

DOMESTIC ABUSE IN NIGERIA: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND CHRISTIAN APPROACH

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Abstract

Domestic abuse or domestic violence has been a turbulent issue in the country. Many have lost their life or being maimed as a result of it. The question is: who is to be blamed for this quagmire? Any individual is a potential perpetrator when faced with a toxic relationship. This means there is no exemption to domestic abuse instigation as relates to gender. This paper introduced four new theories of domestic abuse which are coinage of the writers. These are the Partner-Support Theory which states that the perpetrator becomes domineering because of their supportive inclination towards the welfare of the family, the Parent-Veto Theory which states that the consent of the victim is not recognized for marriage by the parent or parents as the case may be, the Theory of Mannerism which states that the perpetrator is inherently violent or troublesome by nature and the Mood Swing Theory which states that the perpetrator becomes upset about trivial issues between them and their partner, while the two Christian approaches to domestic abuse as coined by the writers are Group counselling Approach where the Church needs to institute a group of individuals whose job is to go house to house to sensitize people on issues of domestic abuse, and the Organisational Approach where there is the need to establish an organisation in the churches that is open for consultation on marriage related issues and avoidance of domestic abuse in marital relationship. The paper also sought to look into the types, causes, and consequences of domestic abuse. It is recommended among others that the Church should establish rehabilitation centres for children from abusive homes as they are prone to violence when they grow up to adulthood. The Church should also endeavour to empower couples of abusive relationship as lack of means of livelihood is tantamount to frustration which eventually leads to violent acts.

Keywords: Domestic Abuse, Theoretical Foundation, Christian, Christianity,

Approach, Domestic Violence.

Introduction

Cases of domestic abuse in the country are increasing like wildfire almost on daily basis. Instances abound about couples maiming and killing their spouses. There is no gainsaying to attribute masculinity to domestic abuse and disengaging femininity from it. Both sexes are involved in domestic violence and involvement in violent act depends on the disposition of the individual or certain issues of life. Domestic abuse comes in different forms such as psychological or emotional, sexual, financial, physical and so on and these types of domestic abuse are not without roots. Domestic abuse is not devoid of consequences that range from physical injury, distress, mental health problems to fatality et cetera. Certain steps have to be taken to solve this problem of violence such as dissolution of marriage, empowerment, abstinence from alcohol, establishment of referral centres, counselling, etc. Couples should watch out for signs that depict domestic abuse and prevent worse situations, signs such as truculent attitude on slightest disagreement on frivolous issues, constraint on movement, restraining relationship with friends and relatives, etc.

Conceptual Clarifications

a. Domestic

Cambridge Dictionary (2022) defines the word domestic as pertaining to a crime as “a fight or attack that happens in a home between people who know each other”. Macmillan Dictionary (2022) defines it as “an argument or violence between people who live together. This word is used especially by the police as an informal word for domestic violence”.

b. Violence

According to Jacquin (n.d), violence is “an act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm”. It is also referred as actions or words that are intended to hurt people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022).

c. Christian

According to Merriam-Webster (2022), Christian is defined as “of or relating to Christianity. Based on or conforming with Christianity”. Oxford Learner's Dictionary (2022) defines Christian as “based on or believing the teachings of Jesus Christ”.

d. Domestic Abuse

As defined by the writers it is when an incompatible relationship culminates into injurious situations. A compatible relationship leads to happiness, while an incompatible relationship leads to violence, that is to say that when two individuals are not compatible to establish a marital relationship or otherwise, the end result is violence if such relationship is founded. When love is instituted in a relationship such union grows without hindrance, though there are moments of discord, but quick resolution comes after. Any physical abuse including physical, emotional, sexual or financial – between intimate partners, often living in the same household (Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022, para. 1). Also as defined by United Nations (n.d.), it is “a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”.

