

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE COMPLICITY OF THE CHURCH: A CRITIQUE

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ABSTRACT

The problem of domestic violence is as old as history in nearly all the nations of the world Nigeria inclusive. This vice is considered to be of negative consequences to families, school, church and the larger society. Lately, there has been increase on the reports of domestic violence in the national dailies in Nigeria. Many spouses were battered to the extent of losing some of their body parts such as eyes, legs, hands and other parts of the body. Many people have equally lost their lives to domestic violence. Nigerian is predominantly Christian society or at best secular society; both Muslims and Christians are supposed to be the stronghold of morals in the society. However, this is not so on the issue of domestic violence because some of the marriages that were solemnized in the church were actually reported to be homes of violence. This paper therefore discusses domestic violence and the complicity of the church: A critique. The research work adopts descriptive, historical and sociological methods. The findings reveal that domestic violence is actually prevalence in our contemporary society. Also domestic violence is bedrock of tension, social crisis and discords in the society. It shows that, the church has not been doing enough to curtail the menace of domestic violence. In fact, the research reveals the complicities of the church on the issues of domestic violence in these ways: asking the victims to persevere in marriage and fast and pray for the perpetrators to change, preaching of no divorce and no marriage, no ministry and marriage is forever, Preaching that lack of submission on the part of the wife causes the husband to unleash terror on the wife, discrimination against those that take the bold step of divorce as a result of domestic violence in the church. The work recommends that, religious leaders should step up efforts for proper orientation for would be couples on how to forestall domestic violence. Church should be made a place of comfort for the victims of domestic violence. Lastly, the church owes its members biblical teachings and educational programs that facilitates awareness of domestic violence and its psychological, sociological, legal and moral consequences.

Keywords: Domestic, Violence, Complicity, Church, Critique.

INTRODUCTION

According to National population commission, female population accounted for more than half of the population in Nigeria. As a matter of fact to maximize economic and political development of

Nigeria, there is need to get as many women as possible involved and this requires a lot of encouragements and liberation from incessant injustice and alienation against them. One of the injustice women are experiencing over the years is domestic violence which had send some of them to untimely grave. Reports from various quarters confirmed that in Nigeria alone an average of 300-350 women are killed every year by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends or male relations. Some are into serious psychological depression that would only take the grace of God for them to come out of it. However, it should be noted that domestic violence is not limited to women alone, there are some women too that do abuse their husbands hence; domestic violence is seen as any violation of fundamental human rights of the two people in marriage. While some women cried out, some for fear of stigmatization refused to talk about it, hence suffer in silence. Meanwhile, the church that is expected to be a succor for such people in abusive relationships seems not to be helping because divorce and separation is never encouraged.

It is against this background that this paper examined domestic abuse, various forms of domestic violence in our contemporary society, why people who finds themselves in abusive relationship not crying out, the consequences of staying in abusive relationships, religious body's roles in the matter. All these issues are very germane for discussion because domestic abuse is presently spreading like a wide fire and needs to be addressed promptly. Even though some people are saying the churches are complicit, could this be true? Therefore for clarity purposes, this paper will be divided to different subsections and possible solutions to the problem will be proffered.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The two key words in domestic violence will be considered before proper clarification of the word will be done. Domestic is a word which is synonymous with home keeping or running of family and relations. The word is also related to house chores the contest of this paper is concerned with the home keeping and running of family and relations. Violence on the other hand is an act of physical force that causes or is intended to cause harm. The damage inflicted by the violence may be physical, psychological or bothⁱ. There are different types of violence depending on the behavioral pattern of the person involved. These are homicide, assault, robbery and rapeⁱⁱ.

Violence is equally seen as a form of power over women and vice versa. The use of violence is found to be bad and make most involved to be vulnerable and discourages them from challenging patriarchy. It is imperative to note that it is not only about men being violent, but there are evidences that suggest that men commits about 90 percent of all violence.ⁱⁱⁱ There is a global picture of violence against women. The United Nations in its declaration on the elimination of violence against women in 1993 defines domestic violence as an aspect of violence against women^{iv}.

Domestic violence therefore is refers to any abuse which include physical, emotional, sexual or financial between husband and wife or intimate partners living in same household. Domestic violence is a vicious attack between family members especially married couples, people that cohabit and people in relationship. It is a destructive behavior in an intimate relationship where one of the spouses tyrannizes and oppresses the other. Domestic violence is not only predominant among married couples; there are cases of abuse among the dating, cohabiting and other amorous relationships. It is often said that women are mostly victims of domestic violence. Meanwhile, there are reports of men who are victims of domestic violence in our contemporary society.

