

Failure to listen to the whispering: Proverbs 12:24–28 in times of femicide epidemic

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This study aims to examine Proverbs 12:24–28 considering the increasing rates of femicide in Nigeria. Various approaches have been employed to address the issue of femicide in the country. Numerous girls and women have been killed by their intimate partners and spouses, with this alarming trend appearing to escalate between 2024 and 2025. Scholars have examined this issue from sociological, legal and political perspectives; however, the problem continues to worsen. This study approaches femicide from a religious perspective, drawing themes from wisdom literature, particularly from the book of Proverbs. Literary analysis was used to analyse data obtained from the Bible, biblical commentaries, real-time examples from newspapers and gazettes, complemented by relevant academic literature. The aphorisms in Proverbs 12:24–28 address themes of diligence, hard work, anxiety, good companionship and longevity. Three primary themes emerged from the analysis: (1) industriousness; (2) interpersonal approach and managing pressure; and (3) friendship dynamics. The pericope also emphasises the importance for women to exercise caution regarding the types of relationships they enter. Based on these findings, recommendations are presented and discussed.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The study shows that laziness, anxiety, a lack of contentment, harsh words and bad friends are aphorisms in Proverbs 12:24–28 that are liable for the increasing femicide in Nigeria. The Old Testament and practical theology were implicated in this study.

Keywords: Proverbs 12; laziness; hard work; femicide; rituals; Nigeria.

Introduction

It was on 12 January 2025 that a gospel evangelist by name Timileyin Ajayi was apprehended in Nassarawa with a bag, and when it was opened, it was the head of his alleged girlfriend 24-year-old Salome Adaidu (Adigun 2025); also on 21 January 2025, Obiozor Sunday Nwaka, a welder, accused his wife, Blessing Chioma Nwaka, of infidelity, which led to a heated disagreement during which he poured petrol on her, set her ablaze, and she died on 22 January 2025 (Ikeji 2025). These are just some of the cases of the increasing femicide in Nigeria. For a better understanding, femicide is broadly defined as the killing of a woman or girl because of her gender and can take different forms, such as the murder of women as a result of intimate partner violence, the torture and misogynist slaying of women and the killing of women and girls in the name of 'honour' (European Institute for Gender Equality 2025). In 2023, an estimated 85 000 women and girls were intentionally killed globally, with over 60 percent of these victims – more than 51 000 – murdered by intimate partners or family members (Busari 2025). Unfortunately, little or nothing has been done to stem this tide. Different scholars (Ogunlana et al. 2024; Olowu 2020) have offered their positions from the psychological, economic and social points of view, and yet the situation escalated in 2025. This study took a different line by observing the situation from the Old Testament point of view.

The Old Testament has a response to most, if not all, of life's challenges. The Wisdom literature of the Old Testament has, as a characteristic, solutions to social crimes in society. According to Dell (2024), wisdom literature serves to educate and shape moral character through wise sayings, guidance, and early observations of natural phenomena; highlights the positive outcomes achieved by following wisdom in matters of life and mortality; and emphasizes the significance of effective communication both personally and collectively within society.

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Just like Ecclesiastes 1:9 puts it, 'There is nothing new under the sun'.

