



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE LIGHT OF CULTURAL VARIATION: A REFLECTION ON NIGERIA' S ETHNO-RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence has become a global topical issue. Social thinkers, scholars and human rights advocates have continued to express concern over the rising trend in domestic violence vis-à-vis the gradual and systematic erosion of family values as occasioned by culture. On daily basis the polity is awash with reports on spousal killings, brutalization, molestation, sexual abuse in the family. Evidently, these incidents have been traced to a number of factors which range from economic social, cultural and psychological disposition of spouses. Statistics obtained from Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2019) noted that thirty (30) percent of women in Nigeria, aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, while sixty-eight (68) percent have encountered emotional, economic, or sexual abuse. This paper aims to bring to the fore the rising incidents of domestic violence in the light of cultural variation. This paper made use of qualitative method of data collection like Focus Group Discussion, Key Informant Interview and other secondary sources of data. The paper adopted and used a self-developed twelve (12) item semi structured interview guide for twelve (12) Key Informant Interview (KII) as well as two (2) sets of ten (10) participants each to elicit information on the phenomenon under study. The paper adopts biopsychological approach, social stressor and non-subordination theory in explaining domestic violence in spousal relationships. The paper concludes that, as long as spouses see marriage from the cultural point of view of male dominance and right to control his spouse so will the spates of domestic violence continue to threaten family life. The paper recommends a holistic approach as a means to solve the problem of domestic violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: Cultural Variation, Religious Diversity, Domestic violence, Sexual abuse and Physical abuse.

Introduction

The family is universally acknowledged as the backbone of any given society and it is the basis of legitimization of offspring and a bond of filial affinity. Thus, harmonious relationship existing in the family forms a measure of predicting the social and psychological stability of any given society. In other words there is an indefinable nexus between marital peace and social progress. But overtime, the recurring and endemic nature of domestically orchestrated violence has taken a toll



on the family and placed it in a perilous situation. On daily basis the media is awash with reports of domestic violence and spousal killings, brutalization and sexual abuses on women and children. Marriage which in the past was the dream of every eligible man and woman has suddenly become viewed with sense of foreboding.

It is no longer news that aspiring young men and women dreads to walk down the aisle of marital life for fear of uncertainties as a result of related incidents of domestic violence. Unfortunately, despite the fact that these violent acts continue to cripple the foundation of many families and by extension the fabric of society, nothing much has been achieved in checking the menace. Recent rise in incidents of domestic violence has brought to the fore that something has gone fundamentally wrong with the institution of marriage. The rise in domestic violence is not helped by seeming non-challant attitude being displayed by not only the victim but society by extension. Today, men, women and children has been turned into punching bags, molested, raped and violated at will.

It is not always easy to determine in the early stages of marital relationship if one spouse will become abusive. Abusers may often seem wonderful and perfect initially, but gradually become more aggressive and controlling as the relationship continues. Abuse may begin with behaviors that may easily be dismissed or downplayed such as name-calling, threats, possessiveness, or distrust. Abusers may apologize profusely for their actions or try to convince the person they are abusing that they do these things out of love or care. However, despite the apologies violence and control always intensifies over time with an abuser. What may start out as something that was first believed to be harmless spiral into excessive control and abuse?

Nigerian women have suffered various forms of gender-induced violence from pre-colonial, through the colonial era and afterwards. Not even civilization and western education has changed most men's perception of the Nigerian woman as someone who deserves some respect and dignity. Here, women are still regarded as a variety of humanity inferior to the menfolk and are therefore treated in manners undeserving of human beings. In Nigeria and Africa generally, women are considered as tools to be used by men. They are regarded as objects to be used for pleasure, temptation and elimination.

