

Domestic Violence against Women: An Overview

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Abstract

Domestic violence as a social phenomenon is deeply elaborated by different social scholars as an act that violates human rights and that all human beings are free and with equal rights and dignity. This paper considers the concept of domestic violence incorporating the forms, causes, and effects, and recommendations are highlighted in the article. The article concludes by suggesting possible remedies to the abnormality of domestic violence.

Keywords: Domestic, Violence, Women, Human Right, Social Vices

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INTRODUCTION

All over the world, violence against women has been recognized as a problem, crossing cultural, geographical, religious, social, and economic boundaries [1]. The reason for these complex problems may in many cases be traced to domestic violence due to women's economic dependence on men, especially in Nigeria where patriarchy system and the differential socialization practice is high. Domestic violence may be perceived in many ways, such as wife battering, kicking, rape, torture, trafficking, forced prostitution, marriage, etc. [2]. Violence against women is the most pervasive form of abuse, a universal problem that transcends divisions of class, race, religion, ethnicity, and geography [3]. The most common type of violence against women is domestic, which is a subset of violence perpetrated by intimate partners or family members against women [4]. The prevalence of domestic violence has a profound impact on the physical, sexual, reproductive, psychological or behavioral health of women and is a major cause of fatal consequences [5].

According to the United Nations, domestic violence is a widespread social problem [6], but due to cultural considerations, especially as it is perceived in the culture of silence and low report by media and the victims, for that reason it is very difficult to get reliable data on the incidence and prevalence of domestic

violence in Nigeria. Furthermore, this menace is believed to be a family affair in Nigeria and even before the police, such cases reported between partners are regarded as family affair and should be resolved within the family or partners. But until at least the early 1990s, that most forms of violence directed against women specifically were met with silence not only by the state but also by the human rights community [2]. So, domestic violence against women has been a cause of concern both locally, nationally, and internationally. Women especially in Nigeria are exposed to abusive and aggressive treatment by men in the name of marriage or family relationship. It has been observed that women, especially the rural based ones and the uneducated ones, are more subject to frequent abuse like beating and other forms of aggressive acts from their husbands just because the women are perceived as weaker sex and fully dependent on men. As a result of this, women are exposed to several health implications as a result of domestic violence. To this effect, one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG III) is dedicated to eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women worldwide, especially among the developing countries like Nigeria.

Increasingly, over the last decade, the international development community has recognized domestic violence against women as a serious problem to womanhood in most

developing nations [7]. Violence against women is a problem of epidemic proportion prevalent in many families, communities, societies, and cultures across the globe. Domestic violence is regarded as a form of terrorism within the home. Domestic violence makes women feel insecure and fearful. Many women and girls and to some extent a few men or boys either directly or indirectly experience the effects of domestic violence against women in their whole life. According to [7], domestic violence affects every phase of woman's life, including their day-to-day relationships with others. Domestic violence makes women traumatized, aggressive, helpless and unable to build a relationship of trust and intimacy necessary for healthy living.

Despite the national and international condemnation of violent against women, the said menace continues to be on the increase and continues to affect women in all facets of life. Sequel to the continued existence of these backdrops, this paper is aimed to consider the concept of domestic violence incorporating the forms and causes of domestic violence. The implication and negative effects of this vice on different members of the society is highlighted in the article. The article concludes by suggesting possible remedies to the abnormality of domestic violence [4].

TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are five basic types of violence against women: emotional, physical, sexual, and social.

1. *Emotional Violence*: This is most widely encountered and is found as a component of all forms of domestic violence. This can be regarded as psychological abuse or mental abuse and can be informed of verbal or non-verbal abuse. This form of violence includes isolating the victim from socializing or associating with friends and family, harassing or humiliating the victim publicly or privately, controlling the victim on what to do or not to do, and deliberately provoking the victim to anger or to make the victim feel diminished and embarrassed [8]. Although preceded and accompanied by other forms of abuse, it can occur in isolated words and language, threats, and intimidation.
2. *Physical Violence*: Physical abuse is an abuse involving contact intended to cause feelings of pain, injury, intimidation, physical suffering, or bodily harm, punching, hitting, pushing, and many other kinds of body contact that result in physical injuries. The harm or physical painful contact targeting the victim or victim's loved ones: children, parents, brothers, sisters, and physical intimidation. Violence starts with physical gestures and strikes targeting the victim and can lead to murder [8].
3. *Sexual Violence*: Degrading begins with comments about woman and the continuing attacks and other unpleasant abuse of the victim during or in connection with the sexual act. Rape is a form of violence which a woman often bears suffering in silence, paying tribute to social norms they believe; intimate relations are primarily a right of man, a territory where he is the master to decide [9].
4. *Social Violence*: This is a condition that is worsening the situation of a woman victim. It includes rigid sexual role expectations out lining the social side of man and woman, and which limits the resources in the community to help the woman victim or even to condemn her for the violence which they live. Social violence is also a barrier in woman's valorization outside the family and a setting facilitator for her aggression in private and intimate life [8].
5. *Economic Violence*: This is a form of violence when one intimate partner has control over the other partner's access to economic resources. Many studies have reviewed that majority of the perpetrators of this abuse are men, especially in most developing countries like Nigeria. Economic abuse may involve preventing a partner or spouse from using resources or by exploiting economic resources of the victim [9].

CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

According to WHO [1], it was found that in more than 80 countries in the world, 35% of women suffer physical and or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a

person with no emotional bond. Most cases of domestic violence occur in their households. Several studies have been conducted to identify the precipitating factors, which lead to the cause of domestic violence on women; some of the scholars have attributed some of the causes of domestic abuse from cultural reasons, poverty as a cause, socialization and societal acceptance. Many studies have shown that dependency of women upon men was positively related to domestic violence against women. Women who are not financially independent run greater risk of being abused as compared to those who are dependent on their husbands [10]. Most of them are purely housewives without occupation, so men take advantage of them in this situation, especially in Nigeria according to senior welfare officer in the ministry of women affair.

Generally, across the globe, domestic violence against women is carried out by men in the form of riots, and account for most fire arm-related injuries and deaths [11, 12]. Violence against women is often seen as a gender-related product because it is part of the gender-specific constraints experienced by women mostly, although men still experience it but not frequently. Such gender violence includes verbal abuse. Gyuse [13] observes that violence against women mostly occurs in the service of perpetuating male power and control. And such violence against women includes rape, battery, homicide, incest, psychological abuse, forced prostitution, trafficking in women, and sexual harassment.

In looking at the causes of violence against women, Heise [14] observes that violence on women is considered normal in most cultures around the world for husband to beat his wife because the wives are mere property to the husband and the husband has the right to control her behavior. And in such societies, it is observed that women who challenge that right will be punished and even in some cases such punishment may take place by merely asking their husband for money for children's needs. Some factors that resulted into violence against women according to worldwide studies were as follows: disobedience, talking back, not taking care of the children or home, questioning about money or girlfriends,

embarking on a journey without permission, sex refusal, refusing to make food for family, and suspicion of infidelity [15]. According to Heise [14], it is noted that in many cases women share the feelings that men have the right to discipline their wives by applying force. Similarly, in rural areas of Egypt, for example, 80% of women also agreed that beating was justified in certain circumstances [14].

Similarly, Gyuse [13] pointed out some major causes of domestic violence against women to incompatibility of partner, insensitivity, disagreement between couples, continued quarrelling, nagging, excess alcohol, neglects, child rebellion, excessive drugs use, etc. Also, on dicho [16] pointed out that the causes of domestic violence against women include the general perception of people that women and children are men's property and they are subject to men's authority and guidance. According to Hughes [17], it was revealed in the findings of a study conducted some years ago by an American University that family as "one of the most dangerous places to be, apart from the war zone or in a riot, is in the home" [17]. Similarly, Ezema [18] pointed out that among the Igbos in the eastern part of Nigeria, the cause of domestic violence against women is the patriarchy system that lays much emphasis on male dominance in which the husband is the main center of authority and decisions are taken by men alone and this leads to violence at home. During my time of internship with the ministry, the major violent cases reported were those of wife battering. According to Heisse and Ellsberg [19], as they captured the concept of wife battery from the United Nations Draft Declaration of 1992, they see wife battery as "any act of gender-based violence that results into or is likely to result into physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in private life [19].

EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

1. *Effect on Children:* There has been an increase in acknowledgment that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during

his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare [20]. Some emotional and behavioral problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family and authorities. Problems with attitude and cognition in school can start developing, along with a lack of skills such as problem-solving. Correlation has been found between the experience of abuse and neglect in childhood and perpetrating domestic violence and sexual abuse in adulthood [21]. Additionally, in some cases, the abuser will purposely abuse them other in front of the child to cause a ripple effect, hurting two victims simultaneously. It has been found that children who witness mother-assault are more likely to exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) [22].

2. *Physical Effect:* Physical abuses such as bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that requires medical attention and hospitalization [23]. Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis and irritable bowel syndrome [24]. Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence relationship experience greater risk of miscarriage, pre-term labor, and injury to or death of the fetus [23].
3. *Psychological Effect:* Among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported. Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for 'provoking' the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship and have a greatly increased risk of suicidality [25].

The most commonly referenced psychological effect of domestic violence is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). According to Vitanza et al. [26], PTSD (as experienced by victims) is characterized

by flashbacks, intrusive images, exaggerated startle response, nightmares, and avoidance of triggers that are associated with the abuse. These symptoms are generally experienced for a long span of time after the victim has left the dangerous situation. Many researchers state that PTSD is possibly the best diagnosis for those suffering from psychological effect of domestic violence, as it accounts for the variety of symptoms commonly experienced by victims of trauma.

4. *Financial Effect:* Once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy. Due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators [27]. In addition to lacking financial resources, victims of domestic violence often lack specialized skills, education, and training that are necessary to find gainful employment, and may have several children to support.
5. *Long-term Effect:* Domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims, all of which are very relevant for a professional working with a victim. Major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty [26].

RECOMMENDATIONS

Below are some of the major recommendations to curb the acts of violence against women:

1. Comprehensive and extensive premarital counselling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationship.
2. There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative

effects of domestic violence against women, especially wife battery.

3. Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against marital violence in their places of worship.
4. Youths should be encouraged and taught to detest and not imitate brutish treatment of wives around them.
5. Medical professionals are in a position to help abused women; after physical treatment, they should refer them to counsellors and psychotherapists.
6. Punishment given to grievously offending husbands should be publicized, so that it can serve as a deterrence to them and general deterrence to the public (others).

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence is a crime. Therefore, it is very important to report it and initiate a court procedure against it. In order to combat domestic violence, especially violence against women and children, it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation between state bodies and non-governmental organizations. In order to reduce the number of domestic violence cases in Nigeria, it is necessary to have a joint vision which will lead us towards joint action. Thus, sensitization of all relevant actors and mechanisms in this field is necessary, since domestic violence is a problem that affects all groups and levels of society, without distinction of race, gender, ethnicity, economic level, geographic area, religion, age, etc.

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