The problem is that several approaches have been used to observe the issue of femicide in Nigeria. Ogunlana et al. (2024) observed the issue from the sociological perspective; Aidonojie, Kolawole and Aleshinloye (2024) viewed femicide from the legal angle; and Molale and Asak (2024) observed the issue from the political lens. It is challenging to locate research that examines the problem of femicide in Nigeria through the lens of ancient Israelite wisdom texts. This is the gap this study intends to fill by taking themes from the wisdom corpus, particularly from Proverbs 12:24–28. The Old Testament Proverbs 12:24–28 provides a better view of the phenomenon of femicide. Proverbs 12:24–28 addresses the issue of economic independence and security. It insists on people being diligent and hard-working so that they may not fall into insecurity. The pericope also shows the dangers of worry because it pushes one into immoral things to solve one's problem, which also affects the young women in Nigeria. Some of the issues lie in bad friendship, which was reputed in Proverbs 12:24–28 with an emphasis on the fact that the righteous are discerning about their relationships. The pericope encourages hard work against laziness, which has the ability of reducing the vulnerability of women to women killers. The climax of the aphorism in the pericope explains that living righteously, notwithstanding the situation one finds oneself in, brings life, which invariably means that unrighteous living, such as trying to make money by any means, brings danger, that is, death. The aphorisms in Proverbs 12:24–28 touch on diligence, anxiety, good friends and long life for men and women. Also, the assertion that women as well as men are created in the image of God is generally hailed in modern world as remarkably progressive (Collins 2019:61). As individuals living in this flawed world and as a society, the passage underlines that there are two routes in this life: one that leads the virtuous to life and the other that leads the wicked to ruin and destruction (Andrews 2019). These aphorisms touch on the very fabric of the motivating factors for the increasing rates of femicide in Nigeria.

This article offers a literary analysis of Proverbs 12:24–28. Literary analysis involves examining narrative and rhetorical techniques to gain deeper insight into their meaning (Rendsburg 2021). The literary analysis looks at how Proverbs 12:24–28 communicates its intended meaning and how the pericope interacts with contemporary narratives of vulnerability in Nigeria, which enriches interpretations. Data were obtained from the Bible, Bible dictionaries, commentaries and articles from relevant biblical, theological and academic journals and books. The data were grouped into themes and analysed through literary analysis. The aim of this study is to examine Proverbs 12:24–28 in the light of the increasing femicide in Nigeria. Firstly, this study provides a nuanced historic purview of Proverbs 12. Secondly, it engages the various theological themes in Proverbs 12. Thirdly, it explains the phenomenon of femicide in Nigeria. Fourthly, it uses Proverbs 12:24–28 to shed light on the negative phenomenon of femicide in Nigeria.

Historical lens of Proverbs 12

The book of Proverbs focuses on the theme of moral living, the meaning of life and the fear of God. Just as in other chapters of the book of Proverbs, Chapter 12 uses poetic and proverbial models to reflect on philosophical and theological lenses from the day-to-day experiences of human beings. Proverbs 12 is believed to be part of the Solomon corpus, which is generally a collection of wisdom sayings. It provides roadmaps on how people should live righteous, morally sound, disciplined and wisdom-filled life. Proverbs 12 falls into the literary genre of Wisdom literature. Wisdom literature was a common phenomenon in the ancient Near East and beyond. In Egypt, for instance, the 'Instruction of Amenemope' brought out some pieces of wisdom that touch on personal wellbeing and social harmony. According to Ruffle (1975:30), the Teaching of Amenemope was closely parallel to the portion of Proverbs sometimes subtitled 'Words of the Wise' (22:17–24:22) and claimed that it was possible to use the Egyptian text to elucidate the crux in Proverbs 22:20. Just like Proverbs in the Old Testament, the Egyptian 'Instruction of Amenemope' contains maxims and aphorisms on diligence, speech and humble living.

Conventionally, scholars (Longman & Longman 2006; Simanjuntak 2020; Waltke 1979) have ascribed the book of Proverbs to Solomon. During the reign of Solomon, Israel enjoyed real prosperity economically and culturally and increased the pursuit of wisdom, justice and order. Wisdom literature invites us to live well in God's world, and it also calls us to cultivate a life that honours God through our actions, relationships and responses to hardship (Teddy 2024). Proverbs is believed to have been compiled over centuries. While Proverbs certainly contains abundant counsel, this guidance carries a distinct sharpness and perspective (Jacobson 2021). The aphorisms contained in Proverbs 12 and other proverbs are believed to be passed down orally or probably by rote.

