

Domestic Violence against Women in Nigeria: An investigation in Delta and Edo states

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This paper presents the results of a study conducted among middle and upper class women in Delta and Edo States of Nigeria. It probes into the nature, determinants and economic and cultural contexts of domestic violence against women. Data were collected through triangulation of in-depth interviews (IDIs), case studies and survey. A sample size of seven hundred and fifty-four respondents was selected for the survey. The results indicate that although physical abuse is not very common in the two states, a sizeable proportion of women are victims of domestic violence in various manifestations, including sexual, psychological and economic violence. The results also show that although men subordinate women to maintain their socially-constructed superiority, the latter for various reasons, prefer adjusting to the status quo to deserting their homes. To contain the incidence of domestic violence against women, the use of formal and informal channels of education to reorientate the populace is strongly suggested. This will help to ensure attitudinal and behavioural change towards women subjugation, as well as help the womenfolk realize their inherent potential. In addition, there is need for policies that will genuinely protect women against violence and those that will empower law enforcement agents to take serious disciplinary measures against the perpetrators of this crime.

Key words: Women, violence, sex, abuse and income

Background

Violence against women is the most pervasive, and the least recognized human rights abuse in the world. The specific acts that constitute this crime, according to the United Nations Declaration on Violence Against Women, include: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the home and the community. In more concrete terms, this violence includes 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 (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 addressing it. In most societies, violence within the home has been regarded as a private matter; thus there are no appropriate intervention programmes or policies in this regard (Effah-Chukwuma, 2002).

Today, domestic violence against women (DVAW) has become a major topic (Reichert, 1990). The problem of violence in this regard is universal and differs only 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 universality, DVAW is today 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 average is based on available national surveys across industrialized and developing countries (WHO, 1997). However, some scholars argue that DVAW is not universal; that although women abuse by intimate partners 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, domestic violence is highly prevalent in Nigeria with 81 per cent of women being victims of one form of abuse or the other (Odujinrin, 1993).

Domestic violence is being 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 threatened 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 serious 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' contributed to its absence in public health policies and government programmes.

In several international conventions, there has now been explicit acknowledgement of the state's responsibility with regard to human rights violations 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 established by these conventions created a space in which 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. Among the various efforts, at the international level, at curtailing the menace of DVAW are the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (UN, 1993); the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (WHO, 1997); the 49th World Health Assembly in 1996, which adopted a resolution declaring violence

a public health priority (WHO, 1997); efforts of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) at bringing together 400 experts from 37 countries in 1998 to discuss the causes and costs of domestic violence, and the policies and programmes to address it (Centre for Health and Gender Equity – CHANGE 1999); the 1998 regional campaigns of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in Africa, Asia/Pacific and Latin America that were designed to draw attention to violence against women globally (UNIFEM, 1999); and the declaration, by the United Nations Population Fund, of violence against women as a public health priority (UNFPA, 1999).

Domestic violence transcends social, economic, religious, and cultural considerations. Many cultures have beliefs, norms and social institutions that legitimize and, therefore, perpetuate violence against women. Also, in all societies there are cultural institutions, beliefs and practices that undermine women's autonomy and contribute to gender-based violence. The Centre for Health and Gender Equity (1999) identifies certain marriage practices as being disadvantageous to women and girls, especially where customs, such as bride-wealth, have been corrupted by the western 'consumer' culture. In many cultures, husbands are expected to pay bride-wealth to compensate the family of the bride for the loss of labour in her natal home. In some parts of Africa and Asia, this exchange has become commercialized, with inflated bride-wealth, leaving the men with the impression that they have 'purchased' a wife. In a study in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, 82 per cent of women said that, in their culture, once a man pays the *lobola* (bride-wealth) on a woman (his would-be wife), he practically owns her (Jewkes et al., 1999). This marriage tradition undermines the ability of the woman to withdraw from any abusive relationship. In some bride-wealth cultures, parents of the woman must pay back the man if their daughter leaves the marriage. Visaria (1999) recounted the experience of an abused woman in India who noted that: '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. It is, rather, 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 battering is considered a sign of love, which women have been socialized to accept and, sometimes, encourage (Kiragu, 1995). This suggests that domestic violence originated from the social structures of the society and their complex sets of values, traditions, customs, habits and beliefs which relate to gender inequality. 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 and other traditions treat the woman as a child, lacking the ability to control her life, and also regarded as the property of the household. Under these circumstances, a woman may not view violence against her as a crime. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when directed at women, especially within the family (CHANGE, 1999). In Egypt, El Hadidi (1999) asserts that most married women agree that their husbands are sometimes justified in beating their wives. They argued that women are most likely to agree that a man is justified in beating his wife if she refuses sex or answers him back. However, they maintained that they are less likely to agree that he is justified in doing so if she burns the food. El Hadidi concluded that one out of three ever-married Egyptian women has been beaten at least once in her marital home. In Nigeria, almost every woman can expect one form of violence on her 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; 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 the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women in the 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 respect and obey their husbands. If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her bounds, or challenged his rights, he may react violently. Zimmerman (1995), Armstrong (1998) and Visaria (1999) in their studies in Cambodia, Zimbabwe and India, respectively, identified a consistent list of events that are said to 'trigger off' violence. These include disobedience to the husband, talking back, not having food ready on time, failing to care adequately for the children or home, questioning the man about money or girl friends, going out without the man's permission, refusing him sex, or expressing suspicion of infidelity.