Types of Domestic Abuse

The forms of domestic abuse range from physical, emotional, sexual, financial, verbal to psychological abuses.

a. **Physical Abuse**

In spite of these various abuses perpetrated on partners, physical abuse is the most conspicuous because injuries are inflicted on partners. As stated by Plumtre (2022, para .10), physical abuse is the popular form of abuse and it comes in such forms as grabbing, pushing, slapping, shoving, hitting, stabbing, burning and biting, while other forms could be: withholding physical needs such as sleep or food, refusing to release necessities, for example drugs, locking a victim out of the house and withholding help where the victim is sick or injured.

b. **Emotional Abuse**

As viewed by Pietrangelo and Raypole (2022), this type of abuse involves when an attempt is made on one to instill fear, exert control or hold one indoors. It is far away from physical abuse, but might involve threatening one or those they love. It is known as one's words, actions and the frequency of those actions. The abuse may start slowly and continues.

c. **Sexual Abuse**

Sexual abuse refers to any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act, or unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, that are directed against a person's sexuality using coercion by anyone, regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including at home and at work. (Jansen, 2016) as cited in Sexual Violence Research Initiative, (2022, para.9). For the researchers, sexual abuse is forceful attempt to have sex with a partner. The consent of the partner is not considered in this type of abuse. Not only women are vulnerable to sexual abuse as some may think, men are also sexually abused by their partners/wives.

d. **Financial Abuse**

Financial abuse occurs when a partner is been deprived of monetary assistance. Some spouses deprive their partners money for food and to carter for other necessities of life. They use this as a weapon to punish their spouses and being in control. We think that only men can deprive their spouses financial assistance, but women do, especially when they are the breadwinners of their families. Some women do it to push their partners into reconsidering their life by engaging in meaningful employment to help themselves and their families than relying solely on them for everything needed in the family, including the children's school fees, and also some women do it to be in control of their husbands, thereby making their husbands inferior and irresponsible. Therefore, Fersch (2022, para. 1) asserts:

Financial abuse occurs when the abusers uses financial means such as withholding child support or spousal support payments to keep their "other" under their control. It is a form of coercion and control. It often occurs when the survivor is dependent on the abuser for support.

e. **Verbal Abuse**

Verbal abuse is the use of the mouth to cause emotional trauma to someone. There is a saying that "the disgrace given to an influential person is worst than physical assault on him". As it implies to this write-up some utterances made by spouses can lead the victims to emotional trauma that can be disastrous. Gordon (2022) affirms that verbal abuse is when a person uses words to humiliate another which can affect the person psychologically. It is a way of controlling someone. Verbal abuse is very dangerous because it can cause unpleasant

situation in the sense that, if not carefully handled, the victim might commit suicide if the verbal assault is grievous.

f. **Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse is when verbal or non-verbal means is used to control or hurt the feelings of someone. It doesn't involve physical injuries but can lead to serious emotional and mental problems (Gupta, 2022). Though this type of abuse is not physical abuse, but can lead to physical abuse if measures are not taken because provocative words can generate physical attack which would leave the perpetrator in a regrettable condition.

Causes of Domestic Abuse

1. Level of Education: Women with lower education are ready preys for domestic abuse because they lack robust means of livelihood as their spouses see them as liabilities, and Pace (2022) sees it in the same way that women with secondary education have reduced their incidence of domestic abuse, and that women that have gone higher in education become equal with their spouses and with good means of livelihood have devoid themselves of depending on their spouses, and therefore, staying away from those things that can lead to domestic abuse.

2. Environmental Factor

By environmental factor the writers mean that there is a correlation between domestic abuse and one's environment. A child who has experienced violence from parents either directly (individual experience) or indirectly (watching a parent abusing another) has the tendency to be violent at adulthood. The child sees domestic abuse as a way of life and also a means of exerting power and control. This idea is supported by Benedictis, Jaffe & Segal (2020) who opined that household domestic abuse is a strong cause of domestic violence in adulthood as the person was brought up in the family. A child who has seen the way the father abused the mother transmits this act to the next generation, thereby domestic abuse becomes a generational factor.

