Battered Women: Towards Understanding Domestic Violence against Women Behind Closed Doors in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study critically looked at the endemic nature of domestic violence against women in Delta state, Nigeria. The paper employed the Social Learning Theory of crime and derived its data from the state through In-depth and Key Informant Interviews besides utilizing Focus Group Discussion and the Vignette Stories Approach. Findings revealed that domestic violence against women in the study area is unrelenting with disturbing dimensions and consequences on the woman and their children. Furthermore, it was established that cultural customary practices and patriarchal system are the major causative factors of the phenomenon in the area. The study however recommended that obnoxious cultural practices against the progress and security of the women folks should be reviewed or be abolished. It further recommended that government should institute harsh laws and punishments as deterrents against domestic violence towards women while counseling centers should be established to counsel victims and intending marriage couples on how to manage their marital relationships. Lastly, mounted campaign through the mass media against the negative effects of domestic

violence against women should be vigorously pursued to reverse the trend.

Key words: Women, marriage, Abuse, patriarchal system, counseling

1. Introduction

Women play vital roles in the growth and development of any nation across the globe and constitute half of the world's population. Alokan (2013); Akpomuvie and Okinono (2018);Akpomuvie (2020), observed that women are home makers, custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society and further observed that notable changes are realized through them. Davis (1999) noted that women as mothers, teachers and guardians and sometimes bread winners deserve respect and better treatment but sadly, the reverse is often the case. Apart from their enslavement in a vicious circle of poverty, neglect and often time's exploitation and discrimination, the women are humiliated and subjected to various levels of violence by their male folks (Davis, 1999). Similarly, Olabisi (1998) contented that in Nigeria, women represent 49 percent of the population with their productive and reproductive activities running through such functions as performing household chores, income earning activities, community participation and management roles.

Current statistics Olabisi (1998) noted, continue to indicate the fact that women in Nigeria particularly in Delta state, face untold 'hardships' that are linked to their gender while gender inequality continues to be rooted in traditional practices, values and norms. Here, culture is presented as a veritable tool in understanding the predominant gender ideology in Nigerian society. The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) similarly stated that violence and hardship suffered by women are manifestations of historically unequal power relations between the men and their women folks which overtime led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the obstruction of the full advancement of women potentials. The UN (1993) declaration further averred that violence against women is one of the very vital social mechanisms through which women are coerced into subordinate positions in contrast with their male counterparts.

UNICEF (2001) also noted that in many African countries including Nigeria, wives and children beating is widely approved as a form of disciplinary measure. And as such, in beating children parents are convinced they are instilling disciple in them; much the same way as in husbands beating their wives who are seen very much like children, to be subjected to disciplinary measures and be checked routinely.

It is against this background that this study takes a critical look, though dispassionately at domestic violence against women in Nigeria particularly in Delta state. The paper also evaluates the dimensions and investigates the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Nigeria as well as the peculiar causative factors of the problem and the consequences on the children.

2. Theoretical Milieu

The guiding theoretical framework for his research is the Social Learning Theory of crime. Mihalic and Elliot (1997) contented that the social learning theory of crime is one of the most popular explanatory perspectives in marital literature. According to Etzioni (1971), learning theory views violence as the result of successful socialization and social control. He noted that aggressive behaviour in general and violent behaviour in particular, is "learned' just like other behaviours and can be triggered where expected even without frustration. It goes to show that children from homes and societies where domestic violence against women is perpetuated, grow to believe that violence is an accepted norm and as a way of resolving conflicts and gaining power. Etzioni (1971) therefore stressed that what one learns, is largely defined by one's culture and subculture. Hence one common explanation for why members of one society are more violent than other cultures.

However, Alkers' Social Learning Theory combines Sutherland's original Differential Association Theory of criminal behaviour with General Behavioural Learning Principles (Agnew, 2006). The implication is that Social Learning Theory is a reformulation and as an extension of Sutherland's differential association. The bottom line of differential association is that criminal behavior is learnt through interaction with others but failed to identify the mechanism by which such behaviour is learned. Akers (1985; 1998; 2004) draws heavily on various theories of learning behavioural theory and social learning theory in psychology hinging on

how crime is learned. The theory proposes that criminal and delinquent behaviours are acquired, repeated and even altered by the same process as conforming behaviour (see Oladeji, 2009).

