

The Emerging Trend in Culture of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Causes, Theoretical Assumptions and Implications

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence has become a national topical issue. Social thinkers, scholars and human rights advocates have continued to express concern over the rising trend in domestic violence vis-à-vis the gradual and systematic erosion of family values. On daily basis the polity is awash with reports on spousal killings, brutalization, molestation, sexual abuse in the family. Evidently, these incidents have been traced to a number of factors which range from economic social, cultural and psychological disposition of spouses. This paper aims to bring to the fore the nexus among psychological disposition of the family, feeling of powerlessness and attitude towards women on the rising incidents of domestic violence. For the research methodology, the paper adopts a descriptive analytical approach and use of secondary sources of data. The paper argue that psychological disposition of spouses to marital responsibility, cultural perception of gender roles in the family and stress associated with cohabitation play profound role in exacerbating the problem of domestic violence in spousal relationships. The apparent inference with regards to this issue is, as long as spouses see marriage from the cultural point of view of male dominance and right to control his spouse so will the spates of domestic violence continue to threaten family life.

Keywords: *Domestic violence, Spousal killings, Cultural trends, Sexual abuses and Physical abuse.*

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Background to the Study

The family is universally acknowledged as the backbone of any given society. Mair (1972) argued that it is the basis of legitimization of offspring and a bond of filial affinity. Thus, harmonious relationship existing in the family forms a measure of predicting the social and psychological stability of any given society. In other words there is an indefinable nexus between marital peace and social progress. But overtime, the recurring and endemic nature of domestically orchestrated violence has taken a toll on the family and placed it in a perilous situation.

On daily basis the media is awash with reports of domestic violence and spousal killings, brutalization and sexual abuses on women and children. Marriage which in the past was the dream of every eligible man and woman has suddenly become viewed with sense of foreboding. It is no longer news that aspiring young men and women dreads to walk down the aisle of marital life for fear of uncertainties as a result of related incidents of domestic violence. Unfortunately, despite the fact that these violent acts continue to cripple the foundation of many families and by extension the fabric of society, nothing much has been achieved in checking the menace. Recent rise in incidents of domestic violence has brought to the fore that something has gone fundamentally wrong with the institution of marriage. The rise in domestic violence is not helped by seeming non-challant attitude being displayed by not only the victim but society by extension. Today, men, women and children has been turned into punching bags, molested, raped and violated at will.

It is not always easy to determine in the early stages of marital relationship if one spouse will become abusive. Abusers may often seem wonderful and perfect initially, but gradually become more aggressive and controlling as the relationship continues. Abuse may begin with behaviors that may easily be dismissed or downplayed such as name-calling, threats, possessiveness, or distrust. Abusers may apologize profusely for their actions or try to convince the person they are abusing that they do these things out of love or care. However, despite the apologies violence and control always intensifies over time with an abuser. What may start out as something that was first believed to be harmless spiral into excessive control and abuse?

Odumaikin (2006) expressing her concern on the alarming rate of domestic violence on daily basis states that it has practically become a daily occurrence in our society. She posits that her office handles more than 2.400 cases of domestic related violence on annual basis. Ironically, only two have been cases of men who reported being beaten or brutalized by their wives (Ajiboye, S, Duru, I and Ojo, H, 2016a). The implication of this is that women are the prime subject and remains the target of abusers. Effah Chukwuma an activist explaining the upsurge and widespread nature of the problem argue that her organization receives between four or five fresh cases every week. According to her, “if you put the number together, we have 16 – 20 cases every month. These exclude old ones that we are working on and the several cases that victims report to the police and family members” (Ajiboye, S, Duru, I and Ojo, H, 2016b). This is only but an infinitesimal part of the problem compared to those that remain unreported or deposed as mere family issues that could be taken care of within the family circle or those that are completely treated with indifference or ignored or considered as signs of a woman's inability to take care of her marital responsibility. The study will explore the connectivity between cultural perceptions towards marital relationship and rising spates of domestic violence.

Definition of Terms

Domestic Violence

National Coalition against Domestic Violence (NCADV) defines Domestic violence as the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior that has become a part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.