3. Lack of Employment

This is one of the major causes of domestic abuse. Some of these perpetrators of domestic abuse are jobless and out of their frustrating condition, they resort to abusing their spouses. Pace (2022) supports this idea, but in another perspective that individual in very serious financial problem indulge in domestic abuse and the victims do not have the financial power to run away from their abusive conditions. Also the victims might not have the means to seek legal assistance or accommodation that is why half of women and children denied of homes are persons that have experienced domestic abuse. Even the perpetrators might make sure that their victims stay in poverty or even the perpetrator might go at length to deprive the victim a job opportunity so that the victim will be reliant on them.

4. Provocation

This can lead to domestic abuse. Some perpetrators are violent to their victims when pushed to the wall with the victims' attitude or utterances. This type of abuse

lies in the Victim – Blaming Theory where the victim is blamed for the abuse they experience. Human beings are liable to react when emotionally attacked through provocative words. As the words are hurting the individual explodes in an unacceptable way to exhibit masculinity as a man or defensive strategy such as hitting, slapping, kicking, et cetera might be used by the woman. These might be injurious as some vital parts could be affected. Also Khawaja, et al (2008) in Idris, et al (2018) blame the woman for being battered by the husband when she intentionally refuses what the husband demands from, being rude to his family, goes out without her husband, displays an unacceptable behaviour, and talks to the husband in an aggressive way.

5. **Drug Abuse**

In-take of illicit drugs like cocaine, marijuana, alcohol, methamphetamine (mkpuru mmiri as translated in Igbo) and so on and so forth might lead to violence against a partner. These drugs cause hallucination and are liable to push the victim into committing outrageous outcome. Dryden-Edwards (2033) concurs with the view that women who are at the greatest threat of being abused violently are those living with men that abuse drugs, mostly alcohol.

6. **Perpetrator's Mindset as regards Marriage**

Some perpetrators of domestic abuse feel that the only way to control their partners is to use violence as a tool to control them. For them violence quietens their spouses and gives them authority to dictate for their spouses. The perpetrators see violence as a way of subduing their partners and keeping the relationship moving. This idea is supported by pace (2022, para. 11) that:

One of the causes of domestic violence is the thought process that violence can help save marriage. Many partners resort to domestic violence in marriage because they think this is the only way to retain their partner. Any threat to the relationship motivates the spouse to devise such retention strategies. Such behaviours, although wrong, are meant to explicitly or implicitly aim at maintaining the bond.

7. **Cultural Causation**

Some cultures permit violence as women are seen as men's property because these cultures perceive the world as masculine and women are to subject themselves to their spouses without complaints. Gupta (2022) states that many cultures have authorized the beating and scolding of women and children as they are seen as belonging to men and that a woman's sexuality is a glory to the family and any deeds that are geared towards disgracing the family attract judgement and violence.

Consequences of Domestic Abuse

The following are the consequences of domestic abuse:

- a. **Inpaired Health Condition:** Victims of domestic abuse experience depression which affects the way they feel and think. Depression can also lead to committing suicide. The traumatic state in which the victims find themselves is appalling that only them can tell what they are passing through in the hands of their perpetrators.

Men do not like outsiders to know that they are experiencing abuse from their spouses as they feel ashamed to let friends and even relatives know their predicaments in order not to be seen as weaklings. Women are seen as those mostly abused by men, but some men are just silent in their problematic marriage as they are smiling and suffering in their marriages. Some women in abusive relationship sometimes develop long term mental disorder if the situation is not well handled because some women are emotionally feeble that they cannot withstand the oppressive hands of their spouses.

b. Divorce

Domestic abuse can lead to divorce. The victim is left with no other option than to dissolve the marriage so that both parties go their separate ways and in this case the children suffer as they will lack proper parental upbringing from both parents. Single parenting as a result of divorce affects the children financially as their care is centred on a parent, especially the mother who might have no good means of livelihood. As regards men, the children in their custody when their mothers are no more with their fathers might be maltreated by their new wives. This is the ugly situation some children experience in their father's houses when both parents are separated.

c. Alcoholism

Some victims of domestic violence resort to taking alcohol to calm themselves. Some men move out to take liquor as they see it as the only means of running away from such situation that is disturbing and before long the person becomes alcohol addict which in normal situation cannot lead them to such behaviour. The behaviour becomes an acquired one which is the resultant effect of domestic abuse. The women are not left out for some of them rely on taking alcoholic drinks to calm their nerves when faced with a toxic relationship as reliance on alcohol disengages them from distress.

d. Fatality

Domestic abuse might lead the victim to encounter road accident. Verbal abuse can lead to such. In anger the victim can drive out only to meet the misfortune of death. This is devastating to the family, especially because they have been deprived of a parent and even the perpetrator might live to regret their action throughout life.

