

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA: AN
INVESTIGATION IN DELTA AND EDO STATES**

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted among middle and upper class women in mid-western part of Nigeria and probes the prevalence and cultural contexts of domestic violence. Data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs), case studies and survey from a sample of 754 respondents. Results indicate that although physical abuse is not very common in the two states, a sizeable proportion of women suffer from domestic violence in various manifestations including sexual, psychological and economic, and that although men subordinate women to maintain their socially constructed superiority, the latter prefer adjusting to the situation to deserting their homes. To curb the incidence of domestic violence against women, the use of formal and informal channels of education to re-orientate the people is strongly suggested. In addition, there is need to introduce policies that will genuinely protect women against violence as well as empower law enforcement agents to pay serious attention to the issue.

Keywords: domestic violence, socially constructed superiority, subjugation, re-orientation.

Background

Violence against women is the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. Among the specific acts listed in the United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women are: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the community, including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs (Mai, 1999; UNFPA, 1999). Although gender-based violence has probably been a part of the human condition, governments and communities in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in developing countries, are just beginning to officially recognize its existence and take steps to address it. In most societies, violence within the family has been regarded as a private matter and therefore not an appropriate focus for intervention or policy (Effah-Chukwuma, 2002).

Today, domestic violence against women has become a major topic (Reichert, 1990). It is universal and only differs in scope from one society to the other (UNFPA, 1999). It occurs in a broad context of gender-based discrimination with regard to access to education, resources, and decision-making power in private and public life. As a result of its universal nature, it is recognized today as a major issue on the international human rights agenda. According to the International Centre for Research on Women – ICRW (1999), available statistics from around the globe indicate that one out of every three women has experienced violence in an intimate relationship at some point in her life. This is an average based on available national surveys across industrialized and developing countries (WHO, 1997). An exception to this universality idea or argument is found in the literature; in other words, while intimate partner abuse is widespread, it is not universal. Anthropologists have documented small-scale societies – such as the Wape of Papua New Guinea – where domestic violence is virtually absent (Counts *et al*, 1999). Conversely, in Nigeria domestic violence is prevalent with 81 percent of women suffering from one form of abuse or the other (Odujinrin, 1993).

Domestic violence increasingly is recognized as a violation of human rights. As early as 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly identified this form of violence as an abuse that threatens the security of women and their fundamental rights to life and liberty, as well as freedom from fear and want (Fischbach and Herbert, 1997). Globally, domestic violence exists in a “culture of silence” and denial of the seriousness of the health consequences of abuse at every level of the society. The fact that domestic violence against women and girls has long been considered a ‘private affair’ has contributed to serious gap in public health policy-making and lack of appropriate programmes.

In several international conventions, there has now been explicit acknowledgement of the state’s responsibility for human rights violations by private actors in both the public and private spheres. The Vienna Accord of 1993 and the Beijing Platform of 1995 together crystallized the principle that women’s rights are human rights. The frameworks that these conventions established have created a space in which one’s private issues like domestic violence can be understood as human rights violations of public concern. In this way, human rights discourse has begun to dissolve the public-private divide and has provided a moral momentum for direct response by national governments and non-governmental actors. Suffice it to enumerate here some efforts so far made at the international level such as UN General Assembly’s Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UN, 1993); Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (WHO, 1997); 49th World Health Assembly in 1996 adopting a resolution declaring violence a public health priority (WHO, 1997); the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) effort at bringing together 400 experts from 37 countries in 1998 to discuss the causes and costs of domestic violence, and policies and programs to address it (Centre for Health and Gender Equity – CHANGE 1999); UNIFEM launching in 1998 regional campaigns in Africa, Asia/Pacific, and Latin America designed to draw attention to the issue of violence against women globally (UNIFEM, 1999); and the United Nations Population Fund declaration of violence against women a public health priority (UNFPA, 1999).

Domestic violence occurs in all countries and transcends social, economic, religious, and cultural groups. Many cultures have beliefs, norms and social institutions that legitimize and therefore perpetuate violence against women. In all

societies there are cultural institutions, beliefs and practices that undermine women's autonomy and contribute to gender-based violence. CHANGE (1999) identifies certain marriage practices as disadvantageous to women and girls, especially where a custom such as bride-wealth has been corrupted by western consumer culture. In many cultures, husbands are expected to pay bride-wealth to compensate the bride's family for the loss of labour in her natal home. In parts of Africa and Asia, this exchange has become commercialised with inflated bride-wealth leaving men with the impression that they have 'purchased' a wife. In a study conducted by Jewkes *et al* (1999) in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, 82 percent of women said it is culturally accepted that if a man pay 'lobola' (bride-wealth) for his wife, it means that he owns her. This marriage tradition undermines the ability of women to escape abusive relationships. For example, in some bride-wealth countries, women's parents must repay the man if their daughter leaves the marriage. Visaria (1999) recounted the experience of an abused woman in India who noted: "one often feels like running away from it all. But where does one go? The only place is your parent's home, but they will always try to send you back".

