The Impacts of Domestic Violence against Children and the Social Work Counseling in Ekosodin Community Benin City, Edo State

By

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Abstract

This study examined the impacts of domestic violence against children and social work counseling in Ekosodin Community Benin City. The objectives were to; determine the impact of social work counseling in rehabilitation of long-term psychological effect of domestic violence on children in Ekosodin Community Benin City and examine the influence of social work counseling on the emotional adjustment of children who are victim of domestic violence in Ekosodin Community Benin City. Family system theory was used. The entire population of the study was 68,787 while the sample size adopted was 144 respondents. The data was analyzed using simple percentages The results established that social work counseling does not help to rehabilitate long-term psychological effect of domestic violence on children. Social work counseling technique can be used to influence the emotional adjustment of children who are victim of domestic violence. Social work counseling process can help to ameliorate the developmental problem of domestic violence on children. The study recommended that social workers should get involved in public health, both in the research and practice of it. They are to utilize their professional skills and knowledge in taking care of the listed challenges of the family particularly domestic violence against children. Parents should be good enough, which is often characterised by the quality of care provided to children and how sensitively parents are able to wield authority to ensure optimum development of their children. The study recommended that there should be policy of child-rearing norms and practices set up by government to checkmate the excess of child discipline and draw a line between domestic violence and child discipline among families.

Keywords: Children, Counseling, Domestic, Rape, Rehabilitation

Introduction

One negative aspect of family life is the effect of domestic violence on children, either as witnesses to, or victims of, the conflict. The effects of domestic violence on children play a tremendous role on the well-being and developmental growth of children witnessing the event (Adeyemo & Bamidele, 2016). Children who witness domestic violence in the home often believe that they are to blame, live in a constant state of fear, and are 15 times more likely to be victims of child abuse. Close observation during an interaction can alert social work professional to the need for further investigation and intervention, such as dysfunctions in the physical, behavioural, emotional, and social areas of life, and can aid in early intervention and assistance for child victims (Tumwesigye, 2021).

Social work interventions may consist of casework as well as therapeutic services designed to provide parenting education, child and family counseling, and family support. Social work interventions may include concrete services such as income support or material aid, institutional placement, mental health services, in-home health services, supervision, education, transportation, housing, medical services, legal services, in-home assistance, socialization, nutrition, and child and respite care (Njoku, G. 2019; Watson, 2017).

Most often, children who witness domestic violence in the home can suffer an immense amount of physical symptoms along with their emotional and behavioral state of despair. These children may complain of general aches and pain, such as headaches and stomach aches. They may also have irritable and irregular bowel habits, cold sores, and problems with bed-wetting. These complaints have been associated with depressive disorders in children, a common emotional effect of domestic violence (Olorunsaiye, Brunner, Laditka, Kulkarni & Boyd, 2017; Özçakar, Yeşiltepe, Karaman & Ergönen, 2016). Along with these general complaints of not feeling well, children who witness domestic violence may also appear nervous, as previously mentioned, and have short attention spans. These children display some of the same symptoms as children who have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). On the reverse, these

children may show symptoms of fatigue and constant tiredness. They may fall asleep in school due to the lack of sleep at home. Much of their night may be spent listening to or witnessing violence within the home. Children who are victims of domestic violence are often frequently ill, and may suffer from poor personal hygiene. Children who witness domestic violence also have a tendency to partake in high risk play activities, self-abuse, and other related negative tendencies (Brian, 2021).

Statement of the Research Problem

Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old. For infants and younger children, violence mainly involves child maltreatment (i.e. physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect) at the hands of parents and other authority figures. Boys and girls are at equal risk of physical and emotional abuse and neglect, and girls are at greater risk of sexual abuse. As children reach adolescence, peer violence and intimate partner violence, in addition to child maltreatment, become highly prevalent (MacGregor, Wathen & MacQuarrie, 2016; Oon, Shuib, Ali, Endut, Osman, Abdullah & Ghani, 2016).

