

**SOCIO-RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS OF DOMESTIC
VIOLENCE: A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF OSINACHI NWACHUKWU'S
ORDEAL**

Benjamin Chukwunonso Nwokocha

Department of Religion and Human Relations

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

This study investigated the socio-religious and cultural consequences of domestic violence with a particular reference to Osinachi Nwachukwu's ordeal. The fact that the 42 year old gospel singer is believed to have died out of domestic violence calls for a pragmatic approach to the issue of domestic violence. Domestic violence which is a violence committed in the victim's domestic circle has sent many to their early graves especially in Africa, Nigeria in particular. It is for this reason that the researcher has undertaken to look at possible religious and social consequences of such act. Using the phenomenological method of the qualitative research approach and primary/secondary means of data collection, the study discovers that domestic violence can take many forms including physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. The study further discovers that domestic violence does not only have devastating physical, psychological consequences on its victims, but can seriously damage the foundations of the family leading to its disintegration. The study further suggests ways to address this societal challenge.

Introduction

The recent death of the famous singer, Osinachi Nwachukwu, has brought the issue of domestic violence into limelight. The dastardly act has drawn the attention of men, women, parents, families, community leaders, religious leaders and law enforcement agencies on the endemic consequences of domestic violence. The emotional wounds and the trauma associated with domestic violence are often times covered up with ignorance that sometimes the victims do not even know that they are experiencing abuse. This is a clear case of the late gospel singer Osinachi Nwachukwu, who was allegedly being abused by her husband and died as a result of the beatings she endured. Here was a woman who could have used her influence and wide connections to get assistance from people or agencies on what she was going through. Unfortunately, the culture of silence sent her to her early grave.

This is however common with many other victims of domestic violence. Some women who are being beaten, starved and abused verbally, emotionally, financially and

psychologically do not even know the gravity of what they are suffering. It is often hard for these women to leave their abusive husbands and toxic marriages because of societal validation, religious beliefs and unhealthy family interference. According to Solomon (2022), it is not easy for victims of domestic violence to open up about what they are going through in the hands of men who claimed to love them. Even when the victims are convinced to leave their abusive partners, would have their family members to contend with who would threaten the victims of cutting them off if they do not go back to their husbands and work in their marriages.

Most worrisome are the religious leaders who keep advising victims to continue praying for their abusers instead of removing themselves from a violent marriage. M. Okeke (personal communication) reported an incidence of a woman who was being sexually and physically abused by her husband. He said that the woman's brother contacted her organization and begged them to help his sister. According to her, the brother of the victim said his sister's husband would get drunk, come back, rape her and beat her. When the man was arrested and the wife counseled to leave the marriage temporarily, she initially agreed but later changed her mind after she was promised by the husband not to beat her again. The woman accepted and went back home and later died with her unborn baby due to injuries she sustained over the several beatings by the husband.

It could be said that some abused women who report their husbands to law enforcement agencies do so not because they want the law to take its course, but because they just wanted to threaten their husbands. According to Ilevbare (2019), most of the women who are being abused would not allow their husbands to be arrested, and if arrested would not allow them to be charged to court and tried for physical assault because they would not want to be separated from their children or children from their fathers. These are the reasons why domestic violence would not stop unless some pragmatic steps are taken to curb the menace.

The scope of the study bordered on the socio-cultural and socio-religious implications of domestic violence with special reference to the circumstances that surrounded the death of Osinachi Nwachukwu, the popular gospel singer. With Osinachi Nwachukwu as a case study, the researcher investigated the history of victims of domestic violence and their abusers. Specifically, the study ventured into providing answers to such questions as; what was their nurturing like? What were they exposed to as they grew up? What skills-relationship, conflict resolution were they modeled and raised from? What are the cultural norms they imbibed about abusive relationships? The researcher also investigated the challenges and limitations victims of domestic violence face in the society which include helplessness and intrinsic assumption that they cannot help themselves coupled with the

culture of silence arising from the victims not wanting to bring shame to their families. These and many more are the grey areas the researcher attended to with the aim to arriving at some lasting solutions to the problem.