In Nigeria, a man will beat his wife and nothing will happen, instead they will expect her to go on her knees and beg him. Cultural violence against the woman and the female gender is an ubiquitous plague that has continually beleaguered societies in Nigeria and Africa in general. The governments have come up with specious and spurious policies that camouflage protection for women, yet fall short of achieving this objective. Majority of women in Nigeria and Africa in general suffers one form of violence or another. Often, this violence takes physical and/or psychological forms. Together with emotional violence which assumes a universal applicability. It is disturbing; indeed, melancholic that women have unfortunately and helplessly come to accept these mistreatments as the norm rather than the exception. Most of these women are raised in the belief that their identity is subsumed or attached to the man's and that they can't have dignity of their own.



Odumaikin (2006) as cited in Ezeakabekwe et al (2021) expressed her concern on the alarming rate of domestic violence on daily basis stating that it has practically become a daily occurrence in our society. She posits that her office handles more than 2.400 cases of domestic related violence on annual basis. Ironically, only two have been cases of men who reported being beaten or brutalized by their wives. The implication of this is that women are the prime subject and remains the target of abusers. Similarly, Effah Chukwuma (2006) as cited in Ajiboye, S, Duru, I and Ojo, H, 2016) noted an upsurge and widespread nature of the problem and stated that her organization receives between four or five fresh cases every week. According to her, “if you put the number together, we have 16-20 cases every month. These exclude old ones that we are working on and the several cases that victims report to the police and family members.” This is only but an infinitesimal part of the problem compared to those that remain unreported or deposed as mere family issues that could be taken care of within the family circle or those that are completely treated with indifference or ignored or considered as signs of a woman's inability to take care of her marital responsibility. The paper will explore the domestic violence in the light of cultural variation.

Statement of the problem

There is a fallacious belief that is rooted in most African cultures and the African women born and raised in these disquieting cultures know nothing other than the system and way of life they are used to. They, thus, are blind to the aberrations of these cultures. It is commonly argued in sociology that no culture is vice, none is superior and none would promote evil or antisocial behaviors. Yet, the distinction between good and evil in most cases is subject to the understanding and reality of the party making such distinction and dependent on several variables. Culture and religion seem to be the right tool for the discrimination, oppression, intimidation and actual use of force on women. Various cultures across Africa favours male domination and the women are at the mercy of themselves.

Violence against women is a crime that should carry stiff penalty yet, it is being favoured by cultural orientation. This issue has led to the death of many women, some were maimed for live. We live in a male-dominated society. It is not a Nigerian thing; it is all over the world. Women are being violated daily in the offices, homes and every social place. Some women don't even know that they are being violated; they just accept it as part of their existence, which is not true. There are various legislations against this form of violence but many people do not know. The Nigerian penal and criminal code penalizes rape, assault and other forms of abuse, but they are hardly reported and arraigned not to talk of conviction. The penal code gives men the permission to violet their wives. You should also know that the civil law entitles females to limited ownership rights. In some cultures, only men have the right to own properties.

Domestic violence is prevalent in marriages and intimate relations. According to demographic and health survey by National Coalition against Domestic Violence (NCADV, 2018) 64.3 per cent of Nigerian women consider it normal to be beaten by their husbands. Girls below the age of 18 are also being abused; but unfortunately, most of these cases are not reported because of the fear of stigmatization. There is every need to put a stop to this violence against women, but unfortunately, African culture and our laws in Nigeria make it difficult, as the society appears to be more favourable to men. However, every effort must be made to stop this unacceptable act. This paper is an attempt to explore the domestic violence in the light of cultural variation.



Objective of the Study

The general objective for this paper is to examine domestic violence in the light of cultural variation while the specific objectives are to:

- (i) To investigate the factors responsible for domestic violence against women
- (ii) To find out the indicators of domestic violence against women with cultural variation
- (iii) To examine unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence
- (iv) To ascertain the implications of domestic violence among women
- (v) To evaluate measures to curb the menace of domestic violence and cultural variations

Research Questions

- (i) What are the factors responsible for domestic violence against women?
- (ii) What are the indicators of domestic violence against women with cultural variation?
- (iii) What are the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence?
- (iv) What are the implications of violence among women?
- (v) What are the measures to curb the menace?

