

Domestic Violence against Men: Balancing the Gender Issues in Nigeria

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Abstract Domestic violence is a reality in many parts of the world. However, domestic violence is mostly seen as synonymous with violence against women. Women only, are often perceived to be the victims of domestic violence, and men as the perpetrators, while most men victims continued to suffer in silence from their intimate partners. This paper studies the phenomenon of domestic violence against men, with the women as the perpetrators or aggressors, with a view towards gender balancing. The paper investigates the causes of domestic violence against men and proffers solution to its eradication.

Keywords Domestic violence, Intimate partners, Women as perpetrators, Eradication, Gender balancing

1. Introduction

Domestic violence, also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, dating abuse, and intimate partner violence (IPV), is a pattern of behaviour which involves the abuse by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, cohabitation, dating or within the family. Domestic violence can take many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, battery), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive / covert abuse and economic deprivation [1]. It is perpetrated by, and on both men and women.

Domestic violence is violence that is perpetrated by intimate partners and other family members, and that is manifested through physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, economic abuse, and acts of omission [2]. Domestic violence is therefore a mix of physical and coercive behaviours designed to manipulate and dominate another competent adult or adolescent [3], to achieve compliance and dependence. The term *intimate partner violence* (IPV) is often used synonymously, other terms have included wife beating, wife battering, man beating, husband battering, relationship violence, domestic abuse, spousal abuse, and family violence with some legal jurisdictions having specific definitions [4]. Intimate partner violence is gender based and is a serious public health problem that cuts across nations, cultures, religion, and class [5] [6].

Laws on domestic violence vary by country. While it is

generally outlawed in the Western World, this is not the case in many developing countries. For instance, in 2010, the United Arab Emirates' Supreme Court ruled that a man has the right to physically discipline his wife and children as long as he does not leave physical marks. The social acceptability of domestic violence also differs by country. While in most developed countries domestic violence is considered unacceptable by most people, in many regions of the world the views are different. According to a UNICEF survey, the percentage of women aged 15–49 who think that a husband is justified in hitting or beating his wife under certain circumstances is, for example: 90% in Afghanistan and Jordan, 87% in Mali, 86% in Guinea and Timor-Leste, 81% in Laos, 80% in Central African Republic. Refusing to submit to a husband's wishes is a common reason given for justification of violence in developing countries: for instance 62.4% of women in Tajikistan justify wife beating if the wife goes out without telling the husband; 68% if she argues with him; 47.9% if she refuses to have sex with him [7]. 80% of women surveyed in rural Egypt said that beatings were common and often justified, particularly if the woman refused to have sex with her husband [8]. In a study carried out by Oyediran and Abanihe (2005), 65% of the women in the study in Nigeria hold that a man is justified to beat his wife [9]. In parts of the Third World generally and in West Africa in particular, domestic violence is prevalent and reportedly justified and condoned in some cultures. For instance, 56% of Indian women surveyed by an agency justified wife-beating on grounds like – bad cook, disrespect to in-laws, producing more girls, leaving home without informing the husband, among others. Statistics show that 25% of women in Dakar and Kaolack in Senegal are subjected to physical violence from their partners and that very few admit they are beaten – while 60% of domestic violence victims turn to a family member, in three-quarter of

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the cases they are told to keep quiet and endure the beatings. The report also reveals that a law passed in the Senegalese penal code punishing domestic violence with prison sentences and fines is poorly enforced due to religious and cultural resistance. In Ghana, spousal assaults top the list of domestic violence [10].

Domestic Violence has been a serious problem in most societies throughout history. Physical violence in particular is very common among intimate partners in both developed and developing countries. Physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury or harm [11]. Physical violence includes but it is not limited to, scratching, pushing, shoving and throwing, grabbing, biting, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, burning, use of a weapon and use of restraints or ones' body size, or strength against another person. Also the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defines Violence against Women as 'any act of gender based violence that results in or 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' [12]. Domestic Violence is the intentional and persistent abuse of anyone in the home in a way that causes pain, distress or injury. It refers to any abusive treatment of one family member by another, thus violating the law of basic human rights. It includes battering of intimate partner and others, sexual abuse of children, marital rape and traditional practices that are harmful to women. Female genital mutilation is a form of domestic violence [13]. Incidents of domestic violence include honour battery, beating, torture, acid baths and even death through honour killing [14] [15].