The relationship between socio-cultural environment and domestic violence in Nigeria is particularly evident in the influence of the patriarchal ethos deriving from societal norms and values, on people's attitudes and behaviours. Isiugo-Abanihe (2003) and Obura (1991) 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 Erinsho (1998) observed that culture dictates shape behaviour; one's environment affects one's attitudes, perceptions and motivations. The pervasiveness of patriarchy is highlighted as a system applies in both patrilineal or matrilineal societies, the only difference being in the magnitude of its application in both societies. Ottong, (1993:1) 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 matriliney.

This situation explains why poverty has a female face in African societies. The feminization of

poverty, according to Akande (2000), is a tragic consequence of women's unequal access to economic opportunities. She observed that the number of rural women living in abject poverty in Africa rose to nearly 50 per cent over the past two decades. She argues that the increasing poverty level of women has a link with their unequal situation in the labour market, education and family 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 – these include fear of retribution, the 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, observed that the unacceptability of being single or unmarried is an additional factor influencing women to stay in destructive marriages.

At the same time, denial and fear of social stigma often prevent women from calling out for help. For example, between 22 per cent and 70 per cent of abused women in a particular survey say they had never told anyone about their plights (CHANGE, 1999). Zimmerman (1995) also showed that victims of domestic violence rarely seek help or relief, as wife battering is considered an internal family matter by courts, police and local authorities, and women are counselled to be patient, while the abusers go unpunished.

It was not until people started weighing the consequences of domestic violence that the topic attracted serious attention the world over. The World Development Report estimated that women, ages 15 – 44, lose more discounted health years of life (DHYL) to rape and domestic violence than to breast cancer, obstructed labour, heart disease, AIDS, respiratory infections, motor vehicle accidents, and 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 an obstacle to economic and social development. By sapping her energy and confidence, gender-based violence can deprive the woman full participation in the society.

The effects of domestic violence on women's reproductive health are even said to be more grievous. According to Mai (1999), sexual coercion undermines the woman's ability to make choices about her health and sexual behaviour (the right to enjoy sex, engage in safe sex, use the contraceptive of her choice, choose the timing and number of pregnancies, experience safe childbirth, etc). Also, because sexual assault reduces the chances of contraceptive use, especially by the woman, there is usually the risk of sexually transmitted diseases and/or HIV/AIDS (Mai, 1999). A woman who is beaten during pregnancy may experience miscarriage or may give birth to an underweight baby. Research findings also suggest that children of abused women are at a high risk of psychological and behavioural problems (Davis and Carlson, 1987; Jaffe et al. 1986); and that children who witness family violence may repeat the same violent behaviour pattern later in life (Kalmuss, 1984).

Although there has been explicit acknowledgement of the state's responsibility, with regard to human rights violations in both the public and private spheres, at several international conventions, violence against women remains prevalent around the globe, and is still a major cultural blind spot. In Nigeria, women and girl-children are most vulnerable, largely because they are victims of practices which are embedded in traditional institutions (eg, patriarchy) and because of the negative influence of urbanization and industrialization (Effah-Chukwuma, 2002).