There are various themes in Proverbs 12. It contains the theme of righteousness and wickedness. It contains aphorisms on the outcomes of living a righteous life and the outcomes of living a wicked life. Chapters 10 and 11 are continued in Chapter 12. Except for verses 9 and 14, wisdom contrasts virtue and wickedness once more. Again, Solomon presents the reader with several real-world, practical life decisions, where the reader must decide between good and bad, true and false and right and wrong. Those who do good bring God joy, but those who lead wicked lives are condemned (Andrews 2019). It proposes that the morally stable person is guided by God and receives blessings from him, while the wicked are brought to ruin. Another theme centres on the need to control one's speech and way of communication. The kind of words used by humans can maintain social relationships and stability and capable of causing conflict and destruction of lives and property. Proverbs 12 also contains a theme on diligence and laziness, where everyone is called to be hard-working to prosper

rather than being slothful and engaging in actions that may be inimical to a good and peaceful life. It secures God's favour, while its opposite is condemned (Maclaren 1952). Above all, the theme of moral integrity bears a central point in Proverbs 12. It calls on everyone to have personal integrity notwithstanding the pressure, treating everyone with genuine love and integrity, which reflected the communal morality in ancient Israel.

Proverbs 12:24–28 provide ethical guidance for individuals, groups and society at large on the moral way to live one's life. This is the normal paradigm of Israelite wisdom literature. The book of Proverbs fits into the Israelite wisdom movement because of its emphases on learning through observation, reflection and experiences of others (or from oneself) like other core biblical books like the Book of Job and Ecclesiastes. The Books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job and certain passages of Psalms did have some of the common features that, over time, would lead them to become known collectively as the wisdom literature of the canonical Old Testament (eds. Wright & Oden 2005). The Israelite wisdom movement focused on living a godly and moral life, which brings about success. Moreover, it has a strong link with Yahwistic faith through repeated expressions that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Parents are expected to teach their children the contents of Proverbs 12 and other maxims found in other parts of Proverbs. These maxims promote important virtues in society, such as honesty, humility and respect for others, especially not involving oneself in taking the lives of others.

What Proverbs 12:24–28 tries to communicate?

Throughout the book of Proverbs, women are represented in the positive and negative light. In fact, the concept 'wisdom' is personified as a female figure possessing noble, valuable and life-saving attributes (cf. Pr 1:20–33, 8:1–36, 9:1–6). Proverbs 31:10–31 depicts the woman of wisdom as one who is wise, industrious, economically viable, respectful and morally sound. Furthermore, women are presented as teachers of morality to the family and to outsiders, teaching their children ways of wisdom and righteousness (Pr 1:8, 6:20, & 31:1). There were also negative representations of women, especially those who seduce men and lead them to destruction (Pr 2:16–19, 5:3–14). There is also the mention of contentious wives who are quarrelsome and nag their husbands and children (Pr 19:13, 21:9, 21:19). The foolish woman is seen as one who is loud, ignorant and destructive. Thus, the book of Proverbs presents women as significant models who can either contribute to the development of social order or destroy the social order and individual wellbeing. It projects women as teachers of morality and the consequences of women who make poor choices in relationships and character.

Proverbs 12:24–28 does not directly mention women. The text talks about the general principles relating to morality, life experiences, character, work and righteousness. The principles presented would apply equally to women within

the book's overall framework. Proverbs 12:24 aligns critically with Proverbs 31 in its analysis of a virtuous woman who works diligently and manages affairs competently. Proverbs 12:25 connotes the positive roles of women as wise counsellors and teachers, and as those who are supposed to be wisdom personified. This corroborated the observation of Hunter (2006:5) that women who are wise manifest their wisdom in several ways. Proverbs 12:26 lucidly projects women as moral guides, either leading towards wisdom or foolishness. Proverbs 12:24–28 emphasise that diligence, wise speech and righteous character are valued traits that lead to positive outcomes regardless of gender. It presents universal principles about men and women emphasising hard work, encouraging words and moral integrity.