TYPES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Having given the conceptual clarification of domestic violence, it is imperative at this juncture to list out some of the domestic violence that is prevalent in our contemporary society. Some of this domestic violence will be discussed succinctly below:

- i. Physical violence
- ii. Emotional violence
- iii. Psychological violence
- iv. Sexual violence
- v. Neglect as a form of domestic violence
- vi. Spiritual violence
- vii. Cultural violence
- viii. Financial violence^v

Physical Violence:

Physical abuse is hitting or beating of a spouse. It involves physical aggression directed at one's spouse, often a husband towards his wife. It was discovered that some men do this out of anger and in the process, women are left injured and physically inflicted with bruises, pains and in extreme cases, loss of their lives as a result of such injuries. The type of injuries inflicted upon spouses varies. Some are whipped, beaten, smashed against the wall or floors, tied and kept in upright position for long period. Also, spouses had been knifed, poured acid on and even gunned down. To buttress these points are the reports of physical abuse reported by Nigerian dailies. A man physically abused his wife, which is a popular gospel artist till she died in Nigeria. A lady recently refused to work an isle with a man who has been physically abusing her till she lost her pregnancy^{vi}. All these and many more are physical violence.

Sexual Violence:

This is one of the dehumanizing abuses. It includes all forms of sexual assaults, harassment and exploitation. It involves forcing a person to participate in sexual activities. It is also the employment, use of persuasion, inducement and coercion of any form to engage in a non-consensual sexual contact. It has been affirmed that men that are physically abusing their wives are equally capable of violating them sexually. Marital rape is one of the most common types of domestic violence. Sex which is often viewed as a secret; forbidden and sacred thing in the olden days is no longer taken serious in our contemporary society^{vii}. Wives have been forced into sexual activities which have led to health problems such as injury and mental health problems.

Neglect as a form of Domestic Violence:

Neglect according to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary is to fail to take care of somebody or something. It is the fact of not giving enough attention or care^{viii}. One of the reasons for marriage in nearly all religions is for companionship. When this is lacking in marriage and relationship, it results in chaos. Neglect as a form of domestic violence is the inability of a spouse to adequately give the attention, affection, love and companionship needed at any given time. Neglect as a domestic violent is the failure by a spouse to provide conditions that are essential for the overall

development of the entire family. Spousal neglect is an error of omission of the psychological and emotional needs of the spouse. There are numerous types of neglects in domestic violence these are; physical, emotional and medical neglects. It is imperative to know that spousal neglect is the bedrock of all other forms of domestic violence, because a spouse who is cared for, loved and have access to basic needs of life, whose spouse listens to and protects cannot be said to be an abused spouse.

Emotional Abuse:

In this type of abuse, the abuser is targeting the self-worth and esteem of the abused. In this type of domestic violence, the abuser makes use of ridicule, insults, accusations, infidelity and ignores the partner^{ix}. The perpetrators targets the emotional and self-worth of the abused. Once this is achieved, the victim will be at the mercy of the predator. The totality of the victim's injury, inflicted bruises and pains cannot be seen physically. Emotionally abused person is an angry, sad, depressed, and battered person without self-worth and self-esteem and sometimes have deliberate suicidal feelings, isolation from family, friends and neighbors^x.

Economic Abuse:

This is a form of domestic violence in which the perpetrator takes hold and controls the family resources and denies the other partner access to it. This type of violence mostly affects women, especially those that are not working and sometimes the working class. The husband leaves the responsibility of home maintenance, school fees, and child-rearing and health care bills on the woman. It is imperative to note that, some working class women could not purchase something of their choice without their partner's approval. That is, some economic abused women have no control of their money because their husbands are in charge. The worst part of it is that some women have been lured into having a joint Bank account with their husbands, where all their wages are going into. This act is done by their husbands to monitor how their wives spend their money if at all they are allowed to do so. Some women are even denied access to their Credit/Debit cards by their husbands.

Women are economically abused by their husbands who forced them into being full housewives, though they have the capacity/capability to work. It has been discovered that some men are doing this in order to subjugate their wives and make them be at their mercy. An economically abused woman is full of anger and resentment.

Spiritual Violence:

A spiritual violated person is one who has been manipulated spiritually, as a result of his or her spiritual beliefs. Spiritual violence is equally dominating, exploiting and manipulating someone spiritually. In the context of this paper, spiritual violence is considered to be when one of the spouses is using religious beliefs to manipulate the abused in order to dominate, exploit, subjugate and control the abused. It has been argued that women are mostly the perpetrators of spiritual violence. Some women have used some spiritual power to have total control over their husbands.