There are only a few studies on domestic violence in Nigeria; and even then, most of them are hospital-based, focussing only on women who presented themselves at the hospital (Aimakhu et al. 2004; Okengbo, 2002). More so, such studies have neglected the socio-cultural and economic contexts of domestic violence. Often, they centred on violence against women of the lower class of the society, evading the fact that those of the middle and upper classes may be subject to domestic violence as well. However by definition, this study regards women of the lower class as those who are not engaged in any form of economic activity, or whose income per month falls within the income rate of the lowest stratum of the Nigeria civil service. Therefore, this study is to provide information on the factors responsible for domestic violence against middle and upper class women. It will discuss the nature, form as

well as the cultural and economic contexts of the menace in Delta and Edo states of Nigeria.

Methodology

This study addressed the following questions: 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? In the quest for a comprehensive understanding, these questions influenced the study methodology.

Given the complex nature of 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 subject. The process of data collection began with the designing of in-depth interview guide for pretests, to facilitate questionnaire design. A total of 20 women of different age groups from the two study states, who were knowledgeable on domestic violence, were interviewed. The data generated through this technique were rich in information, with regard to the influence of patriarchy and the beliefs and practices on domestic violence. To ensure representativeness, respondents for the interview were selected from specific study locations within Delta and Edo states. Although most of the IDIs preceded the survey, some were conducted alongside questionnaire distribution.

A total of seven hundred and fifty-four respondents were sampled in the survey, using questionnaire schedule that was designed in open and close-ended and precoded form. The schedule comprised 93 items that covered topics on socio-demographic characteristics, physical relationship, sexual attitudes, psychological and emotional dimensions of domestic violence. A multistage sampling technique was adopted for the questionnaire – beginning with the purposive selection of the local government areas (LGAs) to represent urban and semi-urban settlements in the two states. Then the men and women-based associations in the chosen locations were identified, and a random selection of these groups was made. The simple random sampling

was also used in the choice of individual respondents for the study.

Although case study was initially not considered appropriate for this study, it was later adopted at a tangential level, as a result of the serendipity of the in-depth interviews. When it became obvious in the course of the interviews that some IDI respondents could provide more concrete data as cases, the life histories of 6 respondents who had been victims of domestic violence were elicited. The data collection was undertaken in 2004 and it lasted four months.

Data analysis was first carried out on the responses from the in-depth interviews and case studies. They were translated and transcribed. Thereafter, there was the iterative technique, which emphasizes the repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data – an indication that analysis starts after some (not necessarily all) of the data have been collected. This technique is particularly necessary in studies involving qualitative and quantitative analyses, where the content of the latter derive largely from insights from the former.

Qualitative data were analyzed using manual content analysis. Quantitative data, generated through questionnaire, were analysed with the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software. A descriptive analysis of data was done using univariate frequency distributions. The demographic data included age, religion, marital status, age at marriage, marriage type, number of children, and educational qualification.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

From the outset, the study adopted a sample size which tilted heavily in favour of women; hence, 77.1 per cent of the respondents were women. However, because it was necessary to obtain the views of the men on such a topic dealing with the relationships, a sample size of 22.9 per cent of men was selected (see table 1). Since the study focused on men and women, currently married or ever-married, the majority of the respondents were between ages of thirty and fifty. The lowest age recorded was twenty-two (two respondents), while one respondent claimed to have attained the age of seventy-one.

Almost all the respondents (92.4%) belonged to the Christian faith. This was expected because Christianity is the dominant faith in Edo and Delta states where this study was conducted (Imoroa, 2000

and Segynola, 2000). Respondents that were Muslims constituted 4.8 per cent, while 2 per cent belonged to various traditional religions. Over 90 per cent of respondents indicated that violent actions have been taken against them.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Per cent
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
Religion	No response	142	-
	Christianity	692	92.4
	Islam	36	4.8
	Traditional religion	15	2.0
	Others	6	0.8
Marital status	No response	5	-
	Single	52	6.9
	Married	655	87.1
	Divorced	10	1.3
	Widowed	19	2.5
	Separated	16	2.1
Age at marriage of respondent's wives	No response	2	-
	14 - 19	12	7.7
	20 - 24	41	26.5
	25 - 29	84	54.2
	30+	18	11.6
Age at marriage of 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

Source: from authors survey questionnaire.

Eighty-seven per cent of all respondents are still married; 2 per cent are separated from their partners; 1.3 per cent are divorced; 2.5 per cent have lost their partners due to death (widowed) and 6.9 per cent are single. However, a further probe 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 per cent have been separated for between one and four years, 31.4 per cent for between six and ten years, and 18.7 per cent have been separated for between eleven and fifteen years.