Spousal Killing

Spousal killings is the act of killing ones partner deliberately or unintentionally causing the death of a spouse by his or her partner. Spousal killings may be **Mariticide** literally means killing of one's husband or **Uxoricide** killing or murder of one's wife or romantic partner. It can refer to the act itself or the person who carries it out (Wikipedia, 2017)

Culture

The Centre for Advance Research on Language Acquisition defines culture as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs and understanding that are learned by socialization.

Cultural Trend

Cultural or societal trends are trends that had to do with new fashion or what is in vogue at any point in time in terms of values and practices experienced within a society. These are norms that explain why people live or behave the way they do.

Sexual Abuse

Includes coercing sexual contact, rape (including marital rape), attack on sexual body parts, forcing sex following physical violence, and sexually demeaning another.

Physical Abuse

Includes such physical acts as shoving, grabbing, pinching, hitting, slapping, hair pulling, and other acts that could cause injury. Denying medical care, forcing alcohol or drugs upon someone, and restraining them from seeking help are also considered physical abuse.

Theoretical Framework

Various theoretical postulations have been advanced in explain the nature and reasons for domestic violence by scholars and social scientists. The theoretical scope of this paper will revolve around the biological/psychological, social stress and non-subordination approaches which provide bio-psychological and power relational explanations to domestic violence.

Biological/Psychological Theory

This assumption attempts to place the root of domestic violence to genetics, brain malfunction, personality trait and psycho-mental characteristics. To this school of thought, sudden burst in adrenaline leading to aggressive disposition or impulsive behavior or reactions is a product of biological and childhood influences. To this perspective, experiences at childhood may induce behavioral insomnia which may lead to violent disposition. In this vein, this view attempts to justify the notion that there are relational interface between childhood experience and future

violent behavioural disposition. This situation is germane towards understanding the innate violent attitude displayed by most spouses which is traced to psycho-pathological disorder, a situation that makes it difficult for such persons to cultivate or develop a healthy relationship with their spouse. To this end, the perspective argues that a child who lives under a roof where violence, spousal fights is a norm is likely to develop and display deregulated depression towards others. Such children are bound to develop a complex personality, lack coping skills towards others in a social relationship, and in the long run adapt and internalize the culture of violent disposition.

Another psychological assumption leaning towards the evolutionary perspective sees domestic violence not only on the basis of childhood experiences but also on attempt by men or abusers to control their spouse reproduction and assume sexual exclusive possession. To such abusers in order to ensure absolute control the spouse sexuality must be placed within his control and must invariably use every means possible to ensure compliance even if it requires threat or use of physical violence. This disposition fell with the purview of the traditionalists who see control of spouse sexuality as extension of family control. Although this paradigm tried to make an expose of the impact of childhood experiences as a factor that can motivate violent attitudes towards spouses or the fact that controlling the spouse sexuality as may have led to domestic violence, the theory failed to explain why such childhood experiences have also served as corrective impetus in the life of many spouses who experience domestic violence. In other words, though childhood experience cannot be over-emphasized as a causative factor, it cannot be entirely used as yardstick in measuring the recent upsurge in incidents of domestic violence.

Social Stress Theory

The social stress theory of domestic violence presupposes domestic violence is instigated by stress and strain associated with marital relationship. To this view financial constraints and inadequacies and associated demands in the family may increase tendency of spouses resorting to aggressive disposition in their relationship. This is usually experienced in middle income families where financial inadequacies and pressure of meeting not only the demands of immediate family but as well as the extended family demands. Situations like this create feeling of depression, frustration and disappointment with self and society and at the slightest impulse may visit their frustration on those close to them. A man's ego is bruised if he is unable to meet his financial responsibilities or found financially incapacitated or incapable of supporting family economically, unable to maintain self control may turn to substance abuse, alcoholism and disposition towards expressing his masculinity in his relationship with his spouse.

