

AAJSMSHEL

**AFRICA AND ASIA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT
SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, EDUCATION AND LEGAL STUDIES:
SAN JOSE OCCIDENTAL MINDORO, PHILIPPINES**

**PUBLISHED IN 2022 BY AFRICA AND ASIA JOURNAL OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT
SCIENCES, HUMANITIES, EDUCATION AND LEGAL STUDIES: SAN JOSE
OCCIDENTAL MINDORO, PHILIPPINES**

ISSN: 2955-0548

AAJSMSHEL
Volume 1, Issue , 2 , 2022
ISSN:2955-0548

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OF SOCIAL AND MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, HUMANITIES,
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ISSN: 2955-0548

Vol. 1 , Issue 2, 2022

Email;dynamicjour@gmail.com

INDEXED IN GOOGLE SCHOLAR

ADDRESSING THE UNPALATABLE UPSURGE

AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN NIGERIA

Akintunde Ojo Sunday

Abstract

Intimate partner violence is prevalent throughout the world. When wives are abused, they are faced with the decision whether to remain in their marriages possibly at the risk of their lives or get separated from the violent husband at expense of various diverse of harms to their children. The first decision is particularly difficult when they believe that they might be disobeying God by ending the marriage. Domestic violence is one of the most inhumane treatments of one's partner, children or ward. A home is supposed to be a haven; place where a person feels safe and enjoys secure attachment with significant people like a spouse or parent. Domestic violence violates a person's core brain needs for love, connection and belonging. Irrespective of

what a person does, domestic violence is inexcusable. This write-up discusses the issue of an upsurge in violence between married couple in Nigeria. It explores statistical records of such violence of husbands against wives and wives against their husbands. Factors culminating to the unpalatable upsurge are examined and finally, the Biblical solutions were considered for possible application.

Introduction

We have witnessed an upsurge in the case of domestic violence most especially among married couples which would have been prevented had it been escalated.¹ The recently reported case of the Christian singer named Osinachi Nwachukwu² is one of the numerous cases of death resulting from domestic violence among couples. It was alleged by the elder sister of the late woman that she was treated badly by her husband before her untimely death. The husband hit her with his leg on the chest she fell down and she was taken to the hospital where she eventually died, even as the doctor declared that there were clusters of blood on her chest. There are also established cases of husbands suffering untold abuses cumulated to violence from their wives in this report. It is obvious that if all deaths involving husbands or wives are sincerely and meticulously investigated, it is obvious that not less than 75% (seventy-five per cent) will be attributed to direct or indirect murder, resulting from the violent relationship over a period of time between the couple.

Lagos State Attorney-General and Commissioner for Justice, Moyosore Onigbanjo confirmed that the state administration received 10,007 reported cases of domestic violence from May 2019 to August 26, 2021. These cases included sexual violence perpetrated against adults and children within the state, whereby 2,980 children experienced emotional abuse and exposure to domestic violence in homes. **Domestic violence** is prominent in Nigeria just as

found in many parts of Africa.³ There is a deep cultural and ancestral belief in Nigeria that it is socially acceptable to hit a woman in the guise of disciplining one's spouse.⁴ This notion is however widely sanctioned of late as a form of discipline by the United Nations agencies resisting acts of marital violence (UNICEF, 2001). Cases of Domestic violence are on the high and show no signs of reduction in Nigeria, regardless of the age, tribe, religion or even social status.⁵

The CLEEN Foundation reported that one in every three respondents in their record is attributed to being a victim of domestic violence. The survey also found a nationwide increase in domestic violence in the past three years from 21% in 2011 to 30% in 2013.⁶ A CLEEN Foundation's 2012 National Crime and Safety Survey Report demonstrated that 31% of the national sample confessed to being victims of domestic violence.⁷ Meanwhile, domestic violence takes many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, and mental. Traditionally, domestic violence is committed against females. Common forms of violence against women in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating, and corporal punishment.⁸

The increased awareness of the populace to speak out has led to a steady increase in formal reportage of cases. In Lagos State alone, the notable achievements of the Ministry of Justice stem from the Directorate of Public Prosecutions (DPP), which has secured over 365 convictions for various sexual offences, including rape, defilement, sexual assault by penetration, and sexual assault. The breakdown of prosecuted cases is as follows: “415 domestic violence, 177 rape, 255 attempt to commit rape/sexual assault, 246 sexual assault by penetration/threat, 877 others (separation, not taking responsibilities of children), neglect, custody of the child, non-GBV and so on), 436 child abuse/physical assault, 271 defilement cases, 13 defilement by

minor to minor, 454 child labour, abduction neglect/others, 148 sexual harassment/molestation case.” It is very interesting to note that an average of 150 new cases are handled monthly.”⁹

Types/Forms of Domestic Violence

There are different forms of abuse a person may be subjected to in the home. They include but not limited to the following:

First among forms of domestic violence is physical abuse, which is the use of physical force in a way that injures the victim or puts him/her at risk of being injured. It includes beating, kicking, knocking, choking, confinement and punching all categorised as assault and battery. Lately, female genital mutilation has also been categorised as physical abuse.