The age at marriage of men of 65.8 per cent of the married female respondents was between 25 and 35. A slightly different distribution was observed for the married male respondents in respect of their wives' age at marriage. A majority (80%) of the female respondents were married at ages ranging from 21 to 30 years. However, in spite of the violence against them, very few (8.3%) of them are either divorced or separated.

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

Most respondents (70.2%) have between one and four children, while 24.2 per cent have between five and nine children (ie, the number of children alive). With regard to the male respondents, it was discovered that 5.8 per cent of them have between ten and twenty four children. Over 90 per cent of the victims of domestic violence had between one and four children.

Ethnic group composition of Delta and Edo states is diverse. About 85 per cent each of the total respondents indicated they belong to one of the following groups: 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 was evidence of intra and inter-ethnic group marriages among the respondents. Of those who responded to the question on inter/intra-group marriage, 69 per cent married from the same ethnic group, while 31 per cent married outside their groups. But this finding also indicated that intra-ethnic unions do not necessarily ensure domestic peace.

The educational level of the respondents was very high, with 90.3 per cent of them having attained tertiary education; only 6.1 per cent of them did not go beyond the secondary school, while the remaining 3.2 per cent have other forms of education. By implication, however, the levels of education did not show any relationship with domestic peace, considering the fact that a majority of the respondents had tertiary education.

In conclusion, the demographic profile of the respondents indicated that they were mainly adults, Christians, and mostly in monogamous unions. The respondents also have somewhat moderate family sizes and are mainly from the dominant ethnic groups of Edo and Delta states.

Attitudes Towards and Prevalence of Physical Violence

To determine the extent of physical violence in these study communities and the attitudes toward it, a number of questions were asked. First, respondents were asked what their attitude would be if they see a man violate his wife. A number of physically violent behaviours were listed and respondents were enjoined to indicate their level of approval or disapproval. These violent acts included: 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). The majority of respondents indicated that they will object or strongly object to any of the above acts against a wife. Also, apart from ‘pushing or shoving’, that was approved by 2.2 per cent of respondents, all other acts had less than 1 per cent approval by the respondents. As a result, one could assume that a few of these respondents might have been victims or perpetrators of any of these 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 against a spouse are ‘pushing and shoving aside’, with 12.1 per cent of the respondents being involved at least once. On whether respondents have either been victims or perpetrators of burning/acid attack on, choking, stabbing and shooting at their partners, a majority of the respondents (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, were the least perpetrated among respondents.

A variety of factors were given by respondents as being responsible for physical violence against

Table 2. Percentage distribution of respondents by attitude to a husband’s violent acts against spouses

Action	Strong-ly object	Object	Indiff-erent	Appr-ove	Strongly approve	Total
Throwing things	504 (71.5)	158 (22.4)	39 (5.5)	3 (0.43)	1 (0.14)	705 (100%)
Pushing or shoving	44 (13.5)	218 (66.9)	56 (17.2)	7 (2.2)	1 (0.31)	326 (100%)
Biting	516 (81.3)	95 (14.9)	22 (3.5)	1 (0.16)	1 (0.16)	635 (100%)
Tying up and/or hitting	584 (83.5)	93 (13.3)	20 (2.9)	1 (0.14)	1 (0.14)	699 (100%)
Pulling 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%)

Source: from authors survey questionnaire.

women. The three main factors mentioned were infidelity, insubordination and poverty. Others included the lack of understanding between spouses,

Determinants of Physical Violence

drunkenness, nagging, wickedness, laziness, denial of sex, and culture. However, in-depth interviews and case studies conducted with victims of domestic violence revealed one other 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 someone 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. When the situation got worse, he started to beat me.

Another respondent affirmed the factor of childlessness. She recounted the experience of her friend thus:

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. His home crumbled [afterwards].

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

Case one

This woman was married for 20 years and had three children in the marriage. She is currently separated from her husband because of repeated incidences of domestic violence against her. She was married off to a Bini man against the wishes of her mother-in-law, who wanted her son to marry a Bini woman. Thus, from the very beginning, the marriage was established against the consent of one of the parents. After a while, the man (her husband) started womanizing. [Then he took a second wife.]

According to her:

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. My marriage collapsed. Immediately after this, I lost my job. . . . 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.