Violence against children can be prevented. Preventing and responding to violence against children requires that efforts systematically address risk and protective factors at all four interrelated levels of risk (individual, relationship, community, society). The impact of domestic violence may be long-term, affecting emotional adjustment, physical health and subsequent relationship (Dobash & Dobash, 2015; Felker-Kantor, Wallace & Theall, 2017).

Social work counselor should be aware of the confounding effect children's age and cultural diversity on presentation. In this regard, shame and isolation may militate against disclosure of any domestic violence. Social work counselor is to raise sensitive questioning that incorporate awareness of cultural and social issues as it is essential to detect domestic violence and initiate appropriate assistance (Felker-Kantor, Wallace & Theall, 2017; Lloyd, 2018). According to this plan, world health organization (WHO 2021) in collaboration with Member States and other partners in addressing the problem of domestic violence against children, thereby: Monitoring the global magnitude and characteristics of violence against children

and supporting country efforts to document and measure such violence, Maintaining an electronic information system that summarizes the scientific data on the burden, risk factors and consequences of violence against children, and the evidence for its preventability, and Developing and disseminating evidence-based technical guidance documents, norms and standards for preventing and responding to violence against children.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine the impacts of domestic violence against children and social work counseling in Ekosodin, Community Benin City Edo State. The specific objectives were to:

1) determine the impact of social work counseling in rehabilitation of long-term psychological effect of domestic violence on children in Ekosodin Community Benin City.
2) examine the influence of social work counseling on the emotional adjustment of children who are victim of domestic violence in Ekosodin Community Benin City.

Review of Literature

Traditionally, in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, the beating of wives and children is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline (UNICEF, 2001; Aihie, 2009). Therefore, in beating their children parents believe they are instilling discipline in them, much the same way as in husbands beating their wives, who are regarded like children to be prone to indiscipline which must be curbed. This is especially so when the woman is economically dependent on the man.

Amnesty International (2005) report on Nigeria indicates that on a daily basis, women are beaten and ill-treated for supposed transgressions, raped and even murdered by members of their family. In some cases, vicious acid attacks leave them with horrific disfigurements. Such violence is too frequently excused and tolerated in communities and not denounced. Husbands, partners and fathers are responsible for most of the violence against women. One in three of all women and girls aged 15-24 have been a victim of violence. Women both married and unmarried have been subject-ted to vicious attacks from men. Rape, sexual insult

and assault, brutalization and victimization, domestic violence on girls and women have in recent time been on the increase in Nigeria, with victims embarrassed to report such incidences to the right agencies for justice. Records have shown that between 50 percent and two thirds of Nigerian women are subjected to domestic violence in their homes. In Nigeria, sixty-five percent or more educated women are in this horrible situation as compared to their low income counterparts, (55 percent). Unfortunately, a staggering 97.2 percent of the abused women do not report the crime to the authorities (Ghimire Axinn & Smith-Greenaway, 2015).

The effects of domestic violence can be devastating and long lasting especially on children and adolescents. Children are often principal victims of domestic violence. Witnessing abuse and living in an environment where someone else, usually a care giver is a victim of abuse, can be psychologically devastating for a child (Aihie, 2009). Straus (1994) reports that children who are hit by parents have higher rates of depression than those whose parents disciplined in other ways and are more likely to think about suicides. Some researchers have also found that children whose mothers were abused by their partners have intelligence quotients (IQs) lower than usual (BBC. 2003; Aihie, 2009).

Anikweze (1998) identified violence as a threat to adolescents' well-being. The adolescent may become socialized in violent behaviour. He or she may become confused and angry. A child who has undergone or witnessed violence may become withdrawn, anxious or depressed on one hand; on the other hand, the child may become aggressive and exert control over younger sib-lings or other people's children. They may become aggressive, becoming troublesome at home and at school. They may also become withdrawn, isolating themselves from others and may underachieve, academically. These adolescents may develop low self-esteem, finding it difficult to trust others. The anger and stress experienced by victims may lead to depression and other emotional disorders sometimes leading to suicide (Brian, 2021). Victims may also exhibit harmful health behaviour like excessive smoking, alcohol abuse, use of drugs and engaging in risky sexual activity. An abused child, for instance, may grow up not to trust other people, may go into relationships with an aggressive mode or may become withdrawn, afraid to go into

intimate relationship. This usually results in involvement in risky sexual behaviour.