Theological themes in Proverbs 12:24–28

The theological themes in Proverbs 12:24–28 that were discovered include:

Being industrious (vv. 24, 27)

In v. 24, the rhetor notes that those who are diligent will rule. Hebrew *הָרֹץ* means diligent, determined, hard-working, and industrious which shows that one who is hard-working will surely rule over others and events. With regards to women, this is a type of encouragement to women for economic empowerment. Rule in Hebrew is *מָשַׁל* [govern, dominate, reign], which shows that one who is hard-working will dominate over others. As usual with aphorists, there was juxtaposition. The wisdom writer in verse 24 emphasised that the idle person [*הַמְּקִיָּה*] (negligent, deceptive) who has neglected their duty to engage in honest, diligent labour will eventually be compelled to perform that same hard work, but under circumstances where it will no longer provide them any advantage or benefit. In this context, Benson (1854) observed that verse 24 characterizes the idle individual as a 'deceitful person' because dishonesty and laziness typically go hand in hand, with such individuals attempting to obtain through fraudulent means, cunning schemes, and dishonest practices what they are either unable or unwilling to acquire through legitimate work. With regards to women, a lazy woman will be at the mercy of those who are hard-working, especially for clothing, shelter and food. This makes them vulnerable. The lazy ones are conquered people and are subjected to forced labour by their benefactors. In many cases, lazy women see men as cheap benefactors without considering the implications. Their benefactors decide where they go, what they do and what they eat, among other things.

In verse 27, the rhetor insists that the lazy do not get themselves ready for opportunities that would have changed their lives. For women, some of them see formal or informal education as a waste of time. They lose every opportunity and catch [*הַתְּרָה*] on no success. The loss of opportunities leads to frustration and intense emotion. However, a juxtaposition was made: 'but the diligent feed on the riches of the hunt'. So, while the lazy lose out, the diligent are always catching

on to these opportunities (wealth, riches, possessions and enough [הון]). This is while the smart women are economically strong, because they are able to grab opportunities at their disposal. It also shows that the diligent person, in this case women, will have an abundance of material wealth through their dependence on God and avoiding the pitfalls of laziness, which makes them exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed.

Manner of approach and pressure (v. 25)

In v. 25a, it explains how women are facing various challenges. Humans, of which women are part of, are bound to be worried about situations and always afraid of the future. Women are always seeking solutions to their anxiety because of the fear of the unknown. The Hebrew term *הַאֲזָדָה* refers to anxiety, worry, and concern, which leads to emotional weight and psychological anguish [הַאֲזָדָה] and ultimately produces negative outcomes if the individual cannot find contentment or maintain patience in their relationship with God. Just like in other books of the wisdom literature, women are called to trust in God's provision as the basic solution to anxiety. In verse 25b, a gentle, encouraging, and good [טוֹב] word brings comfort to the anxious person, providing reassurance of both divine and human care for their circumstances. A good word is glad, comforting, cheering and encouraging, coming from any friend that comforts their distressed state; this lifts the heart and inspires it with joy (Gill 1980). When a woman is thinking too much, anger may set in, but if the person close to her uses kind words to calm the woman with anxiety, the propensity of the woman with anxiety to cause harm is minimised. A woman who is an anxious person is open to good and bad advice. With kind advice, the anxiety of the woman will not push her into engaging in evil. Kind advice or words can bring about divine favour, prosperity and moral integrity to a woman at crossroads.

Friendship (vv. 26, 28)

In verse 26a, the rhetor calls on the righteous woman (just, innocent, humble [צַדִּיקָה]) to carefully choose people to get close to, that is, their friends. Thus, the *צַדִּיקָה* woman engages in moral and ethical behaviour in line with God's standard. The righteous woman is called upon to choose (choose, search, seek, spy [תִּוּר]) friends carefully, ensuring that they do not follow those who live wayward lives. A godly person should investigate and observe someone before making that person a friend. With investigation and observation, the ways of the enemy would be known, and the future success of the righteous is assured. The righteous women are careful in choosing their friends.