This victim believed her marriage was a good one while it lasted – her husband's business was fine; he had the financial power to keep the family going. However, she considered domestic violence as a common or general practice in that part of the country. She said it is more like a 'cultural norm for men to deny their wives money, sex and other rights, as a form of punishment'.

Case two

This second case is a bit different from the first. Simply put, it is a case of living with a rather 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

Table 3. Percentage distribution of respondents by violent acts against a spouse

	Number of occurrence (percentage in brackets)								Total
	Never	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Throwing things	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%)

Source: from authors survey questionnaire.

hell, in fear. My husband disciplines me like he disciplines his children. He insults me at every little misunderstanding, even when he is the guilty one. The point is, he does not have the spirit of forgiveness. We quarrel too often. Although he takes care of my children, sexual intercourse between us is cancelled whenever we have quarrels. My succour all these years has been God. I would not want to marry him again if there is the opportunity to choose in another world.

Case three

This is another case of domestic violence against women that was as a result of childlessness. The victim was married for three years, but without a child. She admitted things went on fine the first year of marriage. But when, after one year, the woman was not pregnant, her husband started behaving 'strangely'. He would not listen to her requests any more. Although she claimed she had never experienced any physical assault from her husband, she agreed that, on some occasions, she had been sufficiently insulted. She was, at the time of data collection, going through intense emotional crisis. The husband would not let her go back to school, contrary to their agreement before they married. Ironically, she claimed to be getting along with her man because 'I understand him so well, and would want to marry him again, because he is straightforward. He is plain, and he cares for me'. She condemned domestic violence and advised that couples be patient with each other.

Case four

This victim has been married for seven years, and had three children. She was the only wife of her husband. However, her husband kept concubines; and this was a major source of quarrel 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'. She claimed she was passing through some emotional and psychological crises. Sometimes, she had fought the man and, thus, attracted the attention of their neighbours. After such quarrels, the man often refused to provide for her financially.

She, however, admitted that the situation had not degenerated to the extent of adversely affecting their children. But she maintained that, for the humiliations

and financial difficulties she has had with her man, she would not want to marry him again if there were a second chance. In spite of her marital problems, she asserted 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 marries. 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 had three children. She was also the only wife of her husband. Within the two years before this study, her husband took to drinking and, thus, had been violent towards her and their children. The man, being unemployed, regularly beat her until she gave him whatever money she had. When the beating became intense and too frequent, she ran away to her sister, on the advice of her relations. After some days, the husband went looking for her, pleading with her to return, for the sake of their children. According to her:

I returned to the house after much plea, but I still undergo turmoil. Although he has stopped beating me, there is an uneasy silence around the house. I think his being unemployed causes him to be violent. I keep praying for him.

Case six

This is the case of a 35 year-old mother of two; she was married to a retired army officer, who has beaten her several times. But she stayed with him, hoping to keep her family intact. After a serious injury that resulted from one of his violent outrages, she decided to call it quit. Her relatives waded in and listened carefully to the man's side of the story. Despite the fact that she was severely and severally injured, they rebuked her and ordered her to return to her husband. Defeated, and without an option, she returned to him. Not long after her return, she sustained a serious head injury from his beatings and was admitted to a hospital. At the hospital, she decided never to return

to him again. She filed for divorce, and it 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 and will not have any sexual intercourse 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 wife abuse (beating) by husbands, both male and female respondents agreed that a wife that is unfaithful, stubborn, naughty, or disobedient, or who does not cook for her household deserves to be beaten by her husband. They also maintained that a woman who does not care for her household, or who refuses her husband sexual intercourse, deserves beatings from her man. Thus, about 16 per cent of female and 44 per cent of male respondents considered physical violence against women a cultural norm and a necessary disciplinary and corrective measure for an errant wife. Nevertheless, about 75 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men in Edo and Delta states viewed physical violence against women as improper and a vice.

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%) had the opinion that a man should not engage in extra-marital relationships. Indeed, the respondents did not approve of polygyny, although they indicated that, in practice, men have children outside wedlock.

The in-depth interview sessions revealed that extra-marital relationships by men sometimes result in pregnancy and childbirth, and this has led to a lot of marriage breakages. One particular single parent in Edo State lamented that extra-marital relationship by her exhusband wrecked her marriage. She had lived as a single parent since then. She said: By the time he took another wife, our marriage ended. Another woman in Delta State narrated that although

'I am his legal wife, he has concubines with children outside'.

