GENDER AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA: A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT: *Socially division of human being into male or female is gender. Therefore, gender is about men and women. Unfortunately, gender differentiation is very common in a patriarchal set up where one group of people feels superior while the other is deemed inferior, anatomically weak and subordinate. However, the term itself is quite controversial, especially among peace and conflict managers. This paper therefore, examines gender issues and violence, such as sexual harassment, forceful marriage, women genital mutilation, trafficking in women, physical torture, discriminating, etc., against women in Nigeria in general and particularly Akwa Ibom State. The study adopted qualitative research and documentary method of data collection. Its revealed that, their families and friends may be affected in the case of intimate partner violence, there is increasing evidence of the negative impact on children of exposure to violence in the family. Society suffers economically, both in the use of resources and in the loss of productivity due to fear and injury. It recommended among others that government should organize workshops and seminars in both urban and rural areas. Also non-governmental organizations should make wider their sensitization projects to the rural areas through electronic and print media. to ensure that the awareness of violence against women permeates the grassroots, and endeavour to work with Ministry of Social Welfare and Woman Affairs.*

KEYWORDS: Gender, Domestic Violence, Victimization, Trafficking, Social Learning, Personality Traits.

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is women into the fabric of society to such an extent that many of us who are victimized feel that we are at fault. Many of those who perpetrate violence feel justified by strong societal messages that say that rape, battering, sexual harassment, child abuse, and other forms of violence are acceptable. Every day we see images of male violence against women in the news, on TV shows, in the movies, in advertising, and in our homes and workplaces. It is a fact of life women of all ages, races and classes.

In the broadest sense, violence against women is any violation of a woman's personhood, mental or physical integrity, or freedom of movement through individual acts and societal oppression. It includes all the ways our society objectifies and oppresses women. Violence against women ranges from sterilization abuse to prescription – drug abuse, pornography, stalking, battering, and rape. It includes the sexual and physical abuse of young girls and the abuse of elders. Every form of violence threatens all women and limits our ability to make choices about our lives. Sexual violence is particularly insidious because sexual acts are ordinarily and rightly a source of pleasure and communication. It is often unclear to a woman who has been victimized and to society as a whole whether a sexual violation was done out of

sexual desire or violent intent or whether these motivations are even distinguishable, because violence itself has come to be seen as sexual or erotic.

Thirty years ago, most forms of violence against women were hidden under a cloak of silence or acceptance. As more and more talked with each other in the recent wave of the women's movement, it became apparent that violence against us occurs on a massive scale; that no women is immune; and family, friends, and public institutions have be cruelty insensitive about it. Women have mobilized to offer direct services to those who have encountered violence, to educate people about the range and nature of male violence against women, and to develop strategies for change (Moradian, 20101).

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with victim's gender as primary motive. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women noted that this violence could be perpetrated by assailants of either gender, family members and even the 'State' itself (United Nations, 1993). Worldwide governments and organisations actively work to combat violence against women through a variety of programmes. A UN resolution designated November 25 as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

Women are crucial to the growth and development of any nation and the world at large. Women constitute half of the world's population and they are homemakers, custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society and permanent change is often best achieved through them. Full community development is impossible without their understanding, cooperation and effect participation. Considering the importance of women as mother, sometimes breadwinners, teachers and guardians, they deserve respect, recognition and better treatment but the opposite is usually the case.

According to Davies, (1999), women are enslaved in a circle of poverty and they suffer from neglect, discrimination and exploitation. They are also subjected to different forms of violence by their male counterparts. Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role assigned to be subservient to men and also other women (Harvey and Gow, 1994). The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) states that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

Women are more likely to be victimized by someone that they are intimate with, commonly called Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). The impact of domestic violence in the sphere of total violence against women can be understood through the example that 40-70% murders of women are committed by their husbands or boyfriends (World Health Organization, 2002). Studies have shown that violence is not always perpetrated as a form of physical violence but can also be psychological and verbal (Pourreza, Batebi and Moussavi, 2004). Instances of Intimate Partner Violence tend not to be reported to police and thus many experts believe that

the true magnitude of the problem is hard to estimate (Centers of Disease Control and Prevention, 2011).

Conceptual Clarification of Violence Against Women

Violence against women does not mean only physical violence. It is much broader and includes sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse. The National Plan targets two main types of violence against women - domestic and family violence, and sexual assault.

