broken homes, alcohol dependence, and personal lack of sexual self-control on the side of the perpetrator.

The research has discovered that incest has serious consequences which may be detrimental to health and life threatening. The victims of incest undergo traumatic experiences which may affect their marital relations and their overall behavior. Some of the survivors of incest experience psychological and mental illnesses. Others attempt or commit suicide at some point in life. Generally, those who have had experiences of incest tend to perform poorly in school and their lives end up in misery for they cannot perform well in life. Others still, end up not trusting any man in life and hence unable to get into any serious marriage relationship. Sadly, most of the incestuously abused end up into prostitution and substance abuse such as alcohol and drugs. In incidences where a child is born out of the act of incest, there are higher chances of the child being born with some deformity and mental degeneration. Also, the child may suffer from psychological problems upon discovering.

Above all, the Bible condemns incest. Therefore, the church must address the problem by creating a platform to address the victims who need counselling and hope in Jesus. The other approach is to condemn the vice by working hand in hand with the government and the non-governmental organizations.

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