Second is sexual abuse which includes all forms of sexual assaults, harassment or exploitation. It involves forcing a person to participate in sexual activity and using a child for sexual purposes including child prostitution and pornography. Marital rape also comes under this.

Third is neglect; including failure to provide for dependants who may be adults or children, denying family members food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and protection from harm or a sense of being loved and valued. Fourth, economic abuse involves stealing from or defrauding a loved one, withholding money for essential things like food and medical treatment, manipulating or exploiting family members for financial gain, preventing a loved one from working or controlling his/her choice of occupation. Fifth, spiritual abuse entails preventing a person from engaging in his/her spiritual or religious practices or using one's religious belief to manipulate, dominate or control him/her. Sixth, emotional abuse which includes threatening a person or his or her possession or harming a person's sense of self-worth by putting him/her at risk of serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders and shouting at a partner which was found to be the most common abuse.¹⁰ Also included in emotional

abuse are name-calling, criticism, social isolation, intimidating or exploitation to dominate, routinely making unreasonable demands, terrorizing a person verbally or physically and exposing a child to violence. Abuse may occur once, or it may occur repeatedly often in an escalating manner. A person may be subjected to more than one form of abuse.

Consequences of domestic violence (abuse)

Victims of domestic violence are often in a position of dependence (financial, emotional, physical and otherwise) on the person abusing¹¹ them, for instance, a husband and a wife, children and parents, dependent relatives, aged parents and domestic servants. Children are often principal victims of domestic violence. Witnessing abuse and living in an environment where someone else, usually a caregiver is a victim of abuse, can be psychologically devastating for a child. 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 suicide. Some researchers have also found that children whose mothers were abused by their partners have intelligence quotients (IQs) lower than usual.¹² It was also discovered that violent punishments such as corporal punishment lead to delinquency in adolescents and subsequently violent crimes.¹³ 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. The anger may become directed towards either parents or other children. They may become aggressive, becoming troublesome at home and at school. They may also become withdrawn, isolate themselves from others and may underachieve, academically. Victims of domestic violence (whether children or adults) may suffer physical injuries such as minor cuts, scratches and bruises. Others may be more serious and cause lasting disabilities such as broken bones, internal bleeding and head trauma, among others. Some injuries are not physical but

emotional. Victims often have 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.¹⁴

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, and afraid to go into an intimate relationships. 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. It is what makes the youth happy and excited about being thugs for wicked politicians. Domestic violence gives rise to a violent society because 'charity begins at home'.¹⁵

Reported Cases of Husband's Violence against Wives

Apart from the earlier mentioned recent case of the Christian singer named Osinachi Nwachukwu who was gradually murdered by his husband, there was a reported case of a man arrested by Lagos State Police Command for allegedly beating his wife named Juliana to death. The incident happened at Joado Street, Oke Ira-nla, Ajah Area of Lagos State in March 2021. According to the police spokesperson, they found the body of Juliana in their apartment after a neighbour contacted the police. "It was gathered that the deceased had engaged the suspect in a hot argument on certain matrimonial issues and in the process, she slumped and sustained a severe head injury. While lying in the pool of her blood, the angry husband refused to rescue her until she gave up the ghost."¹⁶

In 2010, the traditional king of Akure in Ondo State of Nigeria, physical and bloodily assaulted one of his wives resulting in her death. At the urging of the public, the police made a statement that they would press charges.¹⁷ A case was

established but was dismissed in 2012 before the accused deposed monarch died in 2021.