In some societies, marriage for women is never a matter of choice but is almost entirely driven by social norms and the preferences of parents. Consequently, the burden of any adversity in the marriage market, or within a marriage after it has been arranged, is almost exclusively borne by the wife or bride (Rao, 1997). Among the Luhya community of Western Kenya, wife beating is considered a sign of love, which women have been socialized to accept and sometimes encourage (Kiragu, 1995). These suggest that the origins of violence are located in the social structure and the complex set of values, traditions, customs, habits and beliefs which relate to gender inequality. In their study in Uganda, Ezeh and Gage (1998) also assert that cross-cultural studies indicate that at the societal level, discrimination against women is traceable to male authority and decision-making in the home, rigid gender roles, definitions of masculinity that are linked to dominance or male honour, economic inequality between men and women, and the use of physical force for conflict resolution.

This tradition and others treat women as children, lacking control of their own lives, and also regarded as the property of the household. Under these circumstances, women may not be sure of how to view violence against them. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often

go unchallenged when men direct them at women, especially within the family (Centre for Health and Gender Equity(CHANGE), 1999). In a study conducted in Egypt, El Hadidi (1999) asserts that most married women agree that their husbands are at least justified sometimes in beating their wives. For instance, women are most likely to agree that a man is justified in beating his wife if she refuses sex or answers him back, though they are less likely to agree that he is justified in doing so if she burns the food. El Hadidi concludes in his study that one out of three ever married Egyptian has been beaten at least once since marriage. In Nigeria, almost every woman can expect to experience one form of violence at some point in her life (Okemgbo *et al.*, 2002). Similarly, in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, studies have revealed that violence is frequently viewed as physical chastisement - the husband's right to correct an erring wife (Armstrong, 1998; Bradley, 1985; Counts, et al, 1999; Gonzalez, 1998; Hassan, 1995; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Michau, 1998; Schuler *et al*, 1996; Zimmerman, 1995).

In other words, justification for violence frequently evolves from gender norms - that is, social and cultural beliefs and practices regarding proper roles and responsibilities of men and women in society. Typically, men are given relatively free reign as long as they provide financially for the family. Women are expected to tend the house and mind the children and to show their husbands obedience and respect. If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her bounds, or challenged his rights, then he may react violently. Zimmerman (1995), Armstrong (1998) and Visaria (1999) in their studies in Cambodia, Zimbabwe and India identified a consistent list of events that are said to "trigger" violence. These include not obeying her husband, talking back, not having food ready on time, failing to care adequately for the children or home, questioning him about money or girl friends, going somewhere without his permission, refusing him sex, or expressing suspicions of infidelity.

The relationship between socio-cultural environment and domestic violence in Nigeria is particularly evident in the influence of the patriarchal ethos that derives from societal norms and values to impinge on people's attitudes and behaviour. Isiugo-Abanihe (2003) and Obura, (1991) have stated that socialization into gender

roles begins early in the family and community and are reinforced through the interplay of familial, social, economic and cultural forces. Isiugo-Abanihe (1993), Oke (1996) and Erinoshio (1998) observed that culture dictates shape behaviour; one's environment affects the person's attitudes, perceptions and motivations. The pervasiveness of patriarchy as a system that does not discriminate against either patrilineal or matrilineal societies but conceived in terms of difference in magnitude of its application in both societies has been highlighted. Ottong expressed the same view when he stated:

The male plays a very dominant role in the social structure; he is, as of right, the head of the family, and is seen and regarded in certain circumstances by the wife (or wives) as the lord and master whose decision is always final. Even in the exceptionally few matrilineal societies, authority relations are still patriarchal, although patterns of descendancy and inheritance might be governed by the principles of matrilineality (Ottong, 1993: 1).

This situation explains why poverty has female-face in Nigerian and African societies. The feminization of poverty according to Akande (2000) is the tragic consequence of women's unequal access to economic opportunities. She observed that the number of rural women living in abject and absolute poverty rose to nearly 50 percent over the past two decades. Her argument then is that increasing poverty of women has links with their unequal situation in the labour market, education and family power structure, which are shaped by the patriarchal social system. Poverty is implicated in the subjugation and abuse of women in various societies (Nwokocha, 2004). Zimmerman (1995) and Armstrong (1998) contended that a woman's response to abuse is often limited by the options available to her. Women consistently cite similar reasons that they remain in abusive relationships for fear of retribution, lack of other means of economic support, concern for the children, and an abiding hope that "he will change". George (1998) in a study carried out in Mumbai, India, adds the unacceptability of being single or unmarried as an additional barrier that keeps women in destructive marriages.

At the same time, denial and fear of social stigma often prevent women from reaching out for help. In surveys, for example, from 22 percent to almost 70 percent of abused women say that they have never told anyone about their abuse before being asked in the interview (CHANGE, 1999). Zimmerman (1995) also shows that victims of domestic violence rarely seek help and get relief as wife battering is considered an internal family matter by courts, police and local authorities, and women are counselled to be patient while abusers go unpunished.

It was not until people started to appreciate the consequences of domestic violence that attention began to be directed at it. The World Development Report of the World Bank estimated that women ages 15 – 44 lose more Discounted Health years of Life (DHYLs) to rape and domestic violence than to breast cancer, obstructed labour, heart disease, AIDS, respiratory infections, motor vehicle accidents or war (World Bank, 1993). The health consequences of violence against women constitute a serious problem worldwide. Wife abuse can be a significant cause of female morbidity and mortality, and represents a hidden obstacle to economic and social development. By sapping women's energy and confidence, gender-based violence can deprive society of their full participation.