Significance of the Study

This paper will be useful in a number of ways:

It will help the society realize the harm that patriarchy has caused women

It will help the government and other agencies involved take proactive steps to reduce the plight of women in their different cultural bondage

It will help women understand their pain and come together to fight for their rights.

Theoretical Framework

Various theoretical postulations have been advanced in explain the nature and reasons for domestic violence by scholars and social scientists. The theoretical scope of this paper will revolve around the biological/psychological, social stress and non-subordination approaches which provide bio-psychological and power relational explanations to domestic violence.

Biological/Psychological Theory

This theory dates back to Aristotle (384-322BC) Dualist view, Darwin and Wallace 19th Century theory of evolution and common descent and popularized by Helena (1964). This theoretical assumption attempts to place the root of domestic violence to genetics, brain malfunction, personality trait and psycho-mental characteristics. To this school of thought, sudden burst in adrenaline leading to aggressive disposition or impulsive behavior or reactions is a product of biological and childhood influences. To this perspective, experiences at childhood may induce behavioral insomnia which may lead to violent disposition. In this vein, this view attempts to justify the notion that there are relational interfaces between childhood experience and future violent behavioural disposition. This situation is germane towards understanding the innate violent attitude displayed by most spouses which it traced to psycho-pathological disorder, a situation that makes it difficult for such persons to cultivate or development healthy relationship with their spouse. To this end, the perspective argues that a child who lives under a roof where violence, spousal fights is a norm is likely to develop and display deregulated depression towards others. Such children are bound to develop a complex personality, lack coping skills towards others in a social relationship, and in the long run adapt and internalize the culture of violent disposition.



Another psychological assumption leaning towards the evolutionary perspective sees domestic violence not only on the basis of childhood experiences but also on attempt by men to or abusers to control their spouse reproduction and assume sexual exclusive possession. To such abusers in order to ensure absolute control the spouse sexuality must be placed within his control and must invariably use every means possible to ensure compliance even if it requires threat or use of physical violence. This disposition fell with the purview of the traditionalists who see control of spouse sexuality as extension of family control. Although this paradigm tried to make an expose of the impact of childhood experiences as a factor that can motivate violent attitudes towards spouses or the fact that controlling the spouse sexuality as may have led to domestic violence, the theory failed to explain why such childhood experiences have also served as corrective impetus in the life of many spouses who experience domestic violence. This theory is criticized for generalization. They fail to explain why some kids who grow in violent homes are not violent.

Social Stress Theory

This theory is propounded by Stark & Flitcraft (1988). The social stress theory of domestic violence presupposes that domestic violence is instigated by stress and strain associated with marital relationship. To this view financial constraints and inadequacies and associated demands in the family may increase tendency of spouses resorting to aggressive disposition in their relationship. This is usually experienced in middle income families where financial inadequacies and pressure of meeting not only the demands of immediate family but as well as the extended family demands. Situations like this create feeling of depression, frustration and disappointment with self and society and at the slightest impulse may visit their frustration on those close to them. A man ego is bruised if he is unable to meet his financial responsibilities or found financially incapacitated or incapable of supporting family economically, unable to maintain self-control may turn to substance abuse, alcoholism and disposition towards expressing his masculinity in his relationship with his spouse. This theory is criticized for fail to explain why some financially handicapped husbands are not violent.

Non-Subordination Theory

This theory took its roots from Johann Jacob Bachofen 1838 theory of female sexuality control. It was popularized by the Male Dominance Theorists (MDT), particularly, by Jim Sidanius (1999). This theory often referred to as the dominance theory is a feminist legal assumption which lays emphasis on power differentiation between men and women. The theory takes its position on what it termed socially imposed male dominance over the female. In order words it supposes the root of dominance lay in sex differentiation which has perpetrated power imbalance. This perspective focuses specifically on certain sexual behaviours including control of women sexuality, sexual harassment, pornography and violence against women generally. To the proponents of this theory, the theory captures in most intricate form why these sexual abuses against women are endemic. First, there are certain recurring patterns in domestic violence that show an act at the spur of the moment or moment of heat, rather a form of subordination evidence is the fact that victims are sometimes beaten after they have been sleeping or often the abuse takes emotional or financial form in addition to physical abuse. Abusers often employ manipulative measures to arouse their victim's anger to justify any action he considers appropriate to keep the victim in line.