Interestingly, some people are of the view that such women sought spiritual help to subdue their husband as a last resort to all forms of domestic violence meted on them. Equally, some religious leaders especially in Christianity often misuse the bible, by quoting the bible in isolation and out of context to suit the situations at hand. "God hates divorce" is one of such words that has made

domestic violence blossom among Christians. Spiritual violence also happens when spiritual disciplines and belief systems are used to make others live up to a spiritual standard^{xi}. This singular act has led to the death of so many people, while it has made some others go into depression and attempted suicide. Another way a spouse can be violated spiritually is by depriving his/her right to practice a religion of choice. Women are often victims of this as they are forced into practicing the religion of their husbands. This also has created lots of problems.

Why domestic violence?

Domestic violence is spreading like a wide fire in Nigeria and it has become a social problem that needs to be studied to its root causes. If domestic violence is left unabated the end result will not be palatable for all and sundry. This part of the work therefore traces the fundamental causes of domestic violence.

Temperament

Temperament is a peculiar nature of an individual. We have some people who are naturally calm and peaceful. Also there are people who are hot temper, easily upset and short fused and thereby prone to anger. Hot tempered people are prone to slapping, and hitting their spouses out of anger. Temperament is a number one factor that causes domestic violence. "Psychologist has confirmed that some temperamental people are more prone to anger and their anger can be exercised in a violent way. Domestic violence is inevitable once you are married to such partner"^{xii} Also, people with hot temperament cannot put their anger under control; mostly these people are equally involved in other violent behaviors which they often regret later. A lawyer affirmed that ninety percent of women who are imprisoned are there as a result of murdered cases which they have committed out of annoyances and anger.^{xiii}

Financial problem

Financing the home is one of the factors that place strains on the domestic bonds. Financial problem has contributed immensely to domestic violence, it is a common say that a hungry man is an angry man. Financial problem is caused by number of things such as: unemployment, low- income and reckless spending. Equally when one of the spouses is overwhelmed by the burden of financing the home especially women the end result of this is domestic violence which is often caused as a result of men's ego. Women are easily over whelmed if family financial burden is on them; this usually results in marital crises which often graduated to domestic violence. Also, reckless spending on the part of husbands that drinks and are into extra marital affairs also results into domestic violence. Some homes are battle grounds as a result of financial problem.

Cultural beliefs

Culture is the total ways of life of some groups of people. Culture is transmitted from one generation to another. Nigeria is a country whereby all the tribes that made up the country believed that once a woman is married she must remain married forever. This singular cultural belief has made domestic violence flourish in Nigeria. Some Nigerian culture enables domestic violence, a divorcee is often see as a failure, the shame of marital failure by divorcing or separating from a violent spouse has made some victims of domestic violence stayed with their abusers. The culture that teaches a woman to remain married forever and persevere in the face of domestic violence in other to take care of the children has contributed to death of many women in Nigeria. Also in some

culture it is a taboo for a woman to divorce the husband, it is believed in such culture that such a woman has brought shame to the immediate and extended family and most especially her mother that brought her up, for this reason mothers would always encourage their daughters to stay married in the midst of whatever she might be passing through in the marriage. Forced and early marriage is another cultural practice that enables domestic violence. There are stories of child brides especially in Northern part of Nigeria that are being abused by their husbands. Also, it was reported that one of these child brides poisoned her husband in order to be freed^{xiv}. Equally stories have been told about older men who married girls that are their children's age mates the end result of such marriages is domestic violence^{xv}.

Refusing Sexual Intimacy:

In African society women are always advised to give their bodies for sex to the husband because they belong to him. This teaching is also one of the biblical teachings that subjugates woman. A situation whereby a woman tries to resist sex, she may end up being abused by her husband.

Church as an Enabler

It has been discovered that domestic violence is not a respecter of Christian homes because it is equally prevalent among Christian couples. There are stories of pastors, Deacons and Deaconesses and some highly placed men and women in the church that are predators. Emotional and physical violence are common among Christian couples. Accused fingers have been pointed on the church for being an enabler of domestic violence as a result of some teachings that church leaders use to pacify victims of domestic violence to stay in their marriages. A particular Bible passage Ephesians 5:22 that reads "wife submit yourselves to your own husbands as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the head of the wife" has been quoted out of context by church leaders to enable an abuser. This particular Bible passage has been used to subjugate women in Christendom. The case of Nigerian gospel artists Osinachi Nwachukwu^{xvi} who died this year comes to mind here. She was reported to have died of domestic violence which she failed to report for the fear of being stigmatized. This was actually confirmed by those that are close to her including her children, and this man happened to be a Pastor. Other examples of domestic violence abound in the society and in online recently there was a particular Deacon by the name Engineer Taju Olarewaju who boasted and threatening that he would send his wife to early grave.^{xvii} It is imperative to know that some doctrines are placed over the safety of victims of domestic violence. Marital permanence and keeping of vows such as for better or for worst are parts of these teachings.