On an international level, the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women provides the following definition: 'The term violence against women means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.' The laws in each Australian state and territory have their own definitions. While there is no single definition, the central elements of domestic violence include:

• Acts of violence that occur between people who have, or have had, an intimate relationship;

• An ongoing pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening. In most cases, the violent behaviour is part of a range of tactics to exercise power and control over women and their children, and can be both criminal and non-criminal; and the threatening or violent behaviour can comprise of physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and financial abuse (Adebirigbe, 2004).

Physical violence can include slaps, shoves, hits, punches, pushes, being thrown down stairs or across the room, kicking, twisting of arms, choking, and being burnt or stabbed.

Psychological and emotional abuse can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.

Financial or economic abuse includes forcibly controlling another person's money or other assets. It can also involve stealing cash, not allowing a victim to take part in any financial decisions or preventing a victim from having a job.

Family violence is a broader term that refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for domestic violence. As with domestic violence, the National Plan recognises that although only some aspects of family violence are criminal offences, any behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear is unacceptable. The term 'family violence' is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of indigenous people, because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur (Adebayo, 2003).

Sexual assault or Sexual violence can include rape, sexual assault with implements, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, enforced prostitution, and being made to have sex with friends of the perpetrator.

Research has demonstrated that violence against women often involves a continuum of violence from psychological, economic and emotional abuse through to physical and sexual violence.

Causes of Domestic Violence Against Women

There are many different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure stress and social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

Psychological: Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. Personal traits include sudden bursts of anger, poor impulse control, and poor self-esteem. Various theories suggest that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse observed or experienced as a child lead some people to be more violent in adulthood (Kalra, 1996). Dutton and Golant (1995), suggested a psychological profile of men who abuse their wives, arguing that they have borderline personalities that are developed early in life. However, these psychological theories are disputed by Steel, (1974), and Strains, (1980), who suggest that psychological theories are limited. They argue that social factors are important, while personality traits, mental illness or psychopathy are less factors.

Jealousy: Many cases of domestic violence against women occur due to jealousy when the spouse is either suspected of being unfaithful or is planning to leave the relationship. An evolutionary psychology explanation of such cases of domestic violence against women are that they represent to male attempts to control female reproduction and ensure sexual exclusivity for himself through violence or the threat of violence (Goetz, 2010).

Social Stress: Stress may he increased when a person is living in a family situation, with increased pressures. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer and Kalmuss, 1988). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence, due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes, 2002).

Social Learning: If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate it. If there are no negative consequences and the victim also accepts the violence with submission; then the behaviour will likely continue. Often, violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner (Crowell and Sugarman, 1996).

Power and Control: Abusers abuse in order to establish and maintain control over the partner. Abusers' effort to dominate have been attributed to low self-esteem or feelings of inadequacy, unresolved childhood conflicts, the stress of poverty, hostility and resentment toward women (misogyny), personality disorders, genetic tendencies and social cultural influences (Wikipedia, 2012). Most authorities seem to agree that abusive personalities result from a combination of several factors, to varying degrees.

Different Forms of Violence Against Women

Sexual Violence: Although women are more at risk of violence from their intimate partners than from other persons, sexual violence by non-partners is also common in many settings. According to the 2006 In-depth Study of the Secretary-General: "Sexual violence by 'non-

partners' refers to violence by a relative, friend, acquaintance, neighbour, work colleague or stranger. Estimates of the prevalence of sexual violence by 'non-partners' are difficult to establish because in many societies, especially in Africa, sexual violence remains an issue of deep shame for women and often for their families. Statistics on rape extracted from police records, for example, are notoriously unreliable because of significant underreporting (UN, 2006).

According to José 'Alcalá, (2005), it is estimated that worldwide, one in five women will become a victim of rape or attempted rape in her lifetime. In many Nigerian communities, the legal system and community attitudes add to the trauma that rape survivor experience this is because, often times, the perpetuators are not brought to book.

Honour Killings: In some Nigerian communities, rape victims, women suspected of engaging in premarital sex, and women accused of adultery have been murdered by their relatives because the violation of a woman's chastity is viewed as an affront to the family's honour. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) estimates that the annual world-wide number of "honour killing" victims may be as high as 5000 women (UNFPA, 2000).

Early Marriage: The practice of early marriage is prevalent throughout the world, especially in Africa and South Asia. 'This negates peace and security of any nation because it is a form of sexual violence, since young girls are often forced into the marriage and into sexual relations.