Growing up in an abusive environment is what makes a person find the sight of a suspect being beaten or burnt to death, entertaining and enjoyable. Emotional or psychological abuse that is woven into family interactions and communications is also difficult for children to escape and may result in a home environment dominated by fear, control and the anticipation of violence (Stanley, 2011). It is what makes the youth happy and excited about being thugs for wicked politicians, as well as become hardened criminals who see nothing wrong in inflicting pain or death on others in the society.

Social Work and Child Protection

Social work practice with women and children comes under the purview of family welfare services. One cannot talk of women and children in Nigeria without talking of the family which is the basic unit of African life. The family is the "natural and fundamental unit group of society" (Lalor, de Roiste & Devlin 2009). It is a group of people that "live together in a permanent arrangement, separated from the rest of the world by the walls of family-centred interaction". As argued by Lalor, de Róiste and Devlin (2009) the family is essential to children as it is their "most important source of security, love, belonging and identity". It is therefore an irreplaceable environment where the children are formed as persons, where they live, satisfying some of their most important needs that can be satisfied only within the family (Ebue, Uche & Agha, 2017).

Social work with children is one of the core areas of social work intervention (SWI) whose scope varies across different settings. It is important to understand that any kind of intervention with children needs to adhere to the overarching framework of the constitutional provisions, the national and state level laws or acts, policies, programmes, and schemes that address multifaceted and variety of issues concerning children. If social workers find certain gaps between theory and practice or that implementation is not happening to the desired extent, they can intervene by creating advocacy and/or campaigning around the same to ensure that required objectives have been achieved (Shajahan, Nigudkar & Menachery, 2017).

Moreover, social workers must be skilled in judging which intervention to employ within the range of their own competence and they must be able to differentiate the methods/interventions which are either insufficient or irrelevant to the objectives they wish to achieve under the similar circumstance (Laird & Tedam, 2019).

In general, social workers follow certain processes step-by-step, often a fluid circular route, to help clients resolve their problems which are as follows: engagement (building a relationship among the stakeholders), assessment (collecting the information), diagnosis (interpreting the information), intervention (setting the goal based on the assessment and diagnosis and doing of the work), and evaluation (determining the effectiveness). Out of these processes, selection of appropriate intervention method is crucial as it should be informed by social and psychological theories and social work assessments (Laird & Tedam, 2019). The approaches social workers use, determine the process, techniques and roles to be used by a social worker.

The term 'intervention' has been derived from the Latin word 'intervenire' which means "to come between, interrupt". SWIs are purposeful actions undertaken by social workers who are based on the knowledge and understanding acquired, skills developed, and values practiced (Laird & Tedam, 2019). Ebue, Uche and Agha (2017) in their review reported that social work interventions (SWIs) have generally been described as scientifically established processes and patterns applied by the social workers to cases of individuals, groups and communities/societies.

Counseling Implications

To remedy the domestic violence situation in Nigeria, all stakeholders must be involved - the communities, religious groups, institutions, government at all levels. Social work seminars and workshops, where trained counsellors would assist in propagating the anti-domestic violence campaign, should be organized. There is the need to create awareness at these forums, to underscore the fact that violence in the home serves as a breeding ground for violence in the society. The need to regard domestic violence from a psychological rather than a socio-cultural perspective should be emphasized. People should be made to understand that

adults can change the social norms that justify domestic violence by (1) being role models and working together to end violence in the home (2) modelling non-violent relationship (3) disseminating information which condemns domestic violence (Brian, 2021).