3. Methodology

This study took a hard look at the phenomenon of domestic violence against women in Nigeria, using Delta state as case study with which to generalize on the country. The data feeding the article was therefore sourced from the state with 25 local government areas through In-depth and Key Informant Interviews besides utilizing Focus Group Discussions and relying on the Vignette Stories Approach on women at two (2) levels; the stories of victims of domestic violence that ended on a happy note and those that ended on a sad a note. A sample size of 350 respondents was selected through random and systematic sampling techniques to guarantee representation of all shades of the population size.

Apart from using content-based approach, the recorded interviews were transcribed with accuracy tests. Similarly, due to the sensitive nature of the research, participation was voluntary as well as respecting the wishes of the participants for anonymity. Data sourced in the study were interpreted in simple percentages.

4:1 Literature Review; Domestic Violence against Women, Dimensions of The Violence, Causative Factors and Consequences on The Children.

Domestic violence is also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence and Intimate Partner Violence (I.P.V) and it is a pattern of abusive behaviour by one partner against the other in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating or cohabitation (Seimeniuk, Krentz, Gish and Gill,2010). Office of Violence Against Women (2007); UN (1993); WHO (1996); WHO (2008); Ahie (2009); Umweni, Uwadiae and Agbontaen - Eghafona, (2009) defined violence against women as any act of gender- based violence that results in, or likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to the woman; including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in the public or private life. WHO (2002) contented that women are susceptible to abuse by persons very intimate with them usually known as Intimate Partner Violence

(IPV) and accounts for well over 45-75% of women murdered by their either husbands or boyfriends.

Scott and Marshall (2009) in their contributions asserted that domestic violence is specifically male violence (psychological or physical) against the women folks. This phenomenon was popularized by some feminist in the 1970s who established safe haven for battered women as refugees. These feminist succinctly stressed that domestic violence is a reflection of oppression of women and portrays gender inequalities in power and the term in their estimations include any violence within the family. Similarly, Harrison (2004) and Oyelade (2012) summed up domestic violence as emotional, economic, physical, sexual and psychological actions that affect another person such that isolates, frightens, forces, threatens, terrorizes, hurts, inflicts injury or controls another person negatively.

Another definition sees domestic violence as a mix of physical and coercive behaviours meant to manipulate and dominate another competent adult or adolescent to secure compliance and dependence (Kerr, Levine and Woolard, 2007). These scholars alluded to the fact that children can also be victims of domestic violence; the elements of power being the denominator to compel compliance. The United Nations (2000) tends to concur with the power dynamics involved in domestic violence thus: a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is employed to secure or regulate power and control over an intimate partner that maybe emotional, physical, sexual, economic actions that influences another person. By implications "intimate partner" connotes that parties to domestic violence may not necessarily be in a marriage relationship nor do the parties have to reside in the same apartment before an act of violence could be seen as domestic violence.

From the foregoing violence could be used to describe any act that is informed by the intention to cause harm or to destroy the physical or emotional integrity and agency of people; and there after, produces that harm (Oladeji, 2004). The intention to cause harm is central to the definition of violence.

Violence against women has been recorded in history and in most human societies. Judith and Sandy (2001) noted that sometimes, its scale has been extremely massive with tell tale consequences; women with swollen faces, bruises, wounds, mutilations, permanent scars, emotional burdens, maimed and deformed appearances and in some severe cases, loss of life. Sadly, Ojoma (2009) noted with anger, that where there are no visible physical evidences of maltreatment, there are profound psychological wounds nursed and carried by the affected women. Pathetically, this phenomenon is prevalent in the family where high levels of violence against women threaten the very fabric and notion of the family; as a safe heaven, a place of emotional intimacy and personal security according to (Watts and Zimmerman, 2002; Eze-Anaba, 2006). It is sad and disturbing that women suffer domestic violence from the hands of those who claimed to love and protect them from the vicissitudes of life (Eze-Anaba, 2006).