Non-Subordination Theory

This theory often referred to as the dominance theory is a feminist legal assumption which lays emphasis on power differentiation between men and women. The theory takes its position on what it termed socially imposed male dominance over the female. In other words it supposes the root of dominance lay in sex differentiation which has perpetrated power imbalance. This perspective focuses specifically on certain sexual behaviours including control of women sexuality, sexual harassment, pornography and violence against women generally. To the proponents of this theory, the theory captures in most intricate form why these sexual abuses against women are endemic. First, there are certain recurring patterns in domestic violence that show an act at the spur of the moment or moment of heat, rather a form of subordination

evidence is the fact that victims are sometimes beaten after they have been sleeping or often the abuse takes emotional or financial form in addition to physical abuse. Abusers often employ manipulative measures to arouse their victim's anger to justify any action he considers appropriate to keep the victim in line.

The obvious correlation between the three approaches is that they pointed out the inter-play of factors that propels domestic violence. They pointed out that it all dwell on traditional perception of gender roles and their relationship in terms of superiority of a husband and subordination of the wife in marital relationship. Another area of convergence of the three assumptions is the fact that they identified attempts by perpetrators to assert control over their victims and also outlined the power imbalance that plays out in spousal relationships.

Some Indicators of Domestic Violence

Indicators of domestic violence According to studies by National Coalition against Domestic Violence NCADV, it is not always easy to determine in the early stages of a relationship if one person will become abusive. Domestic violence intensifies over time. Abusers may often seem wonderful and perfect initially, but gradually become more aggressive and controlling as the relationship continues. Abuse may begin with behaviors that may easily be dismissed or downplayed such as name-calling, threats, possessiveness, or distrust. What may start out as something that was first believed to be harmless may overtime escalate into extreme control and abuse. Some other overt manifestations of these indicators include;

1. Always critical of spouse's actions and showing lack of appreciation to what the partner is doing. To would be abusers, nothing is ever right about their partners.
2. They tend to display unnecessary aggressiveness when issues of their spouse friends or family are discussed.
3. They are always suspicious of their partner, and have the tendency of accusing spouses of cheating or other dishonest acts that call her fidelity into question
4. They view their partners as their possession and attempts to control every facet of her life, including family spending
5. Have the tendency of embarrassing their spouses before family members and friends with put downs when ever opportunity presents itself
6. Soliciting for sex even when the partner is not in the mood
7. Dictating to spouses the type of friends she should relate with or the type of clothes to wear both at home and in social outings.
8. Use of unsolicited languages while speaking to a spouse even in the midst of outsiders. In most cases beating or flogging is experienced occasionally

These identified indicators may tend to signal the beginning of domestic violence, however, it is important to state that this does not indicate a general pattern, there are certain innate offensive qualities subsumed in the abuser that may instigate violent disposition towards their spouses. There is also the societal angle to the incidents. There tend to be an embedded 'code of silence' for spouses in matters relating to family life, especially with regards to spousal abuse. Domestic squabbles and abuses are often viewed as normal and when they occur it is assumed that it is best in-house or extended family members. Thus, a spouse who attempts to the open such can of worms is often subjected to ridicule and considered a societal failure. Consequently, this 'culturally' established familial code of silence hides the level of domestic abuses going on in many families.

In addition to above stated indicative factors, there are other factors bothering on the age of the spouses, academic background, economic position, labour market disadvantage and isolation; exposition to early spates of domestic violence, aggressive or delinquent behavior as adolescent (Flood and Fergus 2008: NWS Office for Women Policy, 2008). No doubt these risk factors expose some of the inherent domestic violence conditioning, however they cannot be said to represent the entire constituent. In other words, there are other underlying factors that mitigate between violence-related behaviors which include;

Attitudinal Disposition of Perpetrators

This has been identified as a major factor in analysis of causes of most domestic violence. Researchers have shown that spouses with attitude problems are likely to be involved in domestic violence. This is particularly true of spouses who hold a particular notion that males are superior to their female counterparts and thereby demand absolute subservience in their relationship and see physical expression of their masculinity as a tool of control. Another factor is the bread-winnership assertion, particularly where the man earns the income and assumes the woman owes him complete obedience. Traditional and cultural orientation may also instigate cases of domestic violence. Some societal norms assume that spouse beating is not a marital misnomer but a means of keeping spouses in line. One who grew in such culturally held views on spousal relationship is prone to be violent towards a spouse. Attitudinal factors can also be generationally transmitted. A child who grew up in a home where fighting and other physical abuses served as expression of misunderstanding, is likely to see such confrontation as normative rather than exception.