In verse 26b, the rhetor instructs that the way of the wicked (wicked, bad person, evil, guilty, wrong [רָשָׁע]) leads them astray (err, wander, stray, deceive [תִּטְעָה]). The stray path of the wicked shows that they are lost or misguided because of their deviation from God's commandments. The righteous are prosperous, not in this world's goods, but in the graces and comforts of the Spirit, which are the true riches. Evil

men vainly flatter themselves that their ways are not wrong (Henry 2003). The wicked woman is the person who does things against the ethical and moral standards of God. The wicked are considered as rebels to God's law, and this leads to physical and spiritual consequences. The evil ways of the wicked can also cause the death of the wicked.

In v. 28a, the rhetor insists that in the way of righteousness (justice, rightness [יָשָׁר]), there is life (alive, fresh, strong [חַיָּ]). This entails that the woman who does the right thing is surely in a right relationship with God and others. Righteousness is both a personal virtue and a communal responsibility. Righteousness includes good treatment of others, and care for suffering and poor people and the downtrodden. Hebrew *יָשָׁר* shows that the woman who does the right thing will live in prosperity and affluence and receive favour from God and from fellow humans. People of the ancient Near East, including Israel, understood life to be a blessing and a sign that God approves of the good path based on obedience to God and his laws.

In verse 28b, the rhetor further avers that the path of the righteous is immortality [חַיִּים]. The Hebrew word *מָוֶת* means death, pestilence, ruin and plague, which shows that those who follow the wrong path will face death, pestilence and various punishments from nature. Death is the consequence of sin. A person who does right escapes a bad name, and even after his or her physical death, his goodness sings for him or her. The wisdom embedded in Proverbs 12:24–28 is necessary for women in Nigeria. The aphorisms are important in addressing the increasing lack of wisdom portrayed by young women in Nigeria, which can lead them to falling into the hands of ritualists. Proverbs 12:24–28 emphasises diligent work and hard work for Nigerian women, making them less likely to remain in dangerous situations because of economic dependency. Proverbs 12:24–28 also emphasises righteous character for Nigerian women, which serves as a safety net that can provide protection in dangerous situations. The pericope also is of the view that there is a sharp contrast between diligence and laziness of women, and righteousness and wickedness, which can inform decision-making about relationships and life choices. Thus, the pericope projects that women who develop discernment about character can better identify potentially dangerous partners or situations.

Femicide of Nigeria

It was Diana Russell in 1976 who brought about the concept of femicide. Russell (1976) defines femicide as the deliberate killing of women by men, driven by misogyny, disdain, sadistic gratification or possessive attitudes towards women. Essentially, it encompasses the murder of females by males specifically because of their gender. Femicide is a serious form of gender-based violence that is growing in Nigeria and has reached the level of being recognised as an epidemic. It also shows the extension of the socio-cultural norms where women are placed on certain restrictions and do not enjoy the same privileges as the male counterparts. In Nigeria, these socio-cultural norms have led to systemic inequalities between men and women. The three major religions in Nigeria, that is, African traditional religion, Christianity and

Islam, have evidence of this systemic inequality against women. Thus, modern-day society has further extended this inequality into the brutal killing of women and girls all over Nigeria. Table 1 shows a selected list of women and girls killed by their loved ones. Unfortunately, hardly is there a period without the narrative of the killing of a woman in brutal ways. Table 1 shows some examples of femicide.

