



DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: IT'S IMPLICATION FOR FAMILY STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence can be described as the maltreatment of an individual by a family related entity. Domestic violence has been a plague facing the family and overtime has grown to be hydra-headed monster that has intentionally and blatantly refused arrest. This study therefore, seeks to examine domestic violence and its implication on family stability. The aim of the study is to evaluate the effect of domestic violence on family stability. The study reveals some forms, causes and drivers of domestic violence. Based on the findings, there is an adverse effect of domestic violence on like the victim, children and the society. On these bases the study was concludes and further recommends that through greater awareness and engagement on the issue across sectors, community leaders, policy makers and practitioners should work together to address the underlying drivers of domestic violence, as well as strengthen prevention and support efforts for survivor with appropriate laws and policies.

Keyword: Domestic, Violence, Family, Stability, Abuse.

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INTRODUCTION

A family is the first social community in the life of any person or group of persons. It is from this that an individual attaches and understands the values of culture, assimilates the first social roles and acquires the experience of social behavior. In the family, this person takes their first steps, experiences the first joys and sorrows, and then, leaves the family and faces a big world. Then the person returns when he feels uncomfortable out there. The family is not just a simple set of

individuals engaging in their activities. It is a complex social formation. Each member of the family is both a unique individuality and an integral part of a whole family group. The family is a small social group. Individual intra-group processes and phenomena are typical here. At the same time, the family is distinguished from the other small groups by some peculiar features. They are marital or kinship ties among its members, a common way of life, special moral-psychological and emotional-ethical as well as legal relations.

Also, the family has other features like lifelong adherence to the family group (the family is not chosen, a person is born in it). In addition, it has the maximum heterogeneous composition of the group (age, gender, personal, social, professional, and other differences of family members). One more feature is the maximum degree of informal contact in the family and the increased emotional significance of family events. Any family is created with the purpose of satisfying some important needs for its members. However, this beautiful picture of an ideal family has been threatened over time by what we have termed domestic violence of family violence.

Family violence, also called domestic violence, intimate partner violence, relationship violence or inter-personal violence, is a pattern of intentionally violent or controlling behavior used by a person against a family member or intimate partner to gain and maintain power and control over that person, during and/or after the relationship. Violence against women is a major public health and human rights concern, with intimate partner violence and sexual violence among the most pervasive forms of violence against women (Campbell et al., 2014; Bott, et al., 2012). An intimate partner may be a married or dating couple or joined in domestic partnership. Some examples of “intentionally violent or controlling behavior include; control over someone’s schedule, does not allow access to the phone and/or monitors calls, limits use of the car or does not allow a car, persistent calling at work to check up or not allowing someone to work, does not permit use of birth control, name calling and/or threatening family, friends and pets destruction of property.

Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. The definition adds that domestic violence can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender, and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic and psychological abuse (Office of Violence Against Women, 2007). Domestic violence is also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence and intimate partner violence. It is a pattern of abusive behaviors by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation. Domestic violence, so defined, has many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects), or threats thereof, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect, and economic deprivation (Seimeniuk et al., 2010).

Domestic violence and abuse is not limited to obvious physical violence. It can mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment and stalking (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2011). Domestic violence occurs globally (UNICEF, 2005). Families from all social, racial economic, educational and religious backgrounds experience domestic violence in different ways. In the United States of America, each year, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner related physical assaults and rapes while men are victims of about 2.9 million intimate partner related physical assaults. 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, disrespectful to in-laws, producing more girls, leaving home without informing, among others.

Violence against women is a global public health problem that has serious adverse effects on women's physical, mental, and reproductive health. It is increasingly recognized as a public health issue because of the expanding evidence base and growth of research documenting the magnitude and health effects of violence against women. For the first time, global prevalence estimates have been calculated based on all existing data from population-based studies showing that worldwide, 35% of women have experienced either intimate partner violence (physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner) or non-partner sexual violence or both in their lifetime (WHO/GHO, 2018)