Situational Factor

Varied situations may directly or indirectly instigate domestic violence. This may include stress in spousal relationship caused by financial inadequacies, particularly where a man loses his job or circumstances pertaining to a sad event that occurred in the family such as the death of a child which may lead to accusations and blame between spouses which may spiral out of control resulting in domestic violence.

Substance Abuse Factor

According to Wells and Graham (2003), there is strong evidence of relationship between heavy drinking and aggression. Alcohol consumption is found mostly at the root of most domestic violence in the family. Alcohol lowers inhibition and increases feeling of aggression (Nicholas, 2005). Consumption of alcohol beyond the capacity of the offender or victim has tendency of instigating heated argument, squabbles and use of offensive languages, which may lead to violent confrontation between spouses. Mouzos and Makkai (2004) argued that among women who experience intimate partner violence, the most identifiable male perpetrators' behavior was drinking habits.

Lack of Access to Family Support Services

Domestic violence has continued because of seeming lack of institutional framework to deal with the menace. There is absence of domestic violence deterrent institutions that would have assisted victims of domestic violence. In most cases even though the law provides penalties for offenders there has not been any prosecution. Secondly, even where such laws exist there has been lack of enlightenment to its existence. This is coupled with the fact that the judicial system of administration is cumbersome and discourages victims from seeking immediate redress. This has left victims of domestic violence to live in fear and often in resignation. Fear of social

stigmatism is another issue that has made tackling of domestic violence difficult. The culturally held view that family life is sacrosanct and must be guarded by spouses has made victims to shy away from reporting such cases to constituted authorities. This is coupled with fear of threat to life, embarrassment from peers and absolute connivance of family members to demonize the complainant makes victims apprehensive of reporting such life threatening situations.

Unchecked Utterances

Most women are known to be loud with their words when in a state of disagreement with their spouses. The freedom to express ones thought may result in unguarded statements that may cast aspersion on the integrity of their partners. There are certain words and utterances made which may question the masculinity of a spouse and possibly make them lose control of their emotion and composure. Many are known to have developed the culture of nagging as a means of expressing their anger and desperation at the slightest opportunity. Such attitudes could instigate violent response from a spouse.

Infidelity

Cheating a spouse may lead to spousal relationship turning violent. Culturally, society sees men as philanderers whose sexuality cannot be checked by their spouses. This could hurt a woman and also push her to explore the option of extra-marital relationship in order to get back at her husband. Some women go extra mile to bring their male friends into their marital homes or abandon marital sanctity to open display of amorous attitude towards other men. There is no law that says a woman whose husband is a cheat cannot do likewise, but it is advisable for a woman to apply utmost discretion and decorum in going after revenge. Often it is advisable for the woman to quit the union peacefully than to make a mockery of her own family by engaging in immoral relationships outside marriage, for the day you mock your spouse by engaging in amoral relationship with another man or flaunt your extra-marital affairs to his face, that means you are already preparing to return to your father's house or retire to your permanent resting place.

Failure to Leave an Abusive Marriage

The idea of a good mother, faithful wife has left many women today under dire consequences. Most women experience harrowing marital situations still clinging on to their children with forlorn hope that things will change for the better. Even in the face of life threatening situations, such women continue to manufacture reasons to justify why they should stick to the end.

Economic Inadequacies

Another identified cause of domestic violence has been traced to the economic situation. A man who lost his job experiences not only psychological depression but as well as sense of propriety. At this point his confidence is at the lowest ebb. Under economic uncertainties, a man feel bereft of ideas on how to meet the family needs and may become prone to aggression towards those around him.