Physical abuse can also cause death of the victim, especially when hit on a delicate body part. Some women have lost their pregnancies and even died as a result of domestic abuse.

e. Fear

There is a connection between fear and abuse. Children whose father abuses their mother violently often live in fear because from violently manhandling their mother, the next targets become them. They are afraid at the sight of the perpetrator this can lead to psychological disorder that can linger for long if they are not given adequate counselling. Some of the female children can develop hatred towards the opposite sex and decide not to get involved in any marital relationship.

f. Repetitive Circle of Violence

Children who have experienced domestic abuse are liable to be violent in future. They have seen violence as a way of life. This can lead to violence being a hereditary factor as violence becomes generational, that is violence continues to run in the family as it has been instituted by a spouse, especially the father. Betterhelp Editorial Team (2022, para. 16) writes:

Even if a child is not directly abused, when they grow up in an environment of domestic abuse or violence, they live with fear and anxiety that something will set the abuser off or spark a violent episode. They are more likely to grow up thinking this type of behaviour is normal or necessary, and as teenagers and adults, they may try to replicate that behaviour.

These children can even be bullies in their schools as a result of witnessing a parent being frequently abused.

g. Alienation from Family and Friends:

Domestic abuse severs the victim from family members and friends. The perpetrator at times does not allow the victim to come closer to family members and friends and also prevents the victim from calling them. The reason behind this is to hinder interference into the abusive relationship, that is the victim will not have the opportunity to tell the family and friends what they are passing through in their marital relationships which might incur a third-party interference that will be offensive to the perpetrator. Central Staff (2016) asserts that the abuser is detached from family members, friends, and neighbours, and this makes them lose support from the society.

h. Psychological Disorders

Domestic abuse leads to psychological disorders on the abused and the children. As it continues the victim and the children who witness the abuse experience psychological disorder that can be long-lasting, and therefore sees the perpetrator as an enemy especially when it affects the important aspects of their life as regards deprivation of food and education.

“Domestic Violence and Child Abuse” (2022, para. 5) declares:

Research reveals hurting a child's parent, who is an active care-giver, with whom the child lives and has an emotional connection with; in the presence of or to the hearing of the child, will more than always lead to the psychological abuse of the child. In other situations, abusive partners go further to threaten the wellbeing of children of their partners to the hearing of the children in question. This can worsen these children's psychological abuse. It is truly unfortunate that children have to hear that their welfare and safety are in jeopardy as a result of one of their parents, who they have come to know or accept as a care giver.

Theories of Domestic Abuse

a. Partner-Support Theory:

The theory states that the perpetrator becomes domineering because of their supportive inclination towards the welfare of the family. The perpetrator resort to violence because they see themselves as the breadwinner of the family. This gives them control over their spouses. Decisions concerning the family's welfare are taken by them without seeking opinions from the partner. The partner is relegated to a secondary role because the perpetrator sees them as a nonentity.

b. Parent-Veto Theory:

The theory states that the consent of the victim is not recognized for marriage by the parent or parents as the case may be. Some parents take marriage decisions for their children because of money. They persuade their child to enter into marital relationship with someone they don't have feelings for all because of the affluence of the person or family. Marriage is all about love and when love is not seen as the umbrella that covers a union, such union becomes shattered. The victim at times tries every possible means to pull out of such union and such means can lead to domestic abuse which aftermath can be detrimental to the individual and even to the perpetrator. The male victims can drink themselves to stupor everyday and come back home to be aggressive to their spouses which might lead to sustaining injuries and even death because their spouses might use dangerous weapons as knife to protect themselves which might injure or kill the aggressor, while the female victims might involve themselves in taking alcoholic drinks and come back home drunk and this can arouse pugnacious behaviour from their spouses that are injurious, or they can rely on going out to have fun with other males which might lead to contracting deadly infectious diseases.