The effects of domestic violence on women's reproductive health are even said to be more grievous. According to Mai (1999), sexual coercion eliminates women's ability to make choices about their health and sexual behaviour (to enjoy sex, to engage in safe sex, to use the contraceptive of their choice, to choose the timing and number of pregnancies, to experience safe childbirth, etc). In addition, because sexual assault takes away women's ability to require condom use, it can result in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and/or HIV/AIDS (Mai, 1999). A woman who is beaten during pregnancy may experience a miscarriage or give birth to an infant with low birth weight. Research findings also suggest that both sons and daughters of abused women are at an increased risk for psychological and behavioural problems (Davis and Carlson, 1987; Jaffe *et al*, 1986), and that a child who witnesses family violence may go on to repeat the very same violent behaviour patterns (Kalmuss, 1984).

However, although there has been explicit acknowledgement of the state's responsibility for human rights violations by private actors in both the public and private spheres in several international conventions, violence against women remains

highly prevalent and a major cultural blind spot. Nigeria is not exempted from this practice, and its women and girl-children are most vulnerable largely because they are victims of practices which are embedded in traditional institution (e.g. patriarchy) and of the negative consequences of urbanization and industrialization. However, little is known about its incidence in Nigeria (Effah-Chukwuma, 2002). Apart from the fact that very few studies have been conducted on domestic violence in Nigeria, most of them are hospital-based, and focus only on women who presented themselves at the hospital (Aimakhu *et al.*, 2004; Okemgbo, 2002). Such studies have neglected socio-cultural and economic context relevant to an understanding of domestic violence. Often, they centred on violence against women from the lower class of the society – the latter class as conceived in the present paper represents women who are either not engaged in any form of economic activity or whose income per month falls within the level of women in the lowest stratum of civil service in Nigeria – evading the fact that women from middle and upper classes may be subjected to domestic violence as well. Therefore, this research was conducted to provide information on the factors responsible for domestic violence against middle and upper class women, its nature, form as well as its cultural and economic context in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria.

Methodology

The following research questions are addressed by the study in order to investigate issues relevant to the subject: what is the relationship between socio-cultural factors and domestic violence? To what extent does the perception of domestic violence as normal account for its incidence in society? How far has domestic violence affected the psychosocial, physical, emotional and economic development of individuals and communities in Delta and Edo States? What is the most effective strategy for curbing domestic violence in Nigeria? These questions influenced the study methodology in the quest for a comprehensive understanding.

Given the complexity surrounding domestic violence in Nigeria, both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in gathering data for the study. Survey, in-depth interviews and case studies were triangulated to explore issues relevant to the thematic subject. The process of data collection began with the designing of in-depth interview guide which facilitated interviews as a preliminary

step towards understanding of responses that guided questionnaire design. A total of 20 women, of different age categories from the two study states, who are knowledgeable about domestic violence were interviewed. Data generated through this technique were characterized by depth with regard to the influence of patriarchy and beliefs and practices on domestic violence. To ensure representativeness, respondents for interview were selected from specific study locations chosen within Delta and Edo states. Although most of the IDIs preceded survey, some were conducted along with questionnaire distribution.

A total of seven hundred and fifty four respondents were sampled in the survey using questionnaire schedule designed in open and close-ended and precoded form. This schedule comprised 93 items that covered questions related to Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents, physical relationship, sexual attitudes, psychological and emotional dimensions of domestic violence. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for questionnaire distribution beginning with the purposive selection of particular Local Government Areas (LGAs) to represent urban and semi-urban settlements in the two states. The next stage involved identification of women and men based associations in the chosen locations and random selection of specific groups for sampling. Simple random sampling method was also adopted in the choice of individual respondents for the study.

Although case study was initially not conceived as one of the methods of gathering data for the present research, it was however later to be adopted at tangential level as a result of serendipity yielded by in-depth interviews. It became obvious in the course of these interviews that some IDI respondents would provide more concrete data as cases. Hence, this approach led to eliciting of life histories of 4 respondents who had been victims of domestic violence. In sum, data collection was undertaken in 2004 and lasted four months.

Data analysis was undertaken beginning with responses from in-depth interviews and case studies which were translated and transcribed. The *iterative* approach was followed for this purpose. This technique which emphasizes the repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data indicate that analysis starts after some (not necessarily all) of the data have been collected. This approach is particularly necessary in studies involving both qualitative and quantitative

techniques, where the contents of the latter's instrument derive largely from insights from the former. In the final analysis, qualitative data were analyzed using manual content analysis. Quantitative data generated through questionnaire were entered using Microsoft Access software and later exported and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. A descriptive analysis of data was done using univariate frequency distributions. The demographic profile examined included age, religion, marital status, age at marriage, marriage type, number of children and educational qualification.

Findings

Demographic Profile of Respondents

From the outset, the study adopted a sample size which tilted heavily in favour of women. As such, the majority (77.1 percent) of the respondents are females. However, because it was necessary to obtain the views of males on such a topic dealing with the relationships between men and women, a small sample size of 22.9 percent males from the two states was also selected (see table1). Since the study was designed to focus on adult females and males, currently married or ever married, the majority of the respondents were found between ages thirty and fifty. The lowest age recorded was twenty-two (two respondents), while one respondent claimed to have attained seventy-one years of age.