4:2 Dimensions of Domestic Violence against Women in Delta State.

According to WHO (2005), violence against women is a major problem in the society with multi- dimensional forms in its manifestations. Project Alert (2004); Oladeji (2004); Alokan (2013); Ibegbulan et.al (2022); Oluremi (2015) and Odugbenu (2004) stressed that domestic violence can manifest in the form of physical violence and ranging from unwanted physical contact to rape and murder. And may also include; destruction of objects and striking or throwing objects at victims. In addition to physical violence, spouse abuse include; wife battery, denial of self expression, violence from in-laws, negative cultural attitudes and degrading traditional practices; such as widowhood rites, verbal threats of physical violence to the women including insult and attacks. While non- verbal threats may include; gestures, facial expressions and negative body postures suggesting violence.

Psychological abuse may also involve; neglect, economic control; such as controlling the victim's money and other economic resources, shielding victims from contacts with relatives and friends, emotional abuse, spiritual abuse which includes preventing a victim from engaging in her religious practices or manipulating, dominating or controlling a victim with ones religious beliefs, harming a person's sense of worth, name- calling, unnecessary criticism, routinely making unreasonable demands and so on.

Amnesty International (2005) also noted that women on daily basis are beaten and ill- treated, raped and even murdered by members of their families. In some cases, vicious acid attacks leave these venerable women with horrific disfigurements. Women according to WHO (2002) are more likely to be victimized by persons that are intimate with, commonly called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and further observed that the effect of domestic violence in the sphere of total violence against women can be understood through the example that 40-70% murders of women are committed by their husbands or boyfriends. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2011) however reported that instances of intimate partner violence tend not to be reported to the police and thus; many experts believe that the true magnitude of the problem is hard to estimate.

Johnson (1995) similarly identified four types of intimate partner violence, which are supported by subsequent research findings of other scholars (Graham- Kevan and Archer, 2003; Rosen, Stith, Few, Daly and Tritt, 2005). The typologies of violence reported by Johnson (1995) are; Common Couple Violence (CCV) which arises in a simple argument and one or both partners physically lash out at the other, Intimate Terrorism (IT) which involves emotional and psychological abuse and relates to patterns of control by one partner over the other, Violence Resistance (VR) thought of as self- defense reactions by victims against their abusive partners and Mutual Violent Control (MVC) which occurs when both partners act in a violent manner; battling for control.

4.3 Causative Factors of Domestic Violence against Women in Delta State.

Many factors have been adduced for the phenomenon of domestic violence against women. The factors identified in this study are not exhaustive but provide insight into the predisposing causes of domestic violence in Nigeria particularly in Delta state. These factors include: cultural factors, psychological, political, economic dependence, childlessness and male child syndrome, low level of education, jealousy, social stress, social learning, alcohol, drug addiction and religious factors. Cultural and social excuses in which customary practices hold that the man is the head of the house and has control and decision- making powers encourages dominance and oppression. In such patriarchal societies, women are seen as followers (Belknap and Potter, 2006). It therefore goes that in such cultural settings,

it is a taboo for a woman to challenge her husband or act without his permission in any given situation. Similarly, wife beating is seen by relatives as a normal part of marriage life and women are punished for acts against these norms. With this background, women in abusive relationships in Nigeria particularly in Delta state are often reluctant to report their husbands to the authorities or even seek medical assistance. This gives men the leverage to continuously engage in the vicious cycle of abuse of these vulnerable women.

Excessive alcohol consumption or drugs addition are similar factors identified with domestic violence against women because after an overdose of drugs or excessive alcohol consumption by the husbands, they resort to violence by inflicting injuries and often times beating and maiming the women; resulting sometimes to death or bruises, swollen faces and permanent scars. These unfortunate women are constrained to act because is of the inhibitions of the existing norms and the manner of socialization by various cultures into the society.

Politically in Nigeria particularly Delta state, women are not often heard because they are relegated to the background and occasioned by the inability of government to protect women's rights through appropriate legislations. Apart from weak policies on domestic violence against women, the female folks are not adequately represented at the federal and state levels and as such gender sensitive laws and policies are not often a priority. The situation is further exacerbated by the low level of education of the women.