2. Domestic Violence against Men

Domestic violence against men is a term describing violence that is committed against men by the man's intimate partner [16]. It is a rare finding [17]. Even though there have been so much hues and cries about domestic violence against women across the globe, domestic violence against men is a reality. It occurs virtually in every society in varying degrees. The problem in conducting studies that seek to describe violence in terms of gender is the amount of silence, fear and shame that results from abuse within families and relationships. This is why domestic violence against men remains largely unreported. Gender differences in reporting violence have been cited as another explanation for mixed results [18]. According to a 2004 survey in Canada, the percentages of males being physically or sexually victimized by their partners was 6% versus 7% for women. However, females reported higher levels of repeated violence and were more likely than men to experience serious injuries; 23% of females versus 15% of males were faced with the most serious forms of violence including being beaten, choked, or threatened with or having a gun or knife used against them. Also, 21% of women versus 11% of men were likely to report experiencing more than 10 violent incidents.

According to a report by the United States Department of Justice, a survey of 16,000 Americans showed 22.1% of women and 7.4% of men reported being physically assaulted by a current or former spouse, cohabiting partner, boyfriend or girlfriend, or date in their lifetime [19]. A 2010 survey of over 21,000 residents of England and Wales by the UK Home Office showed that 7% of women and 4% of men were victims of domestic abuse in the last year [20]. Domestic violence against men has been on steady increase in Kenya and its assuming a worrisome dimension. It has been reported that in 2011, almost five hundred thousand men were beaten by their wives in Kenya [21]. The rising cases of husband battery is blamed on increasing "female superiority complex".

According to Robert (2012), the BBC reported that a men's group in Kenya named Maendeleo Ya Wanaume ("**Progress for Men**") announced an initiative to protest what is becoming a growing problem of female perpetrated domestic abuse in that country. The protest will entail a nationwide boycott of meals made by their wives and partners and is supposed to encourage men to eat away from home together and share their experiences with domestic abuse whether physical or emotional. In Kenyan culture, eating your wife's meal is said to be a very important part of a man's expression of appreciation for his wife. Last year, the group conducted its own survey of Central and Nairobi provinces and found that up to 460,000 men said they had been subjected to some sort of domestic abuse. The two provinces have a combined population of more than seven million people. **This figure represents an increase from 160,000 cases in 2009 [22].** Many women have responded defensively to the news and statistics. They say the rash of domestic violence reflects deep-seated frustration with husbands and fathers they often describe as dead-beat. The chairman of Maendeleo ya Wanawake -- "Progress for Women" -- in Kiswahili, publicly stated that men who don't provide for their families should be beaten. . . **the result of which are deformed faces, broken legs, burnt bodies and chopped private parts [23].**

Another example of female brutality against men is the sorry tale of Eddie Kidd, a brain-damaged former motorbike stuntman, who revealed how he was severely battered constantly by his wife. He told The Sun on Sunday: 'She had started drinking heavily and would just not change. She would slap me in the face and punch me in the chest and arms, strangle me and say horrible things. As a man, any man, to be beaten by your wife is desperately humiliating and, in a way, shameful. I ended up blaming myself - thinking she had taken too much - or, that it was my fault. I took on so much when I was riding. Then after all the stunts, all the fanfare, I am sat in a chair being beaten by my wife and there is nothing I can do.' Mrs Kidd was arrested for domestic violence last December after her husband's family reported her to police days after the couple split up. She was jailed for five months for four assaults last month [24].

Furthermore, many men have also been killed by their female partners, just as many women have been killed by

their male partners. Statistics show that of those killed by an intimate partner about three quarters are female and about a quarter is male. In 1999 in the United States 1,218 women and 424 men were killed by an intimate partner [25], and 1181 females and 329 males were killed by their intimate partners in 2005 [26]. In England and Wales about 100 women are killed by partners or former partners each year while 21 men were killed in 2010. In 2008, in France, 156 women and 27 men were killed by their intimate partners [27]. Women who often experience higher levels of physical or sexual violence from their current partner, were 44%, compared with 18% of men to suffer from an injury. According to Daily Mail[28], Theresa Rafacz pleaded guilty to manslaughter (killing her husband) and was jailed for two years after Belfast Crown Court was told how she 'lost control' when she came home from work to find her husband Piotr drunk while he was meant to be looking after their three-year-old son. Cases in which women are faced with extremely abusive partners, results in the females having to fear for their lives due to the violence they had faced. In addition, statistics show that 34% of women feared for their lives, and 10% of men feared for their lives as well [29].