Conceptual Clarification and Literature Review on Domestic Violence

Defining domestic violence is inherently difficult given the fact that it is constantly changing according to the culture in which it is taking place. In some cultures the term can be referred to as “wife abuse”, “spousal abuse”, “intimate partner abuse”, “marital abuse”, “family maltreatment”, “family violence”, “conjugal violence”, and “assault”. In this study, the researcher prefers the term “domestic violence” based on its conception in African/Nigerian context. After all, it is a violence that happens inside the home. Nwaeze (2005) categorized domestic violence into four: physical, psychological, verbal, and sexual violence. In assessing these various categories of domestic violence, Nwaeze indicated that verbal-psychological violence (e.g. cursing and ignoring) was the most common, followed by physical (e.g. hitting, slapping, and kicking) and sexual violence. However, carrying out research in the field of domestic violence in Nigeria is a challenging task due to extensive conceptions and misconceptions on the issue owing to the multifarious cultures and ethnicities in Nigeria. That is why the researcher has attempted to focus his study within the south eastern region of Nigeria otherwise known as Igboland.

In an effort to create an agenda for further discussions and areas yet uncovered on the issue of domestic violence in Igboland, the study investigated some of the scholars’ views on the issue of domestic violence. Igbokwe (2021) observed that children and adolescents living with domestic violence are at risk of experiencing emotional, physical and sexual abuse, of developing emotional and behavioral problems and of increased exposure to the presence of other adversities in their lives. Udeh and Akabueze (2005) showed that there was a strong association between men’s personality characteristics and their perception of violence towards their wives. Specifically, they showed that personality traits, such as depression, hysteria, paranoia, and schizophrenia, were positively and significantly associated with domestic violence.

Consequently, Nwachukwu (2006) evaluated 220 married men from various locations in Anambra and Enugu States who perpetrated violence against their wives using Conflict Tactic Scale. He discovered that men who abuse their wives generally suffered from a range of psychological (bipolar disorder), personal or family problems, and social problems. In the 200 randomly selected families, he further discovered that high levels of anxiety and depression were positively associated with abuse in the family; and high

levels of assertiveness on the part of the husbands were correlated with domestic abuse. This causes the victims of domestic violence to suffer from a wide range of psychological disorders. For example, Osinachi Nwachukwu's chest pain which was misinterpreted as throat cancer was one of the medical problems associated with the abuse. Others could be shoulder, hand or neck pain due to excessive beatings.

However, findings above indicated that the rate of domestic violence is particularly high in Nigeria unlike the Western countries with stringent measures adopted in curbing the practice. That is why there is a great need for an increased research on the endemic consequences of domestic violence as well as finding some possible ways of checkmating it.

Osinachi Nwachukwu's Ordeal on Domestic Violence

Mrs. Madu Osinachi, the mother of late Osinachi Nwachukwu, has narrated the alleged ordeals of her daughter in the hands of her husband, Peter Nwachukwu. In an interview with BBC monitored by the Nation, Madu stated that her late daughter insisted on staying in the marriage with her husband despite the series of abuses she experienced. The Nation reports on April 8, that the gospel Artiste died at Abuja hospital where she was being treated for an ailment and since her death; there have been allegations that she was a victim of domestic violence. Osinachi's husband was accused of being physically abusive and has since been arrested by the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Police Command.