Global estimates published by WHO (2017) indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime. Report from VAWG (2018) showed that cases of domestic violence are an everyday occurrence for many women in Rivers state and across Nigeria. Physical violence and sexual assault are often perpetrated against women and children in households, but so too are other forms of abuse, such as financial disempowerment. Some research suggests that over 30 per cent of Nigerian women have experienced physical, sexual or emotional domestic violence during their lifetime. The report further reveal that the most prevalent forms of domestic violence reported were physical abuse and economic disempowerment of women by spouses/partners which has a lasting effect not only on survivors, but also intergenerational impacts on families and broader society. Amnesty International (2007) reports that a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers while girls are often forced into early marriage and are at risk of punishment if they attempt to escape from their husbands. More pathetic is the revelation of gross under reporting and non-documentation of domestic violence due to cultural factors (Afrolnews, 2007). It is the singular objective of this study to examine the effect of domestic violence as it regards family stability.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The medical literature defines domestic violence in different ways. In this article, domestic violence refers to the victimization of a person with whom the abuser has or has had an intimate, romantic, or spousal relationship. Domestic violence encompasses violence against both men and women and includes violence in gay and lesbian relationships.

Domestic violence consists of a pattern of coercive behaviors used by a competent adult or adolescent to establish and maintain power and control over another competent adult or adolescent (AuCoin, 2005). These behaviors, which can occur alone or in combination, sporadically or continually, include physical violence, psychological abuse, stalking, and nonconsensual sexual behavior.

Domestic violence (also named domestic abuse or family violence) is violence or other abuse in a domestic setting, such as in marriage or cohabitation. Domestic violence is often used as a synonym for intimate partner violence, which is committed by a spouse or partner in an intimate relationship against the other spouse or partner, and can take place in heterosexual or same-sex relationships, or between former spouses or partners. In its broadest sense, domestic

violence also involves violence against children, parents, or the elderly (Ellsberg et al., 2008). It takes a number of forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, reproductive, and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse such as choking, beating, female genital mutilation, and acid throwing that results in disfigurement or death.

The global dimension of the problem is therefore alarming. It is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, religion, income, ethnically and age (UNICEF 2005). Ose (2009) noted that domestic violence is the intentional and persistent abuse of any one 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 right.

Maryland (n.d), defines domestic violence “abuse” as the occurrence of one or more of the following acts between family or household members:

- Assault;
- An act that places a person in fear of imminent serious bodily harm;
- An act that causes serious bodily harm;
- Rape or sexual offense;
- Attempt rape or sexual offense; and
- Stalking.

False imprisonment, such as interference with freedom, physically keeping you from leaving your home or kidnapping you.

FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence takes many forms, which includes;

Physical Violence: Any act which causes physical harm as a result of unlawful physical force. Physical violence can take the form of, among others, serious and minor assault, deprivation of liberty, manslaughter, pushing, biting, hitting, burning, strangling, using a weapon, homicide (Taket et al., 2003). WHO (1996) observed that 20 to 50 percent of women from country to country have experience physical abuse at home.

Sexual Violence: Sexual violence is any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or coercion, acts to traffic a person or acts directed against a person's sexuality, regardless of the relationship to the victim.

Emotional Abuse: Emotional or psychological yelling, name calling, blaming, shaming and isolation are behavior that threaten, intimidate and undermines victims’ self-worth or self-esteem or controls the victims’ freedom. Emotional abuse can even involve humiliating the victim privately or publicly, controlling what he can and cannot do, withholding information or even deliberately doing things that will make the victim of abuse feel diminished or embarrassed.

The target of emotional abuse is to reduce your feeling of self-worth and independence. Victims most often report that emotional torture and living under terror is most unbearable than physical violence or brutality. Close correction except between high incidence of suicide and attempted suicide to emotional stress. This has been reported in countries like Peru, India,

Bangladesh, New Guinea and United State. The victims of emotional abuse eventually succumb to the feeling that they cannot survive and leave independently without their abuser

Psychological Violence: Any intentional conduct that seriously impairs another person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats. Statistical definition: Any act which causes psychological harm to an individual. Psychological violence can take the form of, for example, coercion, defamation, verbal insult or harassment, bullying, jealous behavior, humiliation, verbal abuse such as ridiculing and blaming.

Economic Violence: Economic violence is a type of