Substances and Alcohol use:

One of the main reasons identified for domestic violence is substance abuse and alcohol use. Drunkards are mostly known to be temporary out of their senses as a result of alcohol and drugs. These sets of abusers behave irrationally, they smell alcohol, stagger, above all they get annoyed easily. Their spouses are always at the receiving ends for trying to stop them from drinking or abusing drugs. These groups of predators are equally characterized by adultery, thereby neglecting their homes and responsibilities which in turn lead to violence.

Possessiveness and Jealousy:

Some man battered their wives out of jealousy and possessiveness. This comes in number of ways such as: seen their wives talking with another man, having another man phone numbers and social media friendship with opposite sex often results in domestic violence.

Lack of sanction:

It is often said that the perpetrators of domestic violence are not punished or sanction by the church or their communities. This simple act of handling domestic violent with levity hands has made the vice of domestic violence flourish in Nigeria.

Physical build up and emotional weakness of women:

It is often belief that, some women are passive, dependent and sometimes emotionally weak.^{xviii} This in no small measure has always aided abuse of women by men.

Learning from parents:

A child that grows up seen the trends of abuse in his home may likely be an abuser in future. An environment or the home a child grows up may likely influence the kind of a spouse he will become in future. This is because children learn by example.

Identifiable cases of domestic violence

The focus of this part of the work is on some cases of domestic violence victims identified in the course of this work. It is noteworthy that domestic violence is actually prevalent in our contemporary society and it comes in diverse ways. Meanwhile, experiences of victims' differs, a glimpse into experiences of some victims will come up at this point. The case of domestic violence is not related to woman alone there are men who equally suffer abuse from their wives.

An abused man tells his ordeal

A man who suffers domestic violence domestic violence narrates his ordeals, "my wife is from Ondo, we have been married for more than 20years now, we have grown up children, my wife works with the state government, I am also a civil servant. She is a whore who can sleep with anything in trousers, she drinks, party, and club. I have developed high blood pressure as a result of what she is doing to me. I can say she is the husband while I am the wife. She has attacked me with nearly anything you can talk of. To worsen the situation she has turned my children against me. My life is in danger; I am under her demonic influence. I have caught her poisoning my food on one occasion; it was my family that intervened. All these have taken a toll on my health".

A woman tells her story

"I am a victim of teenage pregnancy. My parents abandoned me with the man that impregnated me. He is a drug addict and a drunkard. He makes money from his business but he never cared for me and the children. I feed him and our children from the meager money I make as a laborer. Meanwhile, he still beats and rapes me at will; I believe he delights in seeing me suffering. I have been running away from him many times but my parents insist I return to my husband's house because of my children. Our pastors equally intervene in my returning to him. He has promised not to touch me many times but he would always repeat it".

Here is a story from another woman

“I got married to a married man. I was faced with lots of difficulties in my 15 year marriage. I have been beaten with horsewhip, belt, cane, wire, planks, cutlass and anything he could lay his hands on. Our neighbors have rushed me to hospital many times as a result of beating. I fled his house when he threatened to kill me with a locally made gun I have not returned there since then.” This victim said, she endured all these because of her only child for the man. “I was the only child my mother had for my father; I don’t want this issue to become a trend in my family. I don’t want my child to pass through what I faced from my step mother, after my mother divorced my father. Our pastor has counseled, prayed and encouraged me to keep praying for him. Meanwhile, I have fasted, prayed, begged and visited mountains but nothing seems to work until I left him”.

The story of Osinachi Nwachukwu

Osinachi Nwachukwu a popular gospel singer, who died on April 8, 2022, was reported to have died of domestic violence. Her elder sister Favour, reported that, “my sister died as a result of a cluster of blood in her chest, she suffered this after she was kicked by her husband, Peter Nwachukwu. She kept all she was going through from her relatives, friends, pastors and church members. She was advised by some of the people that know what she was passing through but she kept telling them God is against divorce and separation in marriage^{xix}”. The minister of women affairs Pauline Tallen, visited Osinachi’s house and reported that “the children said their mummy was always in fear and was always sad because their father would always beat their mother and collect all monies from her, even when she cooks, he would be shouting and beating her.”^{xx}

Church and Domestic violence.