3. Domestic Violence against Men: The Nigerian Experience

The Nigeria society is a highly patriarchal one, in which men have bloated egos. Though there is a prevalence of domestic violence against women in Nigeria as many women have died, brutalised or maimed for life by their violent male counterparts [30], however, there is also a prevalence of domestic violence against men, which has largely remained under-reported. According to Watts and Zimmermann (2002), the under-reporting of domestic violence is almost universal and may be due to the sensitive nature of the subject. Husband punching, slapping, kicking, nail scratching, sex deprivation and killing are realities that occur in Nigeria [31].

The tragedy is that men who find themselves in this situation hide and do not talk openly about their experience, as talking about it will bruise their ego and expose them to ridicule in a patriarchal society. *I was beaten by my wife* is a misnomer! It is unheard of in a male egoistic society. Hence such men prefer to suffer in silence until it becomes critical to the point of likely death. An instance is that of Israel Obi, who was a victim of hot vegetable oil bath by his wife. In His words; "I got married to Victoria in May 2005 and settled in Odorasanya in Ijebu Igbo of Ogun State, Nigeria. It all started when my wife influenced me about our relocation to Lagos and I did not know it was the beginning of my trauma. Victoria was influenced by our new environment (hustle and bustle in Lagos) and she started coming home late from her shop. And anytime I cautioned my wife, she turned the situation into an argument. She changed from my loving wife to an abusive spouse calling me different names. On that fateful night, we had an intense argument, and around

1.00am, Victoria came into my room and poured hot boiling vegetable oil on me. It was our neighbours from the other flats that took me to the hospital and I was there for a whole month. After my discharge from the hospital, she begged for forgiveness and we came together again as husband and wife. But barely two weeks after, I was receiving a phone call from a distant aunt but she thought it was a conversation with an unknown mistress. She accused me of infidelity. She smashed the phone on the ground and started destroying the gadgets in the home. When I tried to stop her, she became more aggressive and stabbed me with a knife [32].

In a study conducted by Dienne and Gbeneol, (2009) at the General Outpatient Department of the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, out of a total of 48 victims of domestic violence were identified of which 5 (10.4%) were males. In the study, the following are summaries of the case reports of some of the men abused by their wives.

Case 1:

A 36-year-old mechanical engineer working on an oil drilling platform presented with 2-day history of wound on the right leg. The injury was said to have been sustained during a fight with his wife who in annoyance poured hot water from a kettle on his leg. There had been previous episodes of disagreements with her in which she had physically abused him. He reported this present episode to the police and was asked to obtain a medical report from a physician. He refused divulging the cause of the disagreements. Physical examination revealed scratches on the neck, bruises on the head, and superficial burns on the right calf which was painted with gentian violet. A diagnosis of husband abuse was made. He was treated. He was also given the medical report for the police.

Case 2:

A 43-year-old commercial bank manager presented in the company of a policeman with a 1-day history of wounds on the head, neck, and right arm. He had had a scuffle with his wife who had been suspecting him of infidelity because he was always returning home late from work. He came for the purpose of obtaining medical report from a physician for the police. Physical examination revealed bruises on the head and right arm, scratches on the neck, and welts on the left upper arm. A diagnosis of domestic violence against husband was made. He was treated, given the medical report, and counselled on adjusting his work schedule to avoid further occurrences.

Case 3:

A 42-year-old labourer with no formal education presented with scratches on the face and neck and bruises on the face. He was accompanied by his brothers who felt that the wife was unnecessarily aggressive and domineering. She was accused of irrationally demanding for money which he did not have, considering his occupation, hence will not want the marriage to continue. A diagnosis of domestic violence against husband was made. He was treated, counselled on ways of improving his income, and referred to the hospital

social workers for further management.

Case 4:

This 47-year-old farmer with secondary education was brought to the hospital by his wife and a policeman, with bruises on the head and scratches on the right upper arm. The injuries were sustained about 5 hours after a fight with the wife. He was said to be a problem drinker and was in the habit of beating his wife when drunk. He sustained these injuries when the wife reacted in self-defense and reported the incidence to the police. A diagnosis of domestic violence was made. He was treated of his wounds and referred to the psychiatrists for further management.

Case 5:

This 51-year-old trader with secondary education reported to the hospital with scratch marks on the face and bruises on the hand. These injuries were sustained during a fight with the wife. He claimed that his wife was making excessive financial demands which he could not satisfy hence the frequent disagreements, culminating in fights. He reported to the police and was referred to the hospital to obtain medical report. A diagnosis of domestic violence against husband was made. He was treated, given medical report, and counselled on how to improve his income [33].