The obvious correlation between the three approaches is that they pointed out the inter-play of factors that propel domestic violence. They pointed out that it all dwell on traditional perception of gender roles and their relationship in terms of superiority of a husband and subordination of the wife in marital relationship. Another area of convergence of the three assumptions is the fact that they identified attempts by perpetrators to assert control over their victims and also outlined the power imbalance that plays out in spousal relationships.

Methodology

This study adopted purposive sampling technique and qualitative research design. The research setting was Nigeria and the universes of the study were couple, custodian of culture and tradition as well as Security personnel in the country. This research adopted and used a self-developed twelve (12) item semi structured interview guide for twelve (12) Key Informant Interview (KII) as well as two (2) sets of ten (10) participants each who have had contacts with counseling units or health centers due to domestic violence and for the purpose of eliciting information on the phenomenon under study. This study used qualitative research technique in order to have an in-depth knowledge about the subject under study. It was analyzed using manual content analysis and ethnographic summary.

Findings and discussion of results

The findings of this paper are presented and discussed thematically below:

What are the factors responsible for domestic violence against women?

Participants from the Key Informant Interviews (KII) were asked what the factor responsible violence against women are and one of them pointed out that there included but not limited to insanity, substance use, frustration, poverty, poor socialization and lack of adequate anger management.

Another KII participant observed that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women cut across physical, social, cultural, religious, physiological, psychological and economic. She noted further that whatever point or factor that is mentioned must fall under any one of the aforementioned and advised that girls/ladies should look carefully before the leap into marriage with any Dick and Harry.

It was the view of another KII participant that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women include poverty, jealousy, inadequate socialization, poor socialization, temporary insanity, family background or influence as well as wife disrespect and snot being able to procreate.

One of the KII participants believed that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women are majorly substance abuse, family interferences, jealousy, anger problem; childlessness, wife disobedience, poverty, unemployment; patriarchy via religious and cultural factor amongst others.

Another KII participant argued that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women are poverty, childlessness, religious and cultural factors. Others are anger issue, mental disorder, drug use, peer influence, jealousy, wife disobedience and inadequate child upbringing.



It was conceived by one of the KII participants that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women are so many but some of the most common ones are childlessness, family interferences, poverty, family background, health issues and drug use. She further mentioned wife disrespect, jealousy, peer influence, high bride price, patriarchy, culture and religion as others.

The participants from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) observed that the factors responsible for domestic violence against women are poverty, drug or substance use, psychological disorder, unemployment, mistrust, jealousy, poor socialization, anger and lack of anger management techniques. Others said it could involve attempt by family to control unwanted sexual behaviour, family honour, preventing relationship outside the community and paying of bride price. Some others accused widow treatment, women submission, wife disobedience, inability to bear a child, suspect infidelity or women refusal to give the husband sex as well as lack of love by the husband etc.

What are the indicators of domestic violence against women with cultural variation?

The KII participants were asked the indicators of domestic violence against women, one of them said verbal or physical assault, shoving, threats, raising of hand; vandalism, harassment, battery, injuries, pushing and talking down on spouse.

It was reported by another KII participant that the indicators of domestic violence against women include assault, pushing, fighting, battery and violation of rights, injuries, denial of needs, threats as well as shoving and pushing around.

Another KII participant conceived that the indicators of domestic violence could be assault, pushing, threats, insults and embarrassments, downgrading and denial of basic needs or wants. It could also cover human right violations, battery, affray, vandalism and injuries.