Causes of femicide in Nigeria

The challenge of femicide in Nigeria is caused by some factors. One perspective suggests that some men may commit femicide because of gender-based entitlement, where they perceive control over women as a right, coupled with developmental and attitudinal characteristics that legitimise violence to exert power (Eriksson et al. 2023). Predominantly, intimate femicide is because of societal pressures and individual psychological factors, where perpetrators perceive their actions as justified in defending their honour or societal reputation (Di Marco & Evans 2021). Additionally, socioeconomic environments and the lack of institutional supports can create conditions that exacerbate violence against women, including femicide (Álvarez-Garavito & Acosta González 2021).

Also, poverty is another motivating factor increasing femicide in Nigeria. Poverty can exacerbate social tensions and contribute to femicide, by creating environments where stress and burdens intensify the pressure on the woman making her vulnerable to men who are looking for those to use for rituals. According to Chinanuife and Atakpa (2021), women's financial disadvantage and economic hardship – regardless of their relationship status – serve as key factors that perpetuate violence against them. This ongoing violence, in turn, creates negative consequences for overall socioeconomic advancement. It reduces the opportunities of Nigerian women to escape violent situations and death. Some of these women follow their aggressors to get money for phone, cloth, paying of house rent and other sundry expenses. Thus, financial dependence of some of the Nigerian women on their abusive partners can trap women in abusive relationships as economic constraints hinder the ability to seek help or relocation.

Furthermore, there is the increasing pace of rituals where the youth are no longer contented but want to make money through any means. Uroko (2022) noted that most youths want to fulfil all their wants and needs with no iota of contentment. According to Ojo et al. (2024), it is the elusive mind of the youth

that makes them want to live an extravagant life. They visit native doctors who mandate that they bring the head, hand or any other organs of a human body as far as blood is shed. Youth who are willing to do anything usually end up using their loved ones, who may be their wife, girlfriend, sister or even mother, for the ritual. Take, for instance, the case of a young man who, in November 2024, killed his mother in Eku, Ethiopie East Local Government Area of Delta State, as part of a ritual (Onoyume 2024). Also, there was the case of a 25-year-old woman, Promise Eze, from Ebonyi State, who was tied to a small chair with her mouth covered with plaster and about to be used for a ritual in a hotel in Abuja before she was rescued on 30 January 2025 (Sunday 2025). Domestic violence also causes femicide in Nigeria. There are cases of women who were killed or maimed by their husbands in Nigeria. Between January 2021 and March 2022, 35 women were killed by their husbands (Sahara Reporters 2022). It was on 12 March 2017 that Kalu Bernard killed his wife, SolapeOladipupo, at her Corporal and Below Quarters, Compound 9, Air Force Base, Makurdi, Benue State, on the suspicion that she was having a romantic affair with another man (Eniola 2017).

Additionally, the deeply rooted patriarchal socio-cultural traditions have contributed to the rising rates of femicide in Nigeria. It is conventional for women to see themselves as second-class citizens who are at the mercy of men. They are made to believe that even in death, a woman should be submissive. This is the reason that when the woman is experiencing systemic abuse in the house, she closes her mouth because if she speaks, she is seen as someone who is bringing her family problems outside. It was on 08 April 2022 that a top Nigerian gospel singing star, Osinachi Nwachukwu, died from the systemic beating from the husband who was forced to stay in the marriage because of shame (Olaoluwa 2022).

Furthermore, there seems to be no enforcement of the law against the killing of women in Nigeria. Nigeria possesses the *Violence Against Persons Act*, which makes all forms of violence against women illegal, but beyond merely having these statutes in existence, it is crucial to emphasize that they lack enforcement power - despite these legal protections, women remain vulnerable to continued abuse (Obiezu 2025). What exists is just the general punishment for taking one's life, that is, if the person is found guilty. Take, for instance, it was on 25 December 2022 that there was the shooting of a lawyer named Bolanle Raheem by a policeman, DrambiVandi (Adelagun 2023). The

TABLE 1: Selected cases of femicide in Nigeria.