Most respondents (94.5%) were of the opinion that sexual relationship should not constitute crisis between husband and wife and that a man should not force his wife to have sexual intercourse with him. They believed that sexual intercourse should be the least cause of conflict in a marriage. However, the remaining 5.5 per cent of respondents maintained that a man can force his wife to have sex with him under any condition, to satisfy his own sexual urges or needs alone – for instance, if he wants to be relieved of a bad mood. About 18 per cent of the female correspondents from Delta State also agreed that, sometimes, men who are under the influence of drug force their wives to have sexual intercourse with them.

However, the respondents believed that, for some reasons, a woman could refuse her husband sexual intercourse. They said that the two main circumstances in which such refusal could be valid are when she is ill and when she is menstruating or nursing a baby. Others include when she is 'not in the mood', 'unhappy', 'tired or exhausted', and for 'religious reasons,' or when there is the threat of 'sexually transmitted diseases.' In the same vein, 68.7 per cent of the respondents agreed that a man could refuse his wife sexual intercourse if, for instance, he is 'tired', 'ill', or if his wife is 'unfaithful', 'menstruating', 'fasting', or as a form of 'punishment'.

The in-depth interviews with victims of domestic violence also lend credence to the fact that some men deny their wives sexual intercourse for no just reason. A woman in Edo State lamented thus:

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 the 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 the respondents as being responsible for the time their close confidants

denied their husbands or wives sexual intercourse included: first, 48.7 per cent of them were aware of such situations, while 51.3 per cent claimed ignorance. The reasons given by those who had knowledge of such situation included: extra-marital affair, illness and menstruation.

Subsequently, 81.2 per cent of the respondents stated that forcible sexual intercourse between husband and wife was not common. Contraceptive use, as attested to by 73.1 per cent of the respondents, was usually with the knowledge and approval of the husband. Also, due to the patriarchal nature of most African societies, it was not surprising that 89 per cent of the respondents asserted that the choice of the number of children a family could have depended more on the husband.

Psychological and emotional dimension of domestic violence

Apart from physical and sexual violence, this study tried to find out the psychological and emotional pain of women who experience domestic violence. More than half of the respondents (56%) indicated that wives do not get enough attention from their husbands. The only relationship between them seemed to revolve around the upkeep of their children and the running of the home. As much as 60 per cent of the respondents stated that no special show of affection was accorded the womenfolk. Remarkably, the 56 per cent of women, who suffer from psychological and emotional violence, sought assistance from people around them. This runs contrary to the assertions in literature that victims of domestic violence suffer in silence. Nevertheless, that victims of psychological and emotion violence seek the assistance of others may be due to the fact that this form of violence is often considered mild or less severe, compared to physical violence, in the home.

Consequently, a large proportion of the respondents (71.3%) were of the opinion that psychological and emotional violence in the home constitutes a major problem in our society. Indeed, some even think that this kind of violence is more 'killing' than physical or sexual violence. On the whole, 56 per cent of the respondents believed that many women in Nigeria do not enjoy their marital unions. The in-depth interviews with victims of domestic violence also corroborated this. A victim in Delta State responded as follows:

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

Another victim also recounted her experience thus:

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. He even borrows money to go to night clubs, instead of taking care of his family.

Edo State's women also face similar problems. A certain woman even suggested that:

About 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 cope with the situation because, according to some of these respondents, 'they have no choice, marriage is mandatory'. Some also said that they maintained their

homes for the sake of their children, and the appellation 'Mrs'.

To confirm the views that women face hard times in marriage, more than 50 per cent of the respondents asserted that men maltreat their wives in a number of ways, namely: beating (34.2%), denial of sex (28.6%), disowning the children (23.3%), throwing them out of the house frequently (31.4%), forcing them to have sex (20.4%), denying them financial support (42%), and humiliating them in public (28.1%). The in-depth interviews also revealed 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 they are hurting you emotionally.

Another said:

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

About 60 per cent of the respondents claimed they knew of women who had been subjected to one or some of the abuses mentioned above. On the positive side, more than 65 per cent asserted that men 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 necessities for their families. Such requirements include food, clothing, payment of school fees, hospital bills, rents. The in-depth interviews with victims of domestic violence showed that men generally neglect their economic responsibilities to their families. A victim in Edo State recounted that:

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 described her friend's experience thus:

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

In spite of these experiences by some women, both male and female respondents believe in the age-long tradition that the man should provide for his household. Indeed, about 90 per cent of the female respondents claimed that their husbands provide feeding allowance. As part of the responsibilities of the man, the respondents agreed that the man should provide funds for children's school fees, household bills and rents. A majority of female respondents confirmed that their husbands carry out these responsibilities.