In schools, during Parents' Teachers' Association meetings, the school counsellor could give enlightenment talks, encouraging parents to use disciplinary measures, which are non-violent on their children and avoid exposing children to domestic violent of any form. Prize-giving day programmes could include short talks on the issue of domestic violence, emphasizing its evil consequences and the need for families to avoid it for a better society. The school counselor could organize group counselling sessions for the different age groups and classes, on the advantages of a violence free society. The boys, in particular should be counselled on how to grow up into 'healthy' men. There are influences within the home, outside the home, from friends, the internet, music and movies – messages that show that a man must be tough and in control in a relationship. The children should be taught how to be assertive without being aggressive. They should be taught how to express anger and frustration without violence. In counselling individual students with anger problem, the various anger management techniques should be taught (Tumwesigye, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts family system theory to explain child abuse in Edo State has been prevalence for several years, successive government has tried to make policies as to prevent or eradicate it and its consequences. Family Systems Theory (FST), developed by Murray Bowen, provides a framework for understanding how individuals within a family influence each other and how family dynamics impact behavior and mental health. While FST is not primarily focused on understanding domestic violence, its concepts can help explain how patterns of behavior in a family can contribute to the occurrence and perpetuation of violence. Here's how Family Systems Theory can be applied to domestic violence:

Bowen's theory emphasizes the idea of "multigenerational transmission" — the passing down of patterns of behavior, roles, and emotional responses across

generations. In the context of domestic violence, this concept suggests that children who witness or experience abuse in their homes are more likely to engage in abusive behavior themselves or become victims in adulthood. Children raised in homes where violence is present may grow up learning maladaptive conflict resolution strategies, which they might later replicate in their own relationships. This cycle is not deterministic, but the patterns set in childhood can shape attitudes and behaviors later in life. Families often create unwritten rules about how emotions are expressed and conflict is resolved. In families where emotional regulation is poorly managed or where aggression is normalized, abusive behaviors can become part of the system's dysfunction.

Bowen's concept of "emotional cutoff" refers to individuals distancing themselves emotionally from family members to avoid anxiety. In the context of domestic violence, emotional cutoff can manifest in situations where one partner, often the victim, attempts to distance themselves from the violent behavior without resolving the underlying emotional or relational issues (Black & Lobo 2008). The cutoff might be seen as a way to cope with overwhelming emotional pain or as a survival mechanism, but it often fails to address the root causes of violence. The attempt to avoid the abusive person or situation doesn't solve the underlying family dysfunction, and the abuse can continue. Emotional cutoff can also isolate the victim from supportive family members, making it harder for them to seek help (Bosco et al., 2022). Differentiation of self is a central concept in Bowen's theory, which refers to an individual's ability to maintain their sense of self while staying emotionally connected to others. In relationships where there is domestic violence, the abuser may have a lower level of differentiation, and their identity and emotional well-being may be overly dependent on control and power over the victim. Conversely, the victim may struggle with a higher level of emotional dependency or confusion, often feeling trapped between the need for connection and the harm caused by the abuse (Bosco et al., 2022).

The abuser's low level of differentiation may lead them to feel insecure or inadequate and compensate by exerting control over their partner to maintain a sense of stability. This can escalate to abusive behaviors as they try to dominate or manipulate their partner's emotions and actions. The victim may become

"emotionally fused" with the abuser, meaning they struggle to separate their own feelings and identity from the abuser's behavior (Delsol & Margolin, 2004). This often makes it difficult for the victim to leave or assert themselves because they may feel they need to maintain the relationship at any cost.

Enmeshment is a concept in Family Systems Theory that refers to family members being overly involved in each other's emotional lives, leading to a lack of boundaries and personal autonomy. In abusive families, enmeshment can occur when the abuser's emotional needs are overly prioritized, and the victim's needs are minimized or ignored (Wendel, 2018). This disempowerment contributes to the victim's sense of helplessness, making it harder to break free from the relationship. Enmeshment can make the victim feel responsible for the emotional well-being of the abuser. This dynamic can result in the victim tolerating abuse to avoid causing the abuser emotional distress or conflict, reinforcing the cycle of abuse. From a family systems perspective, domestic violence is often seen as a way for the abuser to maintain control within the family unit. Family Systems Theory views the family as a system in which the individual behaviors of members affect the overall family dynamic.