Number	Case	Place	Date	Source
1.	Nwana reportedly set his wife, ChiomaNwana, ablaze following a heated altercation over suspected infidelity, and she died.	Anambra State	21 January 2025	Obianeri 2025
2.	A 40-year-old man, Joshua Nwafor, killed his wife, Charity, over a tuber of yam.	Ebonyi State	22 December 2024	Agbodo 2024
3.	Sunday beat his wife, Habibbat Bakare, to death in the Ipaja area of the state.	Lagos State	10 December 2024	Idowu 2024
4.	Gospel singer Timileyin Ajayi killed Salome Adaidu by cutting off her head.	Nasarawa State	12 January 2025	Agwam 2025
5.	Miss MojisolaAwesu, a 21-year-old female student of the College of Health Technology, was killed for rituals.	Kwara State	09 August 2024	Shittu 2024
6.	Sofiat Kehinde was killed, beheaded, and her head was burnt for money ritual purposes.	Ogun State	04 February 2022	RédactionAfricanews 2022
7.	Alex, a ritualist and yahoo boy, was caught attempting to kill a hook-up girl named Olivia for rituals.	Abuja	17 September 2024	Bajah 2024

lack of laws protecting the killing of women seems to have made people believe that they can plead not guilty in court and go free.

Proverbs 12:24–28 in times of crisis in Nigeria

The aphorism in Proverbs 12:24 calls on everyone to be hard-working. This entails that people should not be idle, but put their hands into one legitimate venture or business. If brought into the Nigerian context, women are called not to rely completely on men for their daily needs and upkeep. Nigerian women and girls are encouraged to get a job or begin a business to enable them to meet their needs and want. Looking at some of the femicide in Nigeria, some girls rely on their boyfriends for their upkeep, making them easy prey for abuse from their boyfriends or man-friend. It is this quest to meet their needs that Nigerian girls are beginning to enter various forms of prostitution in Nigeria. They are called to hotels by boys and men into rituals and they end up being killed, and some of their body parts are removed for ritual purposes. Thus, the aphorist in v. 24 insists that those who are lazy or have decided not to do anything are bound to suffer the consequences of their laziness, which is seen in the increasing femicide in Nigeria. This is seen in the case of a 17-year-old girl, Chinasa Adigwe, from Umueje village, who was found dead in a bush at Omasi village with her private parts cut off (Eleweke 2024) after her alleged meeting with a man. When a woman uses her hands to engage in a legitimate business, the aphorist said that she is likely to be blessed by God.

In Proverbs 12:25, the aphorists mentioned that man is going through so many problems and challenges. This is like what so many men are going through, no thanks to the dwindling economy. However, the aphorists advised that in this situation, women should learn how to talk to their husbands or men they encounter. Some Nigerian women are known to be arrogant to their husbands, showing a high level of disrespect without considering the distress the man is going through. This is one of the major reasons for increasing femicide caused by domestic violence in Nigeria. This is why in v. 25b, the aphorists advised women to be kind with words, especially to their husbands or others they meet outside. Furthermore, a kind answer will not push a man into killing a woman or engaging in rituals to make money. Some women in Nigeria insult their husbands, comparing other men to them and telling them how poor they are. This sometimes pushes the man into engaging in rituals just to please the lady or wife or to prove a point. Unfortunately, the lady who pushes the man with unkind words into rituals may end up being the scapegoat or the person whom the native doctor will advise the man to use.

In v. 26, the rhetor mentioned the need for people to choose their friends wisely through investigation of the background of the person and family members. Unfortunately, girls do not investigate anything about the man they are about to go into a relationship with as far as the man has the money to spend on them. Had some of the girls killed in Nigeria carried out an

investigation about the person they were entering a relationship with, like knowing their past relationship, and the church they attended, some of them would not have been killed in the gruesome way they were killed. In verse 26b, the wisdom teacher counseled that one should avoid association with morally corrupt companions, as harmful influences undermine virtuous behavior. Those who persist in maintaining relationships with such individuals must accept the resulting consequences. Applying this to the Nigerian context, any woman who chooses to pursue a relationship with a man solely based on his material wealth - luxury cars and money - while being aware that his riches have questionable origins, must be prepared to bear the negative outcomes that arise from such a partnership. A friend of a ritualist should be prepared to be used as a sacrificial lamb at any point in time.