In some cases, some women are found emasculating their spouses by making them feel bad; especially, those that earn more than their husband. Some of these acts became a challenge and a test of their spouse manhood leading to feeling of worthlessness. A man in such a state of frustration may take aggressive disposition. He may hurt their spouse not because he enjoys doing it but because he must show that he is undisputedly the man of the house.

Family Background

Most of the cases of spousal violent is generated by the family orientation and childhood experiences. A child exposed to parental in-house fighting may assume that such acts are normal and will see nothing wrong in beating his spouse in future. The insensitivity of couples in their conduct before their young ones has been fingered as one of the root causes of domestic violence. A child who witnesses the mother abusing the father or the father beating the mother will feel psychologically drained and may lose his or sense of respect for marriage. Such children if they are females end up being reputed for nagging and other quarrelsome dispositions. While the male ones see wife beating as normal in the life of couples. Thus childhood experiences may precipitate violent conducts among future spouses, such children are highly disrespectful and are prone to use of physical confrontation to settle misunderstandings.

Brenda Almond (2006) cited in Haralambos (2007) on the other hand contends that the root cause of domestic violence lay in nature of modern family. According to her, the family is fragmenting. There has been a gradual shift away from concern with the family as a biological institution based upon rearing of children, towards family as an institution which emphasizes 'two people emotional need or desire for one another'. This movement towards individualism and less on social values attached to child bearing and rearing has led spouses feeling more concerned with self rather than with others'. In order words the tendency of seeing oneself on the basis of self desire and need invariably creates tense moments most times between couples which may result in emotional or physical confrontation.

Implications/Effects of Domestic Violence

Many people who go through traumatic events may find that it can take some time to re-adjust and cope for a period after the event. The residual mental, physical and spiritual effects of domestic violence can permeate the daily lives of survivors, which make it difficult to heal. For some, there are severe effects in the immediate aftermath of an assault that may or may not last. For others, the effects come in waves and are not felt until the shock of the event wears off (Morgan and Chadwick, 2009).

Scholars, civil liberty organizations have various espoused on the effect of domestic violence in society. Irrespective of these diverse views, the attendant cost of domestic violence can be experienced in social, economic, psychological, emotional facet of victim's life. Although studies tend to emphasis that women are the major victims and men the culprits, that does not indicate that causes of domestic violence cannot be laid fully on the path of one gender. Often cause of domestic violence are generic as evidence in childhood experiences of both the male and female children. In order words, there is no single consistent pattern that can be used in explaining consequences of domestic violence on the victims. Even though women are presumed to be the major victims, it does not imply that men are not vulnerable to the inducing factors that may be instigated by their spouses. Depending on the nature of relationship, domestic violence could be mitigated by age of spouses, family background, living conditions and income situations. Irrespective of identified causes or generative seed factors associated with domestic violence its impact on the victim and society remains invariably the same. Some of these effects include;

Physical Injury

Bruises, red or purple eye patches, broken wrists are some of the physical manifestations in the body of victims of domestic violence. Some of these marks are deliberately done to leave a permanent or indelible mark on victims by their violators. For instance, occasional sexual molestation, rape, forced sex, acid attacks, knife cuts and use of other dangerous instruments in course of a row. Often victims find it difficult to tell others of their experiences and end up living with the trauma, pain and sense of disillusionment. Some are of the view that nobody will understand them and decide to bear their pain alone, while some fear that exposing these abuses to other persons will incur more wrath of the abuser.

Depression/Insomnia

Victims of domestic abuse are always in a state of depression. Experiences of their ordeal in the hands of loved ones leaves them emotionally drained and induce feeling of restlessness and temporary sadness. Depressive feeling can also trigger other life threatening feelings in victims such as helplessness, hopelessness, weight loss, loss in appetite, loss of interest in activities going on around someone, unexpected bitterness and lack of ability to take decisions, and in most extreme cases nurturing of suicidal tendencies or feeling of losing the zeal to live.

Delusion and Mental Disturbance in Children

Mental disturbance arises as a result of traumatic or terrifying experiences suffered by victims. Some of the common features of this state include nightmares, severe anxiety, uncontrollable thoughts, restlessness and distractions.