Almost all the respondents (92.4 percent) belong to the Christian faith. This is expected given that Christian religion is the dominant faith in Edo and Delta states where this study was conducted (Imoroa, 2000 and Segynola, 2000). The Muslims were 4.8 percent while 2.0 percent belong to various traditional religion. Similarly, majority of the victims of domestic violence are Christians. They represent over 90 percent of respondents who indicated that violent actions have been taken against them.

Eighty-seven percent of all respondents are still married; 2 percent are separated from their partners; 1.3 percent are divorced; 2.5 percent have lost their partners due to death (widowed) and 6.9 percent are single. However, further probing revealed that those who claim to be single had been into some marital relationship before and are either divorced, separated or widowed. Of those that are not with their

spouses, 43.8 percent have been separated for between one to four years, 31.4 percent for between six to ten years and 18.7 percent also have been separated for between eleven and fifteen years.

The age at marriage of husbands of 65.9 percent of the married female respondents' was between 25 and 35 years old. A slightly different distribution was observed for married male respondents in respect to their wives' age at marriage. A majority (80%) were married to women between the ages of 21 and 30, ages which they considered ideal for women to marry. In spite of the violence against them, very few (8.3%) are either divorced or separated.

The majority of the respondents (88.8 percent) as well as about 90 percent of the victims are in monogamous marital relationship. Of the total respondents who are in polygynous relationships, however, 62.6 percent reported they do not all live under the same roof with their spouses. What this means is that for the women, only one wife lives with the husband. Expectedly however, monogamous unions are more stable as 82.8 percent of those who contract this form of marriage live with their spouses.

Most respondents (70.2 percent) have between one and four children while 24.2 percent have between five and nine children (that number of living children). The responses of male respondents were sorted and it was discovered that 5.8 percent of them have between ten and twenty four children. These people are likely to be men who have more than one wife. Over 90 percent of the victims of domestic violence have between one and four children.

The ethnic group composition of Delta and Edo States is diverse. About eighty-five percent each of the total respondents and victims indicate they belong to one of the following groups namely Igbo, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, ijaw, Ika, Edo, Esan and Benin - which are the dominant groups in the states. Other groups represented are Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Ebira, Igala, Birom, Idoma and Ogoni. There is also evidence of intra and inter-ethnic group marriages among the respondents. Of those who responded to the question, sixty-nine percent married from the same ethnic group as theirs, while thirty-one percent married outside their groups indicating that intra-ethnic unions do not necessarily ensure domestic peace.

The educational level of respondents is very high with 90.3 percent of them acquiring tertiary level education; only 6.5 percent did not go beyond secondary level education

while the remaining 3.2 percent have other forms of education. Most of the respondents also have tertiary education, followed by those with secondary education and lastly, primary education. The implication is that level of education does not show association with domestic harmony considering that a large majority of respondents had tertiary education.

In conclusion, a summary of the demographic profile of respondents and of the victims indicates that they are mainly adults, Christians, and mostly in monogamous unions. Respondents also have a somewhat moderate family size and are mainly from the dominant ethnic groups that make up Edo and Delta States.

Attitudes towards and Prevalence of Physical Violence

This section examines attitudes and prevalence of domestic violence in the two selected states. To determine the extent of physical violence in the community and attitudes towards it, a number of questions were asked. First, respondents were asked what their attitude would be if a husband physically violates his wife. A number of physically violent acts were listed and respondents were to indicate their level of approval or disapproval. As shown in Table 2, violent acts listed include “throwing something at her”, “pushing or shoving”, “biting” “hitting with an object”, “burning/acid attack”, “choking”, “stabbing”, “shooting”, “pulling her hair”, and “tying up and/or hitting her”. Table 2 further shows that the majority of respondents indicated that they will object or strongly object to any of the above acts by a husband against his wife. As also indicated in table 2, apart from “pushing or shoving” that was approved by 2.2 percent of respondents, all other acts had less than 1 percent approval by the respondents. Following from this, the assumption would be that very few of the respondents may have ever been victims or perpetrators of any of the listed physical acts. In reality however, respondents do not always give accurate information on issues perceived to impinge on their dignity or that of their families.

Table 3 indicates that the most common physically violent acts undertaken against spouse are “pushing and shoving aside” with 12.1 percent of respondents being involved at least once. On whether respondents have either been victims or have carried out burning/acid attack, choking, stabbing and shooting on partners, table 3 indicates that a majority of the respondents (both male and female) stated that nobody has taken any of these actions against them. Table 3 further shows that hitting,

choking, stabbing and shooting were reported only once and as such are acts that were least perpetrated among respondents

Determinants of Physical Violence

A variety of factors were given by respondents as responsible for physical violence against women. The three main factors mentioned include infidelity, insubordination and poverty. Other important ones are lack of understanding between the spouses, drunkenness, nagging tendency, wickedness, laziness, sex denial, temptation, cultural and so on. However, in-depth interviews and case studies conducted with victims of domestic violence also revealed another important factor namely childlessness. According to a victim in Edo state,

Well, at the beginning of the marriage, things were going on fine and smooth, but after one year and there was no baby, my husband's attitude towards me suddenly changed. He does not give me things willingly again. If somebody else gives birth in the neighbourhood and I go to celebrate with the person, he feels bad. He thinks I am happy about our situation. He became worse that he started to beat me.