c. Theory of Mannerism:

It states that the perpetrator is inherently violent or troublesome by nature. Some people are naturally troublesome, they derive joy in instigating violence by attacking their spouses at any little argument, even they extend this attitude outside the home. Some persons in this group are victims of their misfortunes because of their troublesome and nagging character at any little matter, that is they invite the violent behaviour of their spouses towards them.

d. Mood Swing Theory:

The theory states that the perpetrator becomes upset about trivial issues between them and their partner. Any slightest disagreement attracts violence and after the violent act the perpetrator might become sober and start asking for forgiveness after the harm has been done to the victim. At times the aggression comes with slapping, hitting, beating or kicking the partner.

Christian Approaches to Domestic Abuse

These approaches when applied will go a long way in putting a stop to domestic abuse. These are:

a. Group Counselling Approach:

The church needs to institute a group of individuals whose job is to go house to house

to sensitize people on issues of domestic violence. With this the writers believe that domestic abuse will be completely checked. Counselling is the sure way of assisting people to desist from domestic abuse and thereby maintaining a good marital relationship.

b. **Organisational Approach:**

There is the need to establish an organisation in the churches that is open for consultation on marriage related issues and avoidance of domestic abuse in marital relationship. The sole duty of the organisation is to handle marriage related issues. Couples who are finding it difficult to manage their union have the opportunity to discuss with the group who will give them tips on how to manage their marital relationship irrespective of the condition they find themselves because marriage is “for better, for worse”. They should be made to know the importance of sticking to the vow for a successful marriage.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations:

- a. The church should establish rehabilitation centres for children from abusive homes as they are prone to violence when they grow up to adulthood.
- b. Government should try as much as possible to create jobs for the citizens as this will help to reduce the incidence of domestic abuse.
- c. Parents should be careful on taking decisions for their children concerning marriage. Money is not all one needs as the love for money can lead one's child to perpetual unhappiness in marriage.
- d. Legal actions should be severely taken on perpetrators.
- e. It is advised that victims of domestic abuse should not keep quiet, but let family members, friends, neighbours know what they are passing through because keeping quiet gives the perpetrator the power to continue with their brutal acts.
- f. The Church should also endeavour to empower couples of abusive relationship as lack of means of livelihood is tantamount to frustration which eventually leads to violent acts. The Church should not wait for the government, but try to train them in skill acquisition programmes.
- g. In the case of female victims, their family members should help them financially when they live their husbands' houses until they can stand on their feet to take care of their children. They shouldn't be seen as burdens as this can aggravate their situation psychologically. This is one of the reasons why some women prefer to stay in the partners' houses and die in silence.
- h. It is advisable that actions should be taken by couples when signs of domestic abuse are perceived. There is nothing such as the perpetrator will change. The victim should move out of the marriage than loss their life.
- i. Law should be promulgated concerning a woman having a share in her father's property. This will help the woman in terms of accommodation when she quits her marriage because women face the problem of homelessness when they separate from their husbands as regards domestic abuse. This is among the reasons why women endure toxic relationship that can end their life because if they move out of marriage, they might not have a place to stay as their male siblings occupy their family houses.

Conclusion

The incidence of domestic abuse has risen astronomically in the country. Almost every day news on domestic abuse become headlines in newspapers, on television and radio, and even social media. Physical abuse is more noticeable than other abuses which often might lead to death of the abused. It is said that men are abused by their wives, but theirs are not prominent because they keep quiet as a result of shame as they will be tagged as being weak to be abused by their wives. Man and woman are victims of domestic abuse, not as the wrong perception of people that women are those that are abused. The consequences can be short-term or long-term and even may lead to death. This unhealthy situation should not be ignored as there should be all hands on deck to fight it.

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