Surprisingly, with regard to authority in the home, most men asserted that their wives were involved in decision making. They also encouraged their wives to work outside the home, and vouched that they were supportive to their wives. The response of women also corroborated this. However, the majority of both male and female respondents believed that conflict often ensues when women work for prolonged periods of time outside the home.

Although literature consistently indicates that violence in the home is mostly directed against the women, some men experience some form of violence from their wives. Most of the respondents in this study reported, however, that they are not aware of any case of domestic violence against the men. Among the few respondents in Delta that claimed knowledge of this kind of violence, the male were more than the female respondents. They claimed they know of men who have experienced at least one form of violence from their wives. Where violence against men occurred, immorality/ adultery, poverty and

prolonged quarrels have been identified as the main factors for this.

Conclusion

Although Nigeria is a country rooted in primordialism, rapid changes have been evident in its socio-cultural structure. These changes are producing a wide range of beneficial, as well as harmful, consequences. As a result, the country is characterized by changing values, expectations towards the 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, conditions that account for violence, as men struggle to reassert their dominance. These conditions, according to Armstrong (1998), sometimes make it more difficult for women to respond to domestic violence by asserting their own needs, and to get the desired solution from traditional and historical institutions, 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 clear understanding of the factors that contribute to physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence.

The results of the study showed that there are several causes of domestic violence against women; and this explains the complexity of the problem. In spite of the fact that women face violent situations at home, they prefer coping with the condition to home-desertion – ‘for the sake of their children’, and the ‘faith that the man will change’.

The findings of this study supported earlier ones (Ezeh and Gage, 1998; Romer, 1999; El Hadidi, 1999) that explained domestic violence within the social context. Wife battering, in most African communities, is seen as a reflection of the broad structure of the sexual and economic inequality in the society. Studies have shown that, rather than being seen as an aberration, violence in the home is widely tolerated. It is thus an extension of the role the society expects men to play in their domestic sphere. In this analysis, the abuse of women is seen as a display of male power, the outcome of social relations, in which the woman is considered inferior to man, responsible to him and in need of protection by him.

This study suggests that the woman’s social, political and economic dependence on her man provides the basis for the perpetration of violence against women. This form of independence, approved by the society, is rooted in sexism and misogyny, and have allowed violence in the home to remain largely ‘a private matter’, immune to public scrutiny and intervention.

Finally, the results of this study present a glimpse of the endemic nature of domestic violence in the Nigerian society. These results contribute to knowledge in the social pressures that limit the power and freedom of the woman with regard to violent relationships. The understanding of the underlying causes of abuse provides a starting point for designing initiatives for countering violence. This study, therefore, affirmed that the solution to domestic violence is located in the various societal structures and responsibilities (ie, the family, community, policy, research, the media and education).

Recommendations

In order to effectively contain the menace of domestic violence, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Formal education should be used to eliminate stereotypical attitudes to the social, economic and cultural roles of women and men. Domestic violence should be part of the school curriculum. Teaching materials should be developed to suggest how this issue can be approached at the classroom level. This method has proved effective in Australia, Papua New Guinea, and Canada.
2. The informal methods of education can also be used. A multi-pronged education campaign, consisting of posters, leaflets (at health centres, schools, post offices, banks, religious houses) can also be effective.
3. The mass media should be used to enhance a more balanced, healthy perceptions of gender relations.
4. Very importantly, laws and policies should be aimed at eliminating existing ambiguities and gaps in the roles of men and women, especially those relating to rights and privileges. Any legal provision which suggests that violence against

women is excusable or tolerable should be repealed.

5. Local authorities, such as village leaders, elders, and women's groups, should be engaged in programmes that would help discourage abusive pattern of behaviour. These groups can intervene to relieve the violence situation in homes.
6. The importance of research cannot be underrated. There is a clear need for a national survey on domestic violence to enable the country to formulate policies for addressing domestic violence in its various manifestations.
7. Violence against women is a product of the subordination of women. Domestic violence will not be eradicated until there is a fundamental change in the socioeconomic structures that subordinate the women to the men within marriage and the society generally. Hence, the need for social change.

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