Narrating Osinachi's ordeal, the mother said: "It is quite painful the kind of man my daughter met and her painful experience in the hands of the man. I never thought something like that would happen. Ever since the man married my daughter, she never experienced peace, even me as a mother didn't experience peace". Mrs. Madu further stated that after her daughter got married, she did not set her eyes on her again until after 8 years. Mrs. Madu continued thus: "When she gave birth, her husband never informed me that my daughter had given birth, some other persons rather notified me. She didn't disclose her ordeal to us at first. It was even outsiders that were telling me what my daughter was going through in the hands of her husband. It was when she gave birth to her third child that her daughter, Osinachi called lamenting her ordeal in the hands of her husband. "

Mrs. Madu also reported how Peter, her in-law threatened that if her daughter does not go home alive, she will go in death. This threat made her eldest sister, Favour to travel to Abuja to bring her (Osinachi) and her children to Enugu which she spent one year and three months at her father's house before Peter came begging. At this point, Osinachi was

advised by her family members to divorce Peter and move on with her life which she blatantly refused stating that whatever has been joined together, let no man put asunder.

However, the first son of late Mrs. Osinachi Nwachukwu has narrated the ordeal his mother went through in the hands of his father and how he made them believe that beating women is the right way to being in charge. The boy recounted how his father seized the two cars his mother was gifted by the people, that Osinachi her mother would stand under the sun while waiting for public transport. The boy further narrated how his mother was pushed out of the car at night after wedding service they attended forcing her to walk back home just because of a little argument. Attesting to the boy's revelation, the deceased friend, Ene Ogbe said the boy, confiding in her, said that their mother would be standing under the sun while they will pass and wave at her after church service. One of other Osinachi's sons reportedly has about 25 scars on his back from the strokes of the cane which are testimonies of how he mal-handled the children. Another of her sons bears 12 cane scars on his own back.

However, in what seemed like a cruel oddity, the late singer's husband was focused mainly on denying Osinachi's family members access to her while on the sick bed. Since April 8, 2020 when Osinachi transited into the great beyond, her friends and family have recounted their sad experiences towards her demise. One of her friends, Glory, alleged how Osinachi's husband sometimes poured a full bucket of cold water on her while she was deeply asleep. She further alleged how Osinachi told her that her husband threatened her (Osinachi) that she would die and he would marry another wife. How she often called her imbecile and pig (smelly dirty woman) publicly. Glory admitted that the above reports are true and that they are the central cause of Osinachi's pre-mature death.

Although, these reports are verbal without corresponding evidences, however, this is not the first time reports are making rounds the media over the issue of domestic violence. Not quite long, was a case of a traditional ruler in Ondo State who physically assaulted and sent one of his wives to her early grave. That matter seems to have been swept under the carpet. Every day, there will be one incident of domestic violence in almost all parts of Nigeria. Despite the high rate of domestic violence in Nigeria, it seems that the country is yet to legally step up and do the needful in terms of making stiffer legislations and making sure such legislations are enforced in the fight against domestic violence.

Socio-Religious and Cultural Implications of Domestic Violence

Osinachi endured her toxic marriage based on three reasons: first, she maintained that she did not want to leave her marriage so that people would not curse God because of her. Secondly, she believed divorce was unacceptable to God. Thirdly, she did not want whenever, she was ministering people would be seeing her as a woman who could not

keep her marriage and in that way undermine her service to God. Osinachi was simply avoiding stigmatization. This has some religious and cultural undertone in the sense that African's worldview frowns at divorce or separation of any kind.

However, in the case of Osinachi and other similar cases of domestic violence, religious and cultural considerations played some vital roles. Abusers usually hide under the cloak of culture and religion to achieve their ambition. Some men would go as far as selectively quoting religious texts or interpreting cultural values as a means of asserting male entitlement and privileges over women. Such abusers may pressure their victims into staying in the toxic marriages in order to preserve the respect of the religious community. If the abuser is a religious leader or has a position of respect within the faith community, his victim may feel additional pressure to remain silent. Moreover, there are many religious and cultural beliefs in Africa that promotes domestic violence inadvertently. For example, many Christians believe that divorcees will not make heaven. Divorcees are mostly treated with contempt and are subjected to ridicule because of some cultural beliefs that marriage is the peak of achievement for the African woman. This is why many victims of domestic violence are reluctant to end their violent marriages because they do not want to be seen as single or divorcee.