4. Discrimination against Men as Victims of Domestic Violence

While it is a fact that women suffer as victims of domestic violence, it is also a fact that men suffer as victims of domestic violence as well. While the majority of domestic violence victims are women, male-oriented abuse occurs more often than many think. Naturally, men are stronger than women, but that does not necessarily make it easier for them to have their way all the time. The problem is that the man who suffers domestic violence is hardly given a listening ear. He is first of all assumed to be the aggressor even if he has bruises all over him. An abused man faces a shortage of resources, skepticism from the police and other major legal obstacles especially when it comes to gaining custody of his children from an abusive mother [34]. The various advocacy and sensitization is more or less in favour of women victims, thereby leaving the men victims to suffer in silence. There is great similarity between female and male victims and their abusers. The biggest difference is that male victims find themselves in the same position women were 30 years ago. Their problem is viewed as of little consequence, or they are to blame, and there are few available resources for male victims. Three-quarters of the men who contact an abuse shelter or hotline report that the agency would provide services only to women, and nearly two-thirds were treated as the abuser rather than the victim. University of New Hampshire researcher Murray Straus calls it "selective inattention" because of the total emphasis on female victims, despite what research has shown since 1977. Straus and his colleagues found that in minor violence, the incident rates

were equal for men and women. In cases of severe violence, more men were victimized than women, with 1.8 million women victims of severe violence and 2 million male victims of severe violence a year. Women suffer a greater amount of total injuries ranging from mild to serious, but when it comes to serious injuries where weapons and object use come into play, the injury rate may be about the same [35].

In domestic violence, man is culturally assumed as the aggressor and the victim a female. Current research provides little insight into the risks a man faces if he is assaulted by a woman in an intimate relationship. Family violence research has focused on the relative risks that men and women face and mask the high number of men at risk, because of the large number of women who are injured as a result of domestic violence. Our judicial systems are based on the premise that guilt follows the offender, not the offended. The opposite is the case in domestic violence against men in which shame and guilt becomes the hallmark of the victim with resultant possible multiple psychological effects such as drug and alcohol abuse, mood disorders, and suicide [36] [37]. The present analyses indicate that men are among those who are likely to be on the receiving end of acts of physical aggression [38]. The extent to which this involves mutual combat or the male equivalent to "battered women" is at present unresolved. Both situations are causes for concern. Straus (1997) has warned of the dangers involved—especially for women—when physical aggression becomes a routine response to relationship conflict. "Battered men"—those subjected to systematic and prolonged violence—are likely to suffer physical and psychological consequences, together with specific problems associated with a lack of recognition of their plight [39].

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

Battered husbands cut across all ages, educational levels, and socioeconomic classes. Male victims of domestic violence deserve the same recognition, sympathy, support, and services as do female victims.

Domestic violence mostly leaves the victim depressed and anxious irrespective of gender. There may be a resort to alcohol abuse or drugs or engage in unprotected sex. Domestic violence can even trigger suicide attempts. Consequently, male victims should be listened to and cared for. Male victims also must be prepared to speak out their situations. Because men are traditionally thought to be physically stronger than women, they might be less likely to talk about or report incidents of domestic violence in their heterosexual relationships due to embarrassment or fear of ridicule. They might also worry that the significance of the abuse will be minimized because they are men. Men should start by telling someone about the abuse, whether it's a friend, relative, health care provider or other close contact. At first, it might be difficult due to the male ego, but in the end, it is likely to bring about relief and the much-needed support.

Effective legislations to curb domestic violence against men must be put in place and enforced. Law enforcement agents should also accept that husband battering and other forms of domestic violence against men is a reality, from which men are to be protected. The brutality of a man by his wife should not be seen as a trivial domestic matter. The trials of women who batter or kill their husbands must be given wide publicity in order to serve as deterrence to others who may have such tendencies.

There should be greater advocacy to enlighten the public about the existence and reality of the evil of domestic violence against men by government agencies, religious groups and civil rights organizations. This will help in balancing the gender discourse on domestic violence and bring about better families in the Nigerian society.

Gender activism must involve a balance of power in relationships in order not to arrogate too much power to the women, who will then turn around to use such power to oppress the men. The Kenyan experience should be a lesson for all, if a well ordered society is our goal.

It is the contention of this paper, that as we protect the right of women in the marriages, so also should the rights of men be protected. Also just like women, men deserve protection from intimate partner brutality and abuse, and also have a right for better living as married men.

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