A man identified as Emeh Kalu, from Nguzu Edda village, Afikpo South Local Government Area of **Ebonyi State**, Nigeria's South-east. Was arrested in December, 2021 for allegedly killing his wife in order to inherit her landed property, houses, money in the bank and a thriving business. Kalu lured the wife to a road junction for her to be abducted by five men from Nguzu Edda village whom he had contracted to kill her.¹⁸

It was reported that sometime in 2020, a woman was rushed to the hospital and her partner said she drank a poisonous substance (sniper) out of depression. But investigation revealed that the woman had been experiencing violence but the family had already buried the woman and did not want to pursue the case. According to them, they have lost one child already and they didn't want to lose another.¹⁹

The following cases of men's brutal murder of their wives were further reported as follows²⁰: Dominic Iyayi Ogar, a man from Okpoma village in Yala Local Government Area, Cross River State, killed his wife and only daughter on October 8, 2016, in Mpape, Abuja. It was reported that Ogar, who slept with his wife and their only daughter on the same bed, woke up suddenly in the middle of the night, took a knife and stabbed both of them to death, and they died instantly. His evil deed, however, was exposed when one of his neighbours, noticed a trail of blood that led to the door of the family house. He was arrested and he confessed that he killed his wife and only daughter out of frustration. Another pathetic case was that of Terkaa Ushir, a tanker driver who was arrested for allegedly beating and axing down his wife, Lucy Wasem (29 years) to death following regularly misunderstandings, whilst the father to the late woman had begged her several times to leave the marriage and return home but she refused.

There was also a reported case of Oluwatubosun Dahunsi who was arrested for hacking his wife, Funmilayo Dahunsi, to death having quarrelled over our children's school fees.

So was the case of Bello Muhe, a 25-year-old who killed his 25-year-old wife named Husse Ali; for allegedly having amorous relationship with other men in the neighbourhood.

So also was the case of Lekan Shonde a depot worker, who gruesomely killed his wife named Ronke by beating her to death and locking the corpse and their two children, aged four and six, in the house cannot be ignored. It was reported that their marriage was said to have been marred by domestic violence on the suspicion of the infidelity of her wife with one Kayode, the general manager of a publishing company.

Mutiu Sonola, was also arrested by the Police for allegedly beating his 34-year-old wife, Zainab Shotayo, to death on the 25th of December 2019 over Christmas day food. The misunderstanding led to a physical fight and the husband beat the wife to coma. She was rushed to a hospital where the doctor confirmed her dead.

Olanrewaju Bamidele was also arrested on the 19th of January 2020, by Ogun State Police Command arrested for beating his wife Adenike Olanrewaju to death. The suspect was arrested following a report lodged at Ofada police post by the victim's son, 15-year-old Ayomide Olanrewaju. The son reported that his deceased mother has a misunderstanding with his father which resulted in a brawl between them. Little Ayomide stated further that his father used a big stick to beat his mum to coma, after which he used a screwdriver to stab her in the head resulting in the death of his mother.

The case of Femi Adebawale who was arrested for beating his 37-year old wife, Kuburat Adebawale, to death over an allegation of adultery with their

neighbour is also spectacular.

So also was the case of **Olabode Oluwasanmi who allegedly beat her wife named** Anya Adaeze, to death with 8 months pregnant when the domestic violence incident occurred.

Another reported case was that of Ogho-Oghene Stephen Akpata who was arrested for stabbing his wife of just one month named Oyinye Faustina Eze, to death at their home in the Kpansia area of Yenagoa in August 2017. Upon his arrest after the murder, Stephen alleged his wife was having an extramarital affair.

Samuel Mathew was arrested by the Police for allegedly killing his wife named Mercy Samuel, a 23-year-old mother of two in Jos, Plateau State over disagreement.²¹ There are also cases of acid birth just as recorded in 1990, when a former beauty queen who rejected her boyfriend's attempts to rekindle their relationship got birthed with acid in her face with the words "let me see how any man will love you now".

Reported Cases of Wives Violence against Husbands

The Ondo State Police Command arrested one Queen Beatrice on February 17, 2021 for allegedly killing her husband, Emmanuel Ikujuni, at Omotosho town, in Okitipupa local council of the state.²² Reports had it that the woman hit the head of the deceased with a plank following an argument that ensued between them because the deceased spoke with another woman on phone in her presence. The deceased was said to have collapsed after his wife hit him with the plank. His neighbours rushed him to a nearby hospital, where he was confirmed dead. Maryam Sanda was arrested in November, 2017 for stabbing her husband to death in Abuja.²³ In 2020, a 19-year-old woman, Rabi Shamsudeen, stabbed her 25-year-old husband, Shamsudeen Salisu, to death at Danjanku village, in Malumfashi local government area of Katsina State.²⁴

Factors Responsible For Surge in Domestic Violence in Nigeria and Solution.