Methodology

The research design involves the method adopted in this study to source and analyse data using survey design. The section was subdivided in the following subheading. Research design involves series of arrangement of procedure for collection of data from targeted respondents, it also consist of the overall strategy chosen to integrate the different variables of the study in a clear and reasonable way. The study population covered all children in Ekosodin Community which 68,787 projected figure for the locality according to NPC, 2024 aged 5 to 17 years old. Consequently a sample size of 150 children were adopted for the study using Krejcie and Morgan sample size formula for calculating known population

$$S= \frac{X^2 NP(1-P)}{d^2(N-1)+X^2 P(1-P)}$$

At the end of collection of research instruments only one hundren and fourty four were valid for analysis six were bad, hence 144 qustionaire were used for the study

Table 1: Respondents Socio-demographic Characteristics

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	63	43.75
Female	81	56.25
Total	**144**	**100.0**
Age	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Under 10 years	39	27.08
11- 14 years	64	44.44
15- 17years	41	28.47
Total	**144**	**100**
Religion	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Christian	68	47.2
Islam	34	23.6
ATR	26	18.1
Others	16	11.1
Total	**144**	**100**
Educational qualification	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Primary School	71	49.31
Secondary School	73	50.69
Total	**144**	**100**

Source: Field Survey, (2024)

The table 1 showed that (43.75%, which translated to 63 respondents) were male, while (56.25%, which translated to 81 females. This indicates that the females were more represented than male.

The table above shows that 39 respondents representing 27.08% were under 10 years, 64 respondents representing 44.44% were 11-14 years, 41 respondents representing 28.47% were 15-17 years. This implies that all the respondents fall within the teen group.

From the table it shows that 68 respondents\ representing 47.2 percent of the total respondents are Christians while 34 representing 23.6 percent of the total number of respondents interviewed are Muslims while 26 (18.1 percent) are practicing traditional religion and 16 (11.1 percent) are practicing other forms of religion. The table above, it shows that 71 respondents\ representing 49.31% are in Primary School, 73 respondents representing 50.69% were in Secondary School.

Table 2: Social Work Counseling Helps to Rehabilitate Long-Term Psychological Effect of Domestic Violence on Children

		Scale & no of respondents				N(100%)
	ITEMS	(4) SA	(3) A	(2) D	(1) SD	
1.	Social work counseling can helps to prevent internal trauma experience by children who are victim of domestic violence	62 43.06%	42 29.17%	25 17.36%	15 10.42%	144
2.	Social work counseling can help to prevent psychosocial behaviour which comes from the influence of domestic violence on children	58 40.28%	45 32.14%	28 19.44%	13 9.03%	144

3.	Social work counseling can help to prevent metal health of children who has experience of domestic violence	70 48.61%	40 27.78%	19 13.19%	15 10.42%	144
4.	Social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to overcome anxiety disorder	49 34.03%	53 36.81%	19 13.19%	23 15.97%	144
5.	Social work counseling can help children who are victim of domestic violence to create drive to manage psychosocial problems such as depressive disorder	90 62.50%	37 25.69%	12 8.33%	5 3.37%	144
	Total					

Source: Field work 2024

The table 2 revealed 62 respondents representing 43.06% strongly agreed that social work counseling can helps to prevent internal trauma experience by children who are victim of domestic violence, 42 respondents representing 29.17% agreed, 25 respondents representing 17.36% strongly disagreed, while 15 respondents representing 10.42% disagreed with the statement. From the above 58 respondents representing 40.28% strongly agreed that social work counseling can help to prevent psychosocial behaviour which comes from the influence of domestic violence on children, 45 respondent representing 32.14% agreed, 28 respondents representing 19.44% strongly disagreed, while 13 respondents representing 9.03%

disagreed that social work counseling can help to prevent psychosocial behaviour which comes from the influence of domestic violence on children.