Despite these complexities, culture and religion can also be vital components of a healing journey. Uchendu (2012) indicated that majority of the victims of domestic violence, spirituality and cultural influence was a source of strength or comfort. Faith leaders are often trusted individuals in society, and many survivors turn to them in times of hardship, including religious violence. Faith can be an important part of a survivor's journey of healing, but in some cases it can also complicate their path to safety. Some victims of domestic violence may be faced with abusive husbands who manipulate religious beliefs and religious teachings or faith leaders who lack the knowledge to provide counsel, creating additional barriers to escaping the abuse (Dopamu, 2018).

Domestic violence can affect anyone, regardless of how they are identified in the communities they belong, or how they are seen by others. Religious affiliation is no exception to domestic violence; it can affect anyone regardless of his/her religious inclinations. This is why it is crucial that faith leaders should take steps to better understand the dynamics of domestic violence and how to provide support to the victims. It is also necessary that community leaders should be advocates and support providers to the victims of domestic violence in their respective communities. Religious and community leaders have the power to ensure and foster healthy and safety environments.

Couples Therapeutic Measures to Domestic Violence

The challenge of identifying the solution to domestic violence is threefold:

1. Most victims of domestic violence are blinded with love and do not speak up for help. In such cases, issues of domestic violence can take the form of sexual, physical, emotional, economic, and psychological.
2. The causes of domestic violence are many and varied. It then behooves that the solution to domestic violence would depend on the actual cause of the violent behavior.
3. Even when the causes are identified, some cultural and religious inclinations would impede the pragmatic solutions. This may seem strange but is a major problem to finding some lasting solutions to the challenges of domestic violence in Africa. However some of the identified general therapies/solutions to domestic violence include the following:
 - (i) Seeking refuge: Victims of domestic violence are advised to seek refuge from their abusive partners to ensure that the conflict does not escalate and become uncontrollable. Whether the decision to seek refuge from an abusive marriage will be temporary or a permanent one would be determined based on the circumstances of each individual case and the conduct of the abuser afterwards. If the abuser is not repentant enough to admit that he/she is guilty of the act and seek help from a specialist in counseling and handling domestic violent cases and as well accept to be closely monitored to ensure that the victim can still live peacefully; the victim could consider ending such marriage. This is because of the fact that many who have lost their lives in the course of continuing to endure abuse, do not come back alive.
 - (ii) Scrutinizing some of the pre-conceived notions on marriage and divorce: Many out of socio-religious and cultural reasons believe that divorce is not the best option to domestic violence. It is rather recommended that victims of domestic violence should continue to endure the said violently abusive marriages instead of walking out of such toxic marriages. This is why this study recommends that the victims of domestic violence should personally choose to live or die out of a toxic marriage. Christians who frown at divorce need to know that domestic violence is anti-Christian because the model of family interaction as laid down by Christ is built on the content of love.
 - (iii) Counseling: Both the perpetrators and the victims of domestic violence need psychological attention by either a psychologist or trained religious leaders. Religious institutions should have a viable counseling unit being that religion plays a significant role amongst the Africans. Counseling would identify the

root factors which promotes domestic violence like; inferiority complex, lack of self-control, hot temperament, spiritual or psychological problems. With the understanding of the cause, the best management strategy would be recommended.

- (iv) Awareness/Sensitization: The society needs awareness on the evils of domestic violence. The society should be made to understand that domestic violence is evil and dangerous. People need to know how to help a victim of domestic violence and what they must do to overcome it. The saddest thing is that where a man is abused in the home, many do not believe it. He is expected to be a man and not to disclose it to anyone otherwise he would be considered a weakling. This is why there is every need to break the silence and sensitize the people on the dangers of domestic violence.

Conclusion

The findings of this study deduced that domestic violence is evil and should be nipped to the bud with every means possible. Domestic violence has sent many to their early graves and has left its victims scared, anxious, threatened and dejected. This study however advocates some pragmatic approaches in tackling this menace that has bedeviled many marriages especially within the African/Nigerian homes.

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