Another victim also affirmed the factor of childlessness. She recounted as follows the experience of her friend. Hear her:

There was the case of my friend, a very enterprising woman who was very instrumental to her husband's success. She had no child after five years of marriage. The man married another woman and his home crumbled.

The following case studies summarize the reasons often given for domestic violence.

Case One

This woman was married for twenty-years and had three children in the marriage. She is currently separated from her husband because of repeated incidence of domestic violence against her. She was married to a Bini man, against the wish of her mother in-law, who wanted her son to marry a Bini woman. So, from the very beginning, the marriage was established against parental consent. Afterwards, her husband started womanizing. According to this victim,

My emotional crisis started as soon as the second woman came in. My husband's behaviour just changed. He completely shifted attention to this second woman. The situation became

unbearable, and I had a rough time. Immediately my marriage collapsed, I lost my job.

The victim believes that her marriage was a good one while it lasted. She asserted that her husband was a businessman and had financial power to keep the family going. However, she considers domestic violence as a common or general practice in that part of the country. To her, it is more like a “cultural norm for men to deny their wives of money, sex and other rights as a measure of punishment. She commented further on her domestic crisis thus:

I was completely overwhelmed by the crisis but some family members came to my rescue. I do not think government can do anything about problems facing women at home.

Case Two

The case of this second victim is a bit different from the first. What best describes this is a case of living with a difficult man. The victim narrates her story thus:

I have been married for twelve years and I am blessed with three children. I am the only wife of my husband but things have not been too good for the family. My husband and I do not get along at all. I have been living in hell, in fear. My husband disciplines me like he disciplines his own children. He insults me at little misunderstanding, even when he is the guilty one. The point is he does not have the spirit of forgiveness and we quarrel too often. Although he takes care of my children but sexual intercourse between me and him is cancelled whenever we have problems. My succour all these years has been through God. I would not want to marry him again if there is an opportunity for choice in another world.

Case Three

This is another case of domestic violence induced by the inability of the woman to bear a child. She is the only wife and has been married for three years without a child. She admits that things were good initially, but that after one year without a baby, her husband started behaving “funnily”. He was not listening to her requests any more. The victim claims not to have experienced any physical assault from her husband before but has on some occasions been sufficiently insulted. According to the victim, she is going through intense emotional crisis. The husband has also refused allowing her to go back to school contrary to their agreement before

they got married. Ironically, she claims to be getting along well with her husband because “I understand him so well, and would want to marry him again, because he is straightforward and plain and cares for me”. She condemns domestic violence and advised that couples should be patient with one another.

Case Four

The victim is from Delta State. She has been married for seven years with three children. Although she is the only wife of her husband, she claims that the husband has concubines. This behaviour has been the major source of problem between the couple. For her, “things are no longer smooth, if I protest against his behaviour, he beats me. In fact, he does this regularly”. This victim claims to be facing serious emotional and psychological problems and at times, has had to fight the man to the extent of attracting neighbour’s attention. She is also denied financially when there is a quarrel between her and her husband. She however admitted that the situation had not degenerated to the extent of transferring the problems of the marriage to their children. For various reasons such as being humiliated and encountering financial problems, she would not want to marry her husband again if there is a second opportunity. In spite of her marital problems, she asserts that:

I will not want to abandon the marriage because of my children, if I do, they may be maltreated by any woman that my husband married again. I cope with the situations by praying very hard and hoping that he will change. I also keep the house with whatever little money I have.

Case Five

This respondent married in 1996 and is blessed with three children. She is also the only wife of her husband. Within the last two years to the time of this study the respondent’s husband has had a drinking problem and has been violent towards her and her children. Unemployed, the husband regularly beats her until she gave him whatever little money she had. One day, the beating was so explosive that on the advice of her relations, the respondents decided to run away to her sister. After some days, the husband looked for her and pleaded for her to return for her children’s sake. According to the victim,

I returned to the house after much plea but I still undergo serious turmoil. Although he has stopped beating me, but there

is an uneasy silence around the house. I think his unemployment problem is causing his violent behaviour. I keep praying for him.

Case Six

The victim is 35 years old and has two children. Her husband is a retired army officer. Her husband has beaten her many times, but she has always stayed with him, hoping to keep her family intact. After a serious injury resulting from one of his violent outrages, she finally decided to file a complaint for divorce. Family members waded in and listened carefully to husband's version of events. Despite the fact that the victim showed evidence of serious injuries on her, she was rebuked and told to return to her family immediately. With no other option, she returned to her husband. Less than a year later, her husband brutally beat her causing a serious injury to her head. While she was in the hospital, she decided she was not returning to his house again. She filed for divorce and was granted. As she narrated:

I really cannot say what was responsible for his behaviour. He was not drinking, he was not smoking but he would get angry at the slighted provocation. When he is angry, he will not eat your food, he will not have any sexual intercourse with you either. I guess he just did not like me. But he was the one that said we should get married; I did not beg to be married. Right now, I want to face my work and not think about any man.