The table also revealed that 70 respondents representing 48.61% strongly agreed, that social work counseling can help to prevent metal health of children who has experience of domestic violence, 40 respondents representing 27.78% agreed, 19 respondents representing 13.19% strongly disagreed, while 15 respondents representing 10.42% disagreed that social work counseling can help to prevent metal health of children who has experience of domestic violence.

The table 2 showed 49 respondents representing 34.03% strongly agreed that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to overcome anxiety disorder, 53 respondents representing 36.81% agreed, 19 respondents representing 13.19% strongly disagreed, while 23 respondents representing 15.97% disagreed that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to overcome anxiety disorder.

The table 2 also showed that 90 respondents representing 62.5% strongly agreed that social work counseling can help children who are victim of domestic violence to create drive to manage psychosocial problems such as depressive disorder, 25.69% agreed, 8.33% strongly disagreed, 3.36% disagreed that social work counseling can help children who are victim of domestic violence to create drive to manage psychosocial problems such as depressive disorder.

Table 3: Social Work Counseling Influences the Emotional Adjustment of Children Who are Victim of Domestic Violence

		Scale & no of respondents				N(100%)
	ITEMS	(4) SA	(3) A	(2) D	(1) SD	
1.	Social work counseling can enhance child victim of domestic violence to assesses their lost emotional competencies	101 70.14%	31 21.53%	5 3.47%	7 4.86%	144

2.	Social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to emotional disorder	73 50.69%	50 34.72%	17 11.81%	4 2.78%	144
3.	Social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to behavioural problems	67 46.53%	47 32.63%	12 8.33%	18 12.50%	144
4.	Social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to social problems	77 53.47%	40 27.78%	16 11.11%	23 15.97%	144
5.	Social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to societal adaptation problems	102 70.83%	38 26.39%	4 2.78%	0.00%	144

Source: Field Work 2024

The table 3 revealed, 101 respondents representing 70.14% strongly agreed that social work counseling can enhance child victim of domestic violence to assesses their lost emotional competencies, 31 respondents representing 21.53% agreed, 5 respondents representing 3.47% strongly disagreed, while 7 respondents representing 4.86% disagreed that social work counseling can enhance child victim of domestic violence to assesses their lost emotional competencies.

The table 3 revealed that 73 respondents representing 50.69% strongly agreed, 50 respondents representing 34.72% agreed, 17 respondents representing 11.81% strongly disagreed, 4 respondents representing 2.78% disagreed, that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to

emotional disorder. Table 3 shows that 67 respondents representing 46.53% strongly agreed, 47 respondents representing 32.63% agreed, 12 respondents representing 8.33% strongly disagreed, while 18 respondents representing 12.5% disagreed that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to behavioural problems.

The table 3 shows that 77 respondents representing 53.47% strongly agreed, 40 respondents representing 27.78% agreed, 16 respondents representing 11.11% disagree, while 11 respondents representing 7.64% disagreed that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to social problems. From table the result revealed 102 respondents representing 70.83% strongly agreed, 38 respondents representing 26.39% agreed, 4 respondents representing 2.78% disagree that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to societal adaptation problems.

Conclusion

The result also shows that social work counseling can help to prevent metal health of children who has experience of domestic violence and that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to overcome anxiety disorder. The findings further displayed that social work counseling can help children who are victim of domestic violence to create drive to manage psychosocial problems such as depressive disorder.

The overview of the test of research question two demonstrates that social work counseling can enhance child victim of domestic violence to assess their lost emotional competencies and that social work counseling can be used to help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to emotional disorder. The result also indicated that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to behavioural problems and that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to social problems. The result also revealed that social work counseling can help children who are victims of domestic violence to adjust to societal adaptation problems.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations were made.

- Social workers should get involved in public health, both in the research and practice of it. They are to utilize their professional skills and knowledge in taking care of the listed challenges of the family particularly domestic violence against children.
- Parents should be good enough, which is often characterised by the quality of care provided to children and how sensitively parents are able to wield authority to ensure optimum development of their children.
- There should be policy of child-rearing norms and practices set up by government to checkmate the excess of child discipline and draw a line between domestic violence and child discipline among families.

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