Children who witnessed their mother being subjected to abuses suffer emotional problems similar to those experienced by physically abused children (*Jaffe, Wolfe, and Wilson 1990*). It is also evident that children who live under spate of violence grow up unpredictable and psychologically disorganized. The reason is the trauma they passed through while watching their mother humiliated, demeaned or younger siblings abused feel socially insecure and uncomfortable about their future as they cannot predict what will happen next and tend to be overtly over protective of themselves and younger ones. Such children live, dream, and suffer delusional attitude to violence. Beside emotional and psychological trauma, most of these children caught in the middle of the squabbles may end up physically injured. These are cases of infants who are subjected to injuries as their mother tenaciously held onto them while the abuser strikes at her. Children have also become direct victims of attacks as weapons used may hit them while following their mother.

Stark & Flitcraft (1988) contends that a child may be directly targeted by the perpetrator and suffer physical abuse, sexual abuse and/or serious neglect. Female children are found to constitute the core of targets of abusers. Woman abuse is also the context for sexual abuse of female children. Where the mother is assaulted by the father, daughters are exposed to a risk of sexual abuse 6.51 times greater than girls in non-abusive families (*Bowker, Arbitell and McFerron 1988*). The reason a girl who experience domestic violence is likely to become emotionally withdrawn and will tend to display innate attitude aimed at getting at her father through sexual activities. 38 percent of prostitutes confessed to being victims of early childhood violence.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In spite of 'hews' and 'cries' of the debilitating consequences of domestic violence and its concomitant effect on the stability of the family and society in general, the trend has continued

unabated. To some analysts, domestic violence remains at the root of family disorganization which may have a link with economic displacement many families are facing. As plausible as such argument sounds, it portrays trivialization of this detestable unfilial act that have left its victims traumatized. Evidently, such assertion fail to take into cognizance the indelible mark such acts leaves on the psyche of victims and children per se who invariable become secondary victims. A lot of reasons may have been advanced, ranging from marital immaturity, cultural and attitudinal factor, economic inadequacies, family background, peer influences to substance abuse. Nonetheless, though these factors may have instigated incidents of domestic violence, but the fact remains that culturally assigned gender positioning, particular with regards to place of a woman in the family play vital role in the escalation of domestic abuses. Another noticeable reason for the growing trend is assumption of triviality. Moreover, when such incidents are considered normal in marital relationship and which invariably emboldens the perpetrator to see nothing wrong in such act. The silence of victims has not helped matters. In order not to be termed a failures and to avoid embarrassment that follows such disclosure of one 'washing her family dirty linen in public', makes victims of domestic violence hide the trauma they are passing through on daily basis. In addition to this is lack of institutional mechanism in dealing with problem of domestic violence. Even where cases are reported to authorities, it is usually treated with levity or most times seen as mere domestic squabbles that could be best handled within the family, thus leaving the victim at the mercy of the abuser.

Considering these identified causes and factors responsible for domestic violence there is need to evolve a proactive measure ranging from institutional to affirmative action has become imperative to reduce or eliminate the act. This calls for a holistic approach, from civil to the religious. It has become germane for religious leaders to channel energy not only in theological evangelization but on family rebirth and save society from the dangers inherent in allowing the trend to continue, whose negative impact is more futuristic than immediate. This has become necessary considering the fact that both victim and offender are all part of their congregation. Other measures required include; strict application of the laws concerned with domestic violence, by prosecuting offenders, to serve as deterrent to future violators. In other words there is need for severe penalties against domestic abusers. Creation of collaborative relationship between the criminal justice departments, Non Governmental Organisations and support service institutions, so that cases that deal with domestic violence are identified and given accelerated trial in the court of law. There should be provision of proactive and effective legal deterrents/measures that will protect victims from further harm. Public education and enlightenment campaigns on the dangers of domestic violence and need to seek redress whenever such occurs should be intensified in both rural and urban communities. Victims of domestic violence owe it as obligation to report to the police and other support institutions cases of abuse they experience in the hands of partners for immediate action.

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