To justify being beaten by her husband, male and female respondents agreed that an unfaithful wife, a stubborn/naughty wife, a disobedient wife, a wife who refused to cook for the family would deserve to be beaten by her husband. Other behaviours which could justify such beating are a woman not being uncaring and a wife who refuses to have sexual intercourse with her husband. This perhaps made 16 percent of women and 44 percent of men in the two states to consider physical violence against women as cultural, proper and necessary to discipline and correct an erring wife. Nevertheless, both men and women in Edo and Delta states view physical violence against women as not proper and not part of their culture. About 75 percent of women and 45 percent of men hold this position.

Sexual Dimension of Domestic Violence

Apart from physical violence, the study also investigated issues relating to sexual relationship between a wife and her husband. First, most respondents (91.7%) shared the opinion that men should not have other sexual partners apart from their wives. Indeed, respondents did not approve of polygyny as a form of marriage, but indicated that in practice, their husbands have children from other women. In-depth interview sessions revealed that men's sexual relationships with concubines sometimes result to pregnancy and child birth. A victim, in an interview stated that it was because of the issue of taking another woman that led to her divorce, and has been living as a single parent since then;

*No! by the time he took another wife, our marriage ended
(Victim, Edo state).*

Another woman from Delta state said

I am the legal wife but he has other concubines with children.

The majority of the respondents (94.5 percent) were of the opinion that the issue of sexual intercourse between husband and wife should not be a subject of crisis and that a man should not force his wife to have sexual intercourse. They believed that sexual intercourse should be the least issue that will generate conflict in a marriage. The remaining 5.5 percent thought otherwise. To them, a man can force his wife to have sexual intercourse under some circumstances such as if the wife is suspected of acts of infidelity, if she refuses sex for no reason and also in order to pull her out of any bad mood. A small percentage (18.7 percent) of women in Delta state also reported that men who are under the influence of drug sometimes force their wives to have sexual intercourse.

However, both male and female respondents believe that for some reasons, a woman can refuse to have sexual intercourse with her husband. Two main circumstances that can give rise to this according to them are when the woman is ill and when she is menstruating or nursing a baby. Other major circumstances include "not in mood", "unhappy", "tired or exhausted", "religious reasons," "to avoid contracting sexually transmitted diseases." In the same vein, majority (68.7%) of the respondents also said a man can refuse to have sexual intercourse with his wife for some of the same reasons women give. The reasons include "tiredness", illness", "when wife is unfaithful", "during wife's menstruation", during fasting", "as a punishment" and so on.

In-depth interview conducted with victims also lend credence to the fact that some men deny their wives of sexual intercourse, for no just reason. A woman in Edo state lamented as follows:

It is very common, you see some men, when their wives touch them in the night... some women complained that their husbands don't satisfy them sexually. The source of most quarrels at home is sex. But women will not tell you in details... where do men want women to get sexual satisfaction from? The men feel they are the heads of the home, so they can do anything.

Some of the reasons given by respondents as responsible for the times their close confidants denied their husbands or wives sexual intercourse included: firstly, 48.7 percent are aware of such situations while 51.3 percent claim ignorance. Reasons given by those who have knowledge of such situation include husbands' extra marital affair, illness and menstruation.

Following from responses above, forcible sexual intercourse between a husband and his wife is said to be uncommon. This was confirmed by 81.2 percent of total respondents. The use of contraceptive to control family size is reported to be widespread among colleagues and friends of respondents. Contraceptive use, as attested to by 73.1 percent of respondents is usually with the knowledge and approval of husbands. Due to patriarchal nature of most African societies that make it possible for men to take important decision in the family, it was not surprising that 89 percent of the respondents asserted that the decision on the number of children a family should have rests more on the husband.

Psychological and Emotional Dimension

Another aspect of domestic violence investigated is that which relates to psychological and emotional dimension. Apart from suffering from physical and sexual violence, the study also tried to find out if women in the study locations also suffer from psychological and emotional violence. The majority of the respondents (56 percent) in the two states indicated that wives do not get enough attention from their husbands. The only relationship between them seems to revolve around children's upkeep and feeding of household members. As much as 60 percent of the respondents state that no special show of affection was accorded the wives. What

appears remarkable is the fact that 56 percent of women who suffer from psychological and emotional violence have sought assistance from people around them. This runs contrary to assertions in literature that victims of domestic violence suffer in silence. Nevertheless, the fact that women have sought assistance from people may be because this form of violence is often considered a mild form of domestic violence, far less severe than physical violence.

Following from the above, an overwhelming majority of respondents (71.3%) are of the opinion that psychological and emotional violence in the home constitutes an important problem in our society. Indeed, some women even think that this kind of violence is more 'killing' than physical or sexual violence. On the whole, 56 percent of the respondents believe that many women in Nigeria are not enjoying their marital unions. In-depth interviews conducted with victims also corroborate this. A victim in Delta state responded as follows:

I mean, it is very difficult for a day to pass without my husband beating me or abusing me. There seems to be lack of understanding between us. Perhaps, something is wrong with the two of us

Another complained,

Things have not been going on fine because that man (referring to her husband) has been maltreating me, depriving me of certain things that other women enjoy.

Yet, another said,

Things have not really been very okay, if my husband is loving and caring, things could be better. Things are presently rough because my husband does not take my feelings into consideration. He rather spends his money on night clubbing, even he borrows money to go to night clubs, instead of taking care of his family.

Women in Edo state also face similar problems. According to a woman,

Let's say 99% of women have been having hard times in their homes. Some men bully their wives, some treat their wives as if they are nothing, some don't give their wives money, some only want their wives to be seen and not to be heard.