The man is customarily perceived as the family bread winner irrespective of the financial contributions of the women to the well being of the family. This gives the men folks dominance and control of the family. Women, who depended on their husbands for sustenance and having the burden of caring for the children, find it difficult to separate from their husbands and even contemplate divorce; because their financial burdens will increase thereby making life unbearable for them. Goode, (1971) noted that a woman depending on her husband, implies that she has fewer options and few opportunities and resources to cope with the fluctuating or change in their spouses behaviours. They are therefore compelled to accept and endure whatever life brings; particularly whatsoever violence committed against

them by their husbands who hitherto, were their best friends, confidants, companions and so on.

Sadly and regrettably in most parts of Nigeria and Delta state in particular, significant cases of infertility and the absence of a male child in marriages are attributed to the inadequacies of the women and often times, the men resort to domestic violence to express their displeasure with the situation by venting anger on the women. The purpose of marriage from the African context and the study area is for procreation and the continuity of the family. Males are highly priced against the females in any marriage because of the relevance attached to the male child as the heir apparent to the father. The inability to meet these expectations places the women in dire situations which is often expressed through domestic violence against the women who are regarded as the cause and in extreme cases, branded as witches.

Obedience and submission to the husband are compelled by most customary and religious practices across the length and breadth of the study area. These practices teach that the husband is the head of the family and must be accorded every respect and greater control and decision- making powers. In addition, refusal of the man to permit his wife to practice another faith or worship differently could result conflict and consequently, violence against the woman. Other causative factors include; jealousy in which case, the spouse is either suspected of unfaithfulness or planning to quit the relationship, social stress, social learning, power and control as a result of the abusers efforts to dominate the partner due to low self- esteem, feelings of inadequacies, unresolved childhood conflicts, personality disorders and what have you.

4.4 The Consequences of Domestic Violence against Women on the Children in Delta State.

Domestic violence against women has far reaching consequences not only on the women but also on the children and society in general. Apart from causing prolonged and unpleasant impressions on the child's memory as observed by Shalini (2019), it also provokes anti- social behaviours among vulnerable children such as increased aggressiveness, impatience as well as anxiety disorders noted

(Dodd, 2009). In addition, problems with attitude and cognition in school, starts developing along with lack of skills for problem solving.

Children from houses where domestic violence is perpetuated perceive the world as ugly and brutal and grow to believe that violence is part and parcel of life; as well as a way of resolving conflicts, gaining power and dominating or lording it over other persons. In many cases, children who witnessed the assault on their mothers are more likely to show symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) (Lehman, 1995). Peel Committee against Women Abuse (2001) observed that children are affected by domestic violence against women at various fronts; emotionally (anxiety, anger, depression, low self-esteem) physically (difficulties in sleeping, eating, health problems) socially (poor social skills, peer rejection) cognitively (developmental delays, poor schools performance) behaviourally (aggression, tantrums, immaturity), (Adeniyi, 2009).

5. Results/ Findings.

The findings revealed that most respondents 80.7% are aware of the phenomenon of domestic violence against women an as emerging social problem in Nigeria particularly in Delta State while 13% are unaware of the problem. Besides a significant number of respondents representing 98.4% indicated that domestic violence against women occurred among young couples, in marriages where parents were not involved in the choice of spouses, in cohabitations, remarriages after divorce while marriages properly conducted, religious based and marriages involving elderly couples are the least affected by domestic violence against women with 16%.

Furthermore, the study revealed that while the women are not the only victims of domestic violence in Delta State, they are mostly at the receiving end, indicated by 58% of the respondents. This is because of cultural and societal excuses in which customary practices hold that the man is the head of the house with enormous powers to dominate the woman, particularly in patriarchal societies. Again 42% of the respondents also reported that wife beating is seen by relatives as normal part of marriage life and women are punished for acts against these norms. Yet another 52% of the respondents noted that women in abusive relationships in the study

area are often reluctant to report their husbands to the authorities or seek redress due to cultural inhibitions. While 48% of the respondents, reported that cultural constraints and the fear of societal stigmatizations on the women gives the men the impetus to continuously engage in the vicious cycle of abuse against these vulnerable and unfortunate women.