This practice jeopardizes women rights to health, raises their risk of exposure to HIV/AIDS and limits their chance of attending school. Some parents and families justify child marriages by contending that it ensures a better future for their daughters. Some parents and families also marry off their younger daughters as a means of gaining economic security and status for themselves as well as for their daughters. Insecurity, conflict and societal crises also support early marriage. As reported by UN (2002), many African countries experiencing conflict, where there is a high possibility of young girls being kidnapped, marrying them off at an early age is viewed as a way to secure their protection.

Trafficking in Girls: Trafficking involves the recruitment and transportation of using deception, coercion and threats in order to place and keep them in a situation of slavery, forced labour or servitude. Women are trafficked into a variety sectors of the informal economy, including prostitution, domestic work, street begging, mining, agriculture, cottage industries (Ertürk, 2006). While exact data are hard to come by, UNESCO, (2004), estimates of the number of trafficked persons range from 500,000 to two million per year, and a few organizations have estimated that up to four million persons are trafficked every year. Although women and men can become victims of trafficking but the majority of victims are always female. This is because various forms of gender-based discrimination increase the risk of women becoming affected by poverty, which in turn puts them at higher risk of becoming targeted by traffickers, who often use false promises of jobs and educational opportunities to recruit their victims. Trafficking is often connected to organized crime and has developed into a highly profitable business that generates an estimated US$7-12 billion per year (José Alcalá, M. et al., 2006).

Consequences of Violence Against Women

The consequences of violence against women are far broader than the impact on the women victims. Their families and friends may be affected. In the case of intimate partner violence,

there is increasing evidence of the negative impact on children of exposure to violence in the family. Society suffers economically, both in the use of resources and in the loss of productivity due to fear and injury. Understanding the consequences of violence is necessary for planning and implementing interventions to deal with those consequences.

After the Fourth World Conference on women in Beijing in 1995, it was observed that violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedom.

UN, (1995) reports that acts or threats of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, or perpetrated or condoned by the state, instill fear and insecurity in women's lives. According to this report, the fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are breed into a subordinate position compared to men.

The Global Commission on Women's Health, (UNO, 1996) reports that in addition to morbidity and mortality, violence against women leads to psychological trauma, depression, substance abuse, injuries, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection, suicide and murder. The World Bank in its World Development Report, (1993) for the first time assessed the health consequences of gender based violence.

Based on the limited data available, it estimated that in industrialized countries, ape and domestic violence take away almost one in every five healthy year of life of women aged 15 to 44 years. According to this report, on a per capita basis, the health burden of domestic violence is about the same for productive age for women in both developed, and developing countries.

In the views of Akinjiola, (2000), female genital mutilation or circumcision has negative consequences on the victims. He goes on to argue that the harmful practice leads to shock, injuries to the perineum or rectum, haemorrhage, infection and retention of urine and the long-term consequences are chronic pelvic infections, coital difficulties, lack of orgasm, and obstetric complications, permanent frigidity, temporary trauma and psychoses.

Institutional Influences: Family, Schools, and Religion. Families are where all socialization begins, including socialization for all types of violent behaviour. Studies of violent criminals and violent sex offenders have found these men are more likely than other adults to have experienced poor parental childbearing, poor supervision, physical abuse, neglects, and separations from their parent (Langevin et al., 1985; Farrington, 1991). Increased risk of adult intimate partner violence is associated with exposure to violence between a person's parents while growing up. One-third of children who have been abused or to parental violence become violent adults (Wisdom, 1989). Sons of violent parent are more likely to abuse their intimate partners than boys from nonviolent homes (Straus et al., 1980). Men raised in patriarchal family structures in which traditional gender roles are encouraged and are more likely to become violent adults, to rape women acquaintances, and to batter their intimate partners than men raised in more egalitarian homes (Malamutth et., 1995). Sexual abuse in childhood has been identified as a risk factor in males for sexual offending as an adult (Groth and Birnbaum, 1979; Briere, 1992). Experiences of sexual abuse in one's family may lead to inaccurate notions about healthy sexuality, inappropriate justifications for violent behaviour, failure to develop personal

boundaries, and contribute to communication and coping styles that rely on denial, reinterpretation of experiences, and avoidance (Herman, 1992).