Another simply said,

I suffer from lack of care, lack of trust, negligence, beating, fighting and so on.

However, in spite of the hard times, women still manage to cope because “they have no choice, marriage is mandatory”. Some also said that they maintain their homes just to answer the appellation “Mrs.” and for the “sake of their children”.

To confirm the views that women face hard times in their marriages, more than 50 percent of respondents asserted that men maltreat their wives in a number of ways namely beating (34.2%), denying them sex (28.6%), disown their children (23.3%), throw them out of the house frequently (31.4%), force them to have sex (20.4%), deny them financial support (42%), as well as humiliate them in public (28.1%). In-depth interviews also reveal other forms of maltreatment.

According to an interviewee,

African men these days do not care, they just shout at you, that you are finding things hard or tough is not their concern, they would not know that emotionally they are hurting you.

Another said,

When some wives make little mistakes, their husbands beat them up, while some shout on their wives as if they are children.

Close to 60 percent of respondents claimed to know of women who have been subjected to any or some of the above abuses. On the positive side, more than 65 percent asserted that husbands in the study areas show some commitment to the health of their wives.

Economic Dimension

The economic dimension of domestic violence against women centres on the inability or refusal of husbands to provide household requirements or necessities for their families. Such requirements include food, clothing, payment of children’s school fees, hospital bills, house rent, among several others. In-depth interviews conducted with women show that men are generally lacking in their economic responsibilities to their families. A victim in Edo state recounts as follows:

Women are having a very hard time because things are very difficult now. Women are finding it difficult because some men are not ready to bring out money. For instance, I can use my case as an example. My husband finds it difficult to bring out

money that can last the family for the whole month. From time to time, I keep on running from one place to another to look for money to augment. I know this happens to other women as well.

Another interviewee describes her friend's experience thus:

Yes, this friend in question, her husband denies her financial assistance and even takes the little the woman has forcefully from her for his personal problems.

In spite of these experiences by some women, survey data show that both male and female respondents in the two states believe in the age-long tradition that husbands should normally provide for their families. Indeed, close to 90 percent of female respondents claimed that their husbands provide feeding allowance for the family. As part of the male responsibilities in the study areas, respondents believe that husbands normally provide funds for children's school fees and hospital bills and house rent. A majority of female respondents confirm that their husbands carry out these responsibilities at home.

In terms of decision making at home, surprisingly, most men asserted that their wives are involved in decision making. Husbands also encourage their wives to work outside the home and are even supportive of their wives' work. The response of women also corroborated this. However, majority of both male and female respondents believe that conflict often ensues when women work for prolonged period of time outside the home.

Although literature consistently indicates that most violence in the home are often directed against the women, still some men experience some form of violence from their wives. Most of the respondents in both states reported, however, that they are not aware of any man facing violence from his wife. More men than women in Delta state claimed to be aware of men, who have experienced at least one form of violence from their wives. Where violence against men occurs, factors usually responsible are immorality/adultery, poverty or prolonged quarrel.

Conclusion

Although Nigeria is a country rooted in primordialism, rapid changes have been evident in its socio-cultural structure. The transition taking place is producing a wide range of beneficial as well as harmful consequences. As a result, the country is characterized by changing values, expectations towards women, gender roles,

sexuality and marriage, and worsening socio-economic conditions. These normative changes and conditions invariably lead to stress and confusion in many families, a condition that accounts for violence as men struggle to reassert their dominance. These stresses, according to Armstrong (1998), may make it more difficult for women to respond to violence against them by asserting their own needs, and to get the kind of solutions they want from institutions which have historically

been there to help them, such as the family and the law. This research drew insight from the views of women and men, and especially victims of domestic violence in order to have a clearer understanding of the factors that contribute to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.

Results of the study show that there are several causes of violence against women in the home which explains the complexity of inherent problems. In spite of the fact that women face violent situations at home, they prefer remaining in that condition to home-desertion “for the sake of their children” and “faith that he will change”. The findings of this study have also supported those by others (Ezeh and Gage, 1998; Romer, 1999; El Hadidi, 1999) that have situated explanations of domestic violence within the social context. Wife battering, in most communities in Africa, is seen as a reflection of the broad structures of sexual and economic inequality in society. Studies have shown that rather than representing an aberration, violence in the home is widely tolerated. It is thus an extension of the role society expects men to play in their domestic sphere. In this analysis, the abuse of women can be seen as a display of male power, the outcome of social relations in which women are kept in a position of inferiority to men, responsible to them and in need of protection by them. This study suggests that the social, political and economic dependence on men provides a structure wherein men can perpetrate violence against women. These socially approved sanctions rooted in sexism and misogyny, have allowed violence within the family to remain largely “a private matter”, immune from public scrutiny and intervention.

In conclusion, the result of this study presents a glimpse of the endemic nature of domestic violence in Nigerian societies. The research contributes to increase in knowledge of social pressures that limit the power and options of women in violent relationships. Understanding the underlying causes of abuse provides a starting point

for designing initiatives to counter violence. This study therefore affirms that solutions to domestic violence are located within varied structures in society which include the family, community, policy, research, media and education.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are suggested to combat domestic violence.