On the basis of the occurrence of domestic violence, 68% of the respondents reported that there is an increasing prevalence of domestic violence against women in Delta state as indicated by 48% of women respondents, 16% of respondents who are children and 4% of the men who reported having experienced domestic violence from women.

The study also identified and ranked several dynamics that has contributed greatly to domestic violence against women in Delta State which include: cultural and societal excuses 85.5, excessive alcohol 25.5% gender biases against women 65.5% customary practices 60.2% and divorce 5.5%. Interestingly, the study showed that cultural and societal excuses and gender biases were considered as the most ranked dynamics influencing domestic violence while the least ranked dynamics is divorce and the desired motivations to control the women.

The study also brought to the fore the numerous problems and consequences of domestic violence on the children in the study area. These problems noted the respondents included; anti-social behaviours among vulnerable children 65.4%, negative perception of the world by children from abusive homes 68.5%, health and psychological problems 55%, depression 52.4%, verbal torture 48.2%, emotional trauma and sexual abuse 28.4%, developmental delays and poor school performances 45% low self-esteem 62.5% etc.

From the Vignette Stories and the FGD sessions, victims reported with uncontrollable tears and profound shock in the manner in which they were maltreated and manipulated by the hands of those who claimed to love and protect them from harm. Most of the women victims also narrated how their spouses gave them false hope of love, care, protection and the hope of spending the rest of their

lives together. Some of the women also narrated how they were repeatedly raped with the threat of divorce if they objected.

6. Discussions

The study confirmed the findings of existing literature on the phenomenon; that domestic violence against women was on the increase in Nigeria particularly in Delta State. This Day Newspaper (2011) reported that 50% of women in Nigeria have been battered by their loved ones (husbands). Shockingly, the paper further noted that educated women 65% are in this terrible quagmire compared with their less literate counterparts 55%. That staggering 97.2% of the vulnerable women are not disposed to reporting their ordeals to the authorities. Finally, the paper reported that there is an official acceptance of domestic violence against women as a private affair in Nigeria

Further confirming the results and findings of this study, Obi and Ozumba (2007) reported that 70% of the respondents, reported abuse in their families with 92% of the victims being female partners and the remaining 8% being males. This study was carried out in the South East of Nigeria. In a survey on violence against women conducted with women working in the markets and other places of work; girls and young women in secondary schools and universities in Lagos state, 64.4% of the 45 women respondents in the work place reported that they had been beaten by their partners (boyfriends or husbands), 56.6% of 48 market women respondents, admitted experiencing various forms of violence. The common forms of abuse reported were; shouting at a partner 93%, slapping or pushing 77% while punching and kicking was 40%.

In a study carried out at Abuja, Agbo and Choji (2014) reported of a mother who narrated her ordeals in the hands of her husband who constantly was hitting and beating her whenever he was drink and in the process lost two pregnancies. Similarly in July, 2014 Agbo and Choji reported a pathetic case of a 34 year old housewife that had her face stitched 26 times after she was battered repeatedly by her husband.

7. Conclusion/ Recommendations

From the foregoing, domestic violence can manifest in various forms and from extant literatures on the phenomenon, the typologies of domestic violence ranges from physical, sexual, verbal/emotional and economic abuse to psychological abuse. It has also been established in this study that domestic violence varies from country to country and even within a country as well as from culture to culture. Victims of domestic violence in the study area are reluctant to report their experiences because of cultural influences, threats, fear of condemnation from family and community members, concern about divorce, the hope that their partners will change, sometimes due to the attitudes of the law enforcement agents as well as medical workers and stigmatization from the society.

The government should put in place laws protecting women's rights and provide fund for counseling centers at the community level; in addition to employing professional counselors to help victims and perpetrators of domestic violence in the study area. Similarly, comprehensive premarital counseling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationships. In addition, public enlightenments through the mass media on the negative effects of domestic violence against women should be mounted and sustained. Religious leaders, the churches and mosques should also be involved in this drive to curtail domestic violence against the women. Finally, cultural practices with patriarchal undertones should be reviewed and made thread bare on the progress and security of the women folks.

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