To the extent that schools reinforce sex role stereotypes and attitudes that condone the used of violence, they may contribute to socialization supportive of violent behaviour. other institutions that have been implicated in contributing to socialization that supports violence against women are organized religion and the workplace.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Research in recent years has brought an increased understanding of the impact of trauma, in general, and of violence against women, in particular. Both rape and intimate partner violence are associated with a host of short- and long-term problems, including physical injury and illness, psychological symptoms, economic costs, and death. It should be noted that part of what is known about the consequences of violence against women comes from studies of women who were seeking help, so it may not be representative of all victims. It is possible that these women suffered more severe trauma than women who do not seek help, and so represent the worst cases. The opposite is also possible: that women who come forward have suffered less fear and damage to their self-esteem, and therefore the worst cases remain hidden. Women who agree to participate in research may come from different social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds than those who do not participate. Finally, researchers do not always have the understanding or the resources to reach subgroups of victims who may either be at high risk for violence or face special challenges in recovery.

Virtually absent from the research are studies addressed specifically to the experiences of older women, disabled women, immigrant and refugee women, migrant farm worker women, rural women, Asian American women, American Indian women, homeless women, lesbian and bisexual women, drug-addicted women, and institutionalized women (Eaton, 1995; Gilfus, 1995). Whether or not these groups differ in the overall level of violence they experience, the evidence suggests that the descriptive characteristics of the assaults are very similar (Torres, 1991; Wyatt, 1992). However, the same act can have very different meanings depending on many features that shape perceptions and behavior, including the age of the victim, her relationship with the perpetrator, culture, social class, sexual orientation, previous history of violence, perceived intent of the violence, and perceived causes and effects of the violence (Murphy and O'Leary, 1994). Victims from oppressed racial, ethnic, or cultural groups or who are lesbian or bisexual face additional challenges that may influence their strategies and resources for recovery (Brown and Root, 1990; Sue and Sue, 1990; Wyatt, 1992; Garnets and Kimmel, 1993; Schriver, 1995). Most studies of the consequences of violence look at impairments; only a few studies examine resilience and strengths as protectors against untoward outcomes or as alternative results to impairment (Gilfus, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The social, cultural, religious and economic factors that contribute to violence against women in include male dominance, gender inequality, superiority of males to females, females being seen as the weaker sex and females economic dependence on males. Some of the major health problems associated with violence against women are depression, suicide, murder, sexually

transmitted diseases (HIV/AIDS), substance abuse, physical injuries, high mortality, sudden death and high blood pressure. In the study, different forms of violence and they include heating, rape, maltreatment, humiliation, verbal abuse, widowhood practices, early marriage, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced prostitution and trafficking in women.

At this juncture, it is necessary to see the influence of culture as a constraint that presents itself in the pursuit of the goals of eliminating all forms of violence against women. Even though culture is not static, but dynamic, it has a role to play in violence against women. The influence of culture has really affected women's responses to violence against them, even when they feel aggrieved at having been dehumanized, they choose to live with the situation rather than opt not to tolerate.

Violence against women is usually under reported even though it is a criminal act. For instance, disputes within the family and different forms of physical abuse are not seen as criminal acts by the perpetrators, the victims themselves or by the legal system. Some women are battered regularly by their husbands but they hardly report these cases because in many cases, they are further humiliated by security agents under the pretence that it is a minor offence of two people fighting or that it is a "family matter".

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Government should organize workshops and seminars in both urban and rural areas. Also non-government organizations should make wider their sensitization projects to the rural areas through electronic and print media. To ensure that the awareness of violence against women permeates the grassroots, non-governmental organizations should work with Ministry of Social Welfare and Women Affairs.

2.   There should be institutional mechanisms where women and girls who are victims of violence can feel free to report acts of violence against them in a safe and confidential environment.

3.   There is need for counselling centres to be established and adequate provisions should be made to eliminate violence against women in our society.

4.   Government and non-governmental organizations should make efforts to establish these agencies that deal with violence against women in the rural areas. This will enable women in the rural area to have access to these agencies and benefit from their services just as women in the urban area.

5.   Men who are perpetrators of physical violence against women should have a change of attitude. They should understand that beating women for not leaving up to their expectations and performing their roles well as wives and mothers is not the only way to correct them. Dialogue may be used as a corrective measure.

6.   Victims of violence against women should avoid this culture of silence and not reporting their cases to these agencies. They should be eager to visit these agencies in order to alleviate their problem and not to resign to their fate.

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