- a. Formal education can be used to eliminate stereotypical attitudes to the social, economic and cultural roles of women and men. The subject of family violence should be part of the formal curriculum. Teaching materials should be developed to suggest how these issues might be approached in the classroom. This method has proved effective in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Canada.
- b. Informal methods of education can also be used. A multi-pronged education campaign consisting of use of posters, leaflets to health centres, at schools, post offices, banks, religious houses can also prove effective.
- c. The mass media should also be used to promote more balanced, healthy perceptions of gender relations.
- d. A very important arm in this quest for solution is the legal system. Law and policy makers must act to eliminate any existing ambiguities and gaps in the law that deprive women of adequate legal resource. Any legal provision which suggests that violence against women is excusable or tolerable must be repealed.
- e. Local authorities like village leaders, elderly people, and women's groups should be engaged in this lofty quest by building peace against altercations that can lead to abusive behaviour. This group can intervene to relive an already violence situation in families.
- f. The importance of research cannot be underrated. There is a clear need for national surveys on domestic violence that will enable the country have a policy statement to address domestic violence in its various manifestations.
- g. Finally, violence against women is a product of the subordination of women. Domestic violence will not be eradicated until there is a fundamental change in social and economic structures that maintain the subordination of women within marriage and in society generally. Hence the need for social change.

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Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	173	22.9
	Female	581	77.1
Age	Below 30	88	13.5
	30 – 34	115	17.5
	35 – 39	135	20.6
	40 – 44	142	21.7
	45 – 49	101	15.5
	50 – 54	23	7.8
	55 +	7	3.8
	No Response	100	-
Religion	Christianity	692	92.4
	Islam	36	4.8
	Traditional Religion	15	2.0
	Others	6	0.8
	No Response	5	-
Marital Status	Single	52	6.9
	Married	655	87.1
	Divorced	10	1.3
	Widowed	19	2.5
	Separated	16	2.1
	No Response	2	-
Age at Marriage of Married Male Respondent's Wives	14 – 19	12	7.7
	20 – 24	41	26.5
	25 – 29	84	54.2
	30+	18	11.6
Age at Marriage of Married Female Respondent's Husbands	17	2	0.4
	20 – 24	24	4.5
	25 – 29	128	23.9
	30 – 34	206	38.5
	35 – 39	131	24.5
	40 – 44	34	6.3
	45+	10	1.9
Marriage Type	Monogamous	609	88.8
	Polygynous	77	11.2
	No Response	68	-
Number of Children	0	27	4.0
	1 – 4	478	70.2
	5 – 9	165	24.2
	10 – 41	11	1.6
Level of Education	None	3	0.4
	Primary & Secondary	44	6.1
	Technical/OND/NCE & Equiv	268	36.3
	University	399	54.0
	Others	24	3.2

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Attitude to a Husband's actions against wife

	Strongly object	Object	Indifferent	Approve	Strongly Approved	Total
Throwing something at her	504 (71.5)	158 (22.4)	39 (5.5)	3 (0.43)	1 (0.14)	705 (100%)
Pushing or shoving her	44 (13.5)	218 (66.9)	56 (17.2)	7 (2.2)	1 (0.31)	326 (100%)
Batting	516 (81.3)	95 (14.9)	22 (3.5)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.16)	635 (100%)
Tying up and/or hitting her	584 (83.5)	93 (13.3)	20 (2.9)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	699 (100%)
Pulling her hair	587 (84.5)	92 (13.24)	14 (2.01)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	695 (100%)
Hitting and hitting her again	566 (81.8)	98 (14.16)	24 (3.5)	3 (0.43)	1 (0.14)	692 (100%)
Hitting with an object	603 (86.51)	77 (11.05)	15 (2.15)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	697 (100%)
Burning/acid attack	649 (93.3)	38 (5.5)	7 (1.01)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	696 (100%)
Choking	619 (89.2)	63 (9.08)	10 (1.44)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	694 (100%)
Stabbing	646 (92.3)	44 (6.3)	8 (1.14)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	700 (100%)
Shooting	640 (91.7)	45 (6.4)	10 (1.43)	2 (0.29)	1 (0.14)	698 (100%)

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Violent Acts (in the past) against a Spouse

	Never	Number of Times							Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Throwing something at you	563 (90.9)	48 (7.7)	4 (0.65)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.16)	- (-)	619 (100%)
Pushing or shoving	527 (85.9)	74 (12.1)	8 (1.31)	1 (0.16)	- (-)	3 (0.49)	- (-)	- (-)	613 (100%)
Biting	597 (96.5)	19 (3.1)	- (-)	- (-)	1 (0.16)	2 (0.32)	- (-)	- (-)	619 (100%)
Pulling hair	198 (93.8)	12 (5.7)	1 (0.47)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	211 (100%)
Hitting and hitting again	552 (89.4)	56 (9.08)	8 (1.30)	1 (0.16)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	617 (100%)
Hitting with an object	569 (92.8)	44 (7.2)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	613 (100%)
Burning/acid attack	595 (96.7)	19 (3.09)	- (-)	1 (20.0)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	615 (100%)
Choking	593 (96.4)	22 (3.6)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	615 (100%)
Stabbing	591 (96)	25 (4)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	616 (100%)
Shooting	601 (97.7)	14 (2.3)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	- (-)	615 (100%)