One other KII participant believed that domestic violence against women begins with shoving or pushing, harassment, insult/assault, battery, affray and injuries incurred on the body. It could involve violation of right, denial of needs, downgrading, vandalism and threats of all kinds.

It was the opinion of another KII participant that the indicators of domestic violence are threats, insult, assault, affray, harassment, battery and denial of needs as well as pushing and down grading.

Another KII participant argued that the indicators of domestic violence could be seen from the angle of insult, beating, biting, harassment; denial of needs, violation of rights and down grading of her personality. It would cover booing and jeering, disgrace, fighting, vandalism and throwing of weapons. Some other indicators are denial of needs, betrayal before family members, violently shoving and pushing etc.

The FGD participants noted that the indicators of domestic violence against women with cultural variation are assault verbal or physical, affray; wife battery, talking down one`s spouse, pushing, shoving, raising of hands, vandalism, threat, denial of needs, injuries, deaths and violation of rights.



What are the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence?

KII participants were asked the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence in our society. one of the KII participants believed that ghost marriage, surrogate marriage, widow inheritance, wife swapping, women use as object of entertainment to visitors, purdahood, betrothed hood amongst others.

It was the opinion of a KII participant that money marriage, female genital mutilation, forced marriage, child marriage; spouse sharing, widow inheritance and ghost marriage. Some other cultural practices are forced marriage, honour-based marriage, betrothed hood, son preference, polygamy and scarification.

One of the KII participant noted that the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence are oath taking, circumcision/ female genital mutilation, oath taking, wife sharing, wife swapping, polygamy, son preference, scarification and tribal marks. She further pointed at forced marriage, betrothed marriage, child marriage, money marriage and honour-based marriage as some other unique cultural practices contributing immensely to domestic violence.

Another KII participant said widow inheritance, oath taking, testimony and swearing, child marriage, money marriage, betrothed marriage and circumcision are some of the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence. She said wife swapping, wife sharing, son preference and forced marriage are others.

It was the believe of another KII participant that the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence are forced marriage, betrothed marriage, child marriage, money marriage and honour-based marriage. Others are female genital mutilation/circumcision, oath taking, wife sharing, wife swapping, polygamy, son preference, scarification and tribal marks.

One KII participant accused wife sharing, child marriage, surrogate marriage, forced marriage, son preference, money marriage and widow inheritance as unique cultural practices that encouraged domestic violence. She believed that honour-based violence, betrothed hood, circumcision, scarification and tribal marks could be others.

The participants from FGD conceived that the unique cultural practices that encourage domestic violence against women with cultural variation are money marriage, wife swapping, forced marriage; betrothed hood and purdahood. Child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and honour-based violence were also seen as some. Others are female spouse sharing, son preference, polygamy, scarification, tribal marks and circumcision of young boys.

What are the implications of domestic violence among women?

When participants were asked the implications of domestic violence against women in our society, one of the KII participants noted that it violates women rights, demean them, denied women opportunity for growth and development. Other she said are trauma, injuries, pain, deaths and complications.



Another KII participant said the implications of domestic violence against women in our society are injuries, death, lack of growth and development, torture, trauma and institutionalizes patriarchy. It causes physical, social, cultural, emotional and psychological pain on women.

A KII participant observed that the implication of domestic violence against women in our society is that it relegates women to the background, oppress and subjugate them, it has the exploited and demean women to a point of causing physical, emotional and psychological trauma. It has also brought about injuries, deaths and permanent health challenges and complications on women.

It was the view of a KII participant that the implications of domestic violence against women in our society are exploitation, torture, trauma, subjugation and self-denial. It has also demeaned and denied women opportunity for growth and development.

One KII participant observed that the implications of domestic violence against women in our society are pain, torture, injuries, deaths, complication and health issues. It has also led to oppression and subjugation women thereby depriving them of the chance for self and community growth and development.