In v. 28, the aphorist is of the view that people who do the right thing live a happy and long life. The practice of justice and godliness, although it exposes a person to some dangers and inconveniences in the world, will certainly lead him to peace and happiness, whereas the end of all wicked courses is death and destruction (Poole 1985). Thus, any Nigerian woman who decides to know the type of man to go into a relationship with, or the married woman who knows how to treat and talk to the husband in a good way, will live a happy and long life. The lady or woman has little chance of being used for sacrifice or being abused to death. Just as long life is something God used in blessing the ancient Israelites, so it is to the present Nigerian women who may enjoy long life if they are hard-working, disciplined in choosing friends and kind with the words they use on their husbands.

Recommendations

The following are suggestions that could be followed to curb the increasing level of femicide in Nigeria. They include:

- Nigerian ladies should look for jobs to do so as not to put a burden on any boy or man. This dependence on man for every one of their needs makes them easy prey to be used for rituals.
- Nigerian ladies should investigate the background information of anyone they are about to go into a relationship with. It is sad that a lady will meet a man on Facebook and travel eight hours to meet a man in his house or hotel they have never met before. This makes them products for ritual men.
- There is the need for the Nigerian government to enact comprehensive domestic violence laws with specific femicide provisions and mandatory minimum sentences.
- There is the need to incorporate gender equality, healthy relationships and conflict resolution into primary and secondary school curricula in Nigeria.
- There is the need to train religious leaders on the theological foundations of gender equality and the sanctity of women's lives. Also, encourage the clergy to develop sermons and teachings that explicitly condemn violence against women while promoting biblical concepts of love and respect.

- There is also the need to develop community-based programmes that challenge toxic masculinity and promote healthy expressions of manhood. This can be attained through the training of traditional rulers, community elders and male leaders to become advocates against femicide.

Conclusion

Proverbs 12:24–28 provides formidable axioms for girls and women to live a peaceful life in Nigeria. This article emphasises the need for Nigerian women to be industrious, especially the unmarried girls, so as not to fall prey to men into rituals. The pericope also emphasised the need for ladies to be careful with the kind of relationship they go into. For the married women, Proverbs 12:25 emphasised how kind speech could help control anger and reduce anxiety in men. The lessons are crucial for Nigerian women and girls to embrace, especially in light of the growing cases of femicide in the country. Such incidents include the brutal beheading of women, their bodies being mutilated in hotels, private parts being removed, and even wives being set ablaze with petrol by husbands who feel they are not meeting their expectations. The study proposes that men who are found to be involved in femicide, if found guilty, should be made to face the full legal consequences of Nigerian law. Also, there is a need to enact laws on femicide in Nigeria because of the lacuna created by the non-existence of constitutional provisions on the consequences of those involved in femicide. Programmes should be organised for young people where they are taught respectful relationships and contentment. This article expands theological understanding of how Proverbs' wisdom traditions can inform gender relations and women's safety. The article provides valuable insights that religious leaders, governmental and non-governmental organisations can use in sermons, teachings and counselling to address femicide. It offers biblically grounded curricula for church-based anti-violence programmes. Churches and faith communities can play a crucial role in anti-violence advocacy in Nigeria. Religious institutions command significant respect and trust in Nigerian society, giving them unique power to shape attitudes towards violence against women through sermons, teachings and community guidance. Faith communities can hold perpetrators accountable through church discipline while offering redemption and rehabilitation programmes that address the root causes of violent behaviour.

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F.C.U. is the sole author of this research article.

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