(1) Lack of Emotional Intelligence Skills: -

Several factors are responsible for the upsurge in domestic violence and murder in Nigeria, and of the factors is the lack of developed emotional intelligence skills which empower couples with the ability to handle provocations relating to when and how to respond to negative attitudes of the partner. It is high time all the Marriage Counselling Centres embrace emotional intelligence empowerment training as they prepare new couples for conjugal bliss.

(2) Deteriorating Economy: -

Since the second decade of the millennium year, there has been a prevailing downward trend in the standard of living in Nigeria with its attending daily increasing cost of living. The incidence of COVID-19 added salt to the injury because the financial difficulty associated with the lockdown was reported to trigger stress, and frustration, and as a result, negative coping mechanisms such as substance abuse were adopted by the men who might have eventually suffered a massive loss of employment making many average families vulnerable to acute poverty promoting strives, misunderstanding and anger.²⁵ The best way to address the economy is through responsible leadership cutting across political, traditional and religious terrains. Any leadership system with less emphasis on ethical values, equity, fairness and equitable distribution of wealth will breed homes of tensions, fighting and murder.

(3) The Long Loud Silence: -

Silence is another main factor whilst marital violence is rising. Nigeria is a highly religious society and on one side, the woman's plight is seen as a non-

discussion issue forbidding by religious traditions and books. Whilst, on the other hand, womenfolk are seen as not submissive when they report their ordeals, and this makes the police to be inactive.

The Biblical Solutions to Marital Violence

Many Christian communities have been designing ways the recognition and respond to domestic violence, most especially in a hypocritical society which is complicated by a culture of silence and acceptance among abuse victims. There are some Bible verses that abusers use to justify the discipline of their wives, even as Christian groups and Church authorities generally condemn domestic violence as inconsistent with the general Christian duty to love others and the scriptural relationship between husband and wife.²⁶

According to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Men who abuse often use Ephesians 5:22, taken out of context, to justify their behaviour, but the passage (v. 21-33) refers to the mutual submission of husband and wife out of love for Christ. Husbands should love their wives as they love their own body, as Christ loves the Church."²⁷ Some Christian theologians, such as the Rev. Marie Fortune and Mary Pellauer, have raised the question of a close connection between patriarchal Christianity and domestic violence and abuse.²⁸ Steven Tracy, author of "Patriarchy and Domestic Violence" writes: "While patriarchy may not be the overarching cause of all abuse, it is an enormously significant factor, because in traditional patriarchy males have a disproportionate share of power.²⁹ So while patriarchy is not the sole explanation for violence against women, we would expect that male headship would be distorted by insecure, unhealthy men to justify their domination and abuse of women."³⁰

In *Responding to Domestic Abuse*, a report issued by the Church of England in 2006, suggests that patriarchy should be replaced rather than reinterpreted:

"Following the pattern of Christ means that patterns of domination and submission are being transformed in the mutuality of love, faithful care and sharing of burdens; 'Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ'(Ephesians 5.21). Although strong patriarchal tendencies have persisted in Christianity, the example of Christ carries the seeds of their displacement by a more symmetrical and respectful model of male–female relations."

The Church authority and the related government agencies must be ready to promote a situation and environment whereby issues are discussed before they degenerated to marital violence. The ministers of God must not only discuss marital violence but should establish credible institutions of marital support for the victims and distressed homes.

Finally, there must be an immense campaign by all the concerned authorities to reduce to the barest minimum issues of verbal and written abuse by couples which provokes anger.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the issue of marital violence and its capital price on the family. It was revealed that the issue of violence is not gender monopoly as both partners had been at the receiving ends as victims. Some husbands were too provoked to get lost in their emotions and resulted in killing whilst some of the murders were mistakenly done in the state of anger. Many women too have resulted in brutal killing out of anger protesting against the malevolent actions of their partners against their interests. The Bible is aware of our nature as humans and that is why we are encouraged not to sin in the course of our anger and its display (Ephesians 4:26).

Recommendations

In order to bring the waves of marital violence to the barest minimum, the following recommendations are suggested.

First, we have to restore family ethics and morals into our homes. The restoration will address the foreign culture mindsets that have rubbed the African concept of humility, patience, royalty and restraints back to us.

Second, the marriage system must embrace the concept of mutual respect and the principle of life and let's live. Society must allow free expression from both parties and where things are going wrong, discussion of the differences must be encouraged to avoid unnecessary escalation of conflict.

Finally, the law must treat both the male and female genders equally whilst handling criminal prosecutions. It was discovered that many female genders hide under societal emotional patronage which strictly condemns the male gender for every act of violence in the home. In several spheres, this does degenerate into the mental instability of the male gender causing alcohol and drug abuse and igniting violent reactions, brawls and murder.

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