The FGD interviewees observed that some of the implications of domestic violence against women in our society are that it leads to demeaning women, violation of rights, trauma, deprivation of needs, denied women their self-growth and development. Infact, it inflicts physical, emotional and psychological trauma as well as institutionalized patriarchy. It effect could also be health challenges and complication such as permanent injuries, severe pains, haemorrhage, infection, urinary retention, injury and damage to tissues and organs that may not be fixed or remedied.

What are the measures to curb the menace?

KII participants were asked the measures to curb the menace and it was reported by one of the participants that legislating against these inhuman and barbaric cultural practices, punishing the perpetrators, proper socialization, orientation and conscientization will go a long way to remedy the situation.

Another KII participant observed that the measures to curb the menace are conscientization; reorientation and socialization of advocates and adherents in the society on the dangers of these for cultural practices to call for a review will be of help. She further said that the government must be up and doing in law making, executing and punishment of people who indulge in this form of dangerous and harmful cultural practices that promote domestic violence on the women folks.

It was conceived by a KII participant that women domestic violence in the light of cultural variation is inhumane and barbaric thus can be curbed via sensitization, reorientation, socialization and total eradication of cultural practices through law making and effective implementation to the later in our society.

One of the KII participants believed that some of the measures to curb the menace of domestic violence in the light of cultural variations include sensitive law making; effective implementation, adequate community education, mass mobilization and effective sensitization, proper socialization and total reorientation.



Another KII participant was of the opinion that women domestic violence occasioned by unique cultural practices will not be eliminated if adequate legislation and effective execution of such laws with severe sanctions are not applied to culprits and advocates. He laments the spate of such harm and advised that there should be total reorientation, socialization and conscientization to disabuse the minds of adherents as well as free women from physical and mental slavery.

It was reported by a KII participant that the measures to curb domestic violence brought about by unique cultural practices is the cultural review and punishment to offenders or practitioners backed by the law. Parents should adequately socialize their children, the community should conscientize its members and the Non-Governmental Organization and Government should reorient its citizens to stay away or discontinue such harmful cultural practices.

The FGD interviewees conceded with dismay the harmful effect of women domestic violence enshrined by some inhuman unique cultural practice. They went further to state that the measures to curb domestic violence are proper socialization, conscientization, effective law making and enforcement as well as reorientation. They said these practices will not stop until women are mentally free and men are devoid of patriarchal lifestyle.

Conclusion

In spite of 'hews' and 'cries' of the debilitating consequences of domestic violence and its concomitant effect on the stability of the family and society in general, the trend has continued unabated. To some analysts, domestic violence remains at the root of family disorganization which may have a link with economic displacement that many families are facing. As plausible as such argument sounds, it portrays trivialization of this detestable act that has left its victims traumatized.

Recommendations

This research adopted and used a self-developed twelve (12) item semi structured interview guide for twelve (12) Key Informant Interview (KII) as well as two (2) sets of ten (10) participants each who have had contacts with counseling units or health centers due to domestic violence and for the purpose of eliciting information on the phenomenon under study.

Considering these identified factors responsible for domestic violence and its consequences, there is need to evolve a proactive measure ranging from institutional to affirmative action has become imperative to reduce or eliminate the act.

This calls for a holistic approach, from civil to the religious. It has become germane for religious leaders to channel energy not only in theological evangelization but on family rebirth and save society from the dangers inherent in allowing the trend to continue, whose negative impact is more futuristic than immediate. This has become necessary considering the fact that both victim and offender are all part of their congregation.

Creation of collaborative relationship between the criminal justice departments, Non-Governmental Organizations and support service institutions, so that cases that deal with domestic violence are identified and given accelerated trial in the court of law.



Public education and enlightenment campaigns on the dangers of domestic violence and need to seek redress whenever such occurs should be intensified in both rural and urban communities. Other measures required include; strict application of the laws concerned with domestic violence, by prosecuting offenders, to serve as deterrent to future violators.

Finally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) also have important roles to play in developing the capacity of local actors and service providers, raising awareness about domestic and other gender-based violence in communities, and offering financial and human resources to sustain domestic and other gender-based violence prevention and response.

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