Actually it would be wrong to affirm that church has not been making frantic efforts to curtail domestic violence in the society especially among their members. They preach against it both on the pulpit, marriage seminars and even religious conferences. From our interactions with some church members, some churches for many years have been supporting women and men who experience domestic abuse by helping them to relocate, provide advice and counseling. But majority do not know that the support is there. However, what one could say is that church is guilty of inaction in the aspect of lack of continuous proper follow up of the victim of domestic violence. The point being made here is that at times church can help to perpetrate it if they fail to offer support when needed. There may be reasons for this, sometimes it is because church leaders don’t understand or are not willing to accept that domestic abuse occurs within their congregations. Another part of the problem is overwhelming male leadership in the church today and most importantly because they are key decision makers in those churches and domestic violence probably may be the least of their priorities. Some even advise victims to stay and pray, trusting God that the man would change. All they are after is to avoid divorce as it is against the Biblical injunctions.

Those that are married to Pastors are even the worst that the church protects from the public when they are abused. Rather than asking them to quit, all they do is to tell them to submit and forgive the abuser. Instead of addressing domestic violence sufficiently, but sometimes they are enabling and concealing it. The fact that we reported that psychologists and survivors say the doctrine of headship that a man is to be the head of the woman, as Christ was head of the church, and a woman

is often twisted by husbands to justify abuse, was seen as a direct attack on church authority, and a cover for feminist agenda.

However, in spite of the fact that women all over the world are tweeting personal stories of domestic and sexual abuse to expose violence and sexism in the church has not solve the problem either. There has always been this fear of judgment from other members of the congregation and they often blame themselves when interpreting the scriptures. For example, not being faithful and pious enough to wait for answers to their prayers for the abuse to stop and this means they have to stay in abusive relationships for longer so as not to be accused of lack of faith in God.

But the question is that, are faith leaders listening? This is majorly because we are in a patriarchal world where men almost every time have the say. Besides it might be as a result of lack of training in how to respond to reports of domestic abuse. Even when clergy are trained, they fear they are still ill- prepared to effectively respond. So, at times we may not need to blame the church or the clergies out rightly for lack of prompt response to domestic abuse. Church these days continue to assert that “submit” is a biblical truth for marriage. For this, we may logically conclude that the church is complicity and a thorough understanding of the context of that passage would probably have helped the church to have a rethink on the kind of advice given to victims of domestic abuse.

Deducible Facts from Victim’s Experiences

The encountered with these victims of domestic violence shows that:

- i. Domestic violence is prevalence in our contemporary society
- ii. Some religious teachings encourages domestic violence
- iii. Men just as women can be victims of domestic violence
- iv. Some cultural beliefs also encourages domestic violence
- v. Church is not doing enough to forestall domestic violence

Effects of domestic violence

Domestic violence has grievous consequences on the victims, who are always sad, fearful and insecure. Children from these homes often end up wayward because of the kind of environment they grow up and what they watch their parents doing. Also, they perform woefully in the school as a result of mental torture they experience whenever their parents are fighting. Such children are often times abandoned and become street children. Evidences abound that some women have lost their lives as a result of domestic violence^{xxi}.

CONCLUSION

In view of what has been discussed so far, this paper would be concluded with a strong advice to our women out there that are being maltreated by their spouses. The first step is for women to speak. The second is that the church needs to listen to them and believe them that it happens. The instinct of the church must shift from protecting reputations to protecting the vulnerable.

ENDNOTES:

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ⁱⁱ <https://www.britannical.com>

ⁱⁱⁱ Sylvia Walby: *The Future of Feminism*, (Polity Press, Cambridge. 2011) quoted in Haralambos & Holbon, sociology themes and perspectives. Collins, London, 2013

^{iv} (Haralambos2013)

^v <https://www.womenagainstabuse.org/education-resources/learn-about-abuse/types-of-domestic-violence>. Accessed 15/4/2022.

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^{xi} Jeannie Cochrane, Spiritual Abuse: A Research Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Spiritual Directors' Training Program of Spiritual Growth Ministries. 250.

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^{xiii} Barrister Adabembe Rotimi is a practicing lawyer who has done many cases on domestic violence and divorce in Nigeria. Interviewed on 20/3/2022.

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^{xvii} <https://www.kanyidaily.com/2022/05/daughters-gang-up-against-father-as-he-threatens-to-beat-their-mum-to-death-video-html/amp> retrieved on 16/06/2022.

^{xviii} Samuel Waje Kunhiyop *African Christian Ethics*, (Kenya: Hippo Books 2018), p. 245.

^{xix} (Google 2022)

^{xx} <https://punching.com/what-osinanchi's-children-told-me-women-affairs-minister//?amp>.accessed 15/4/2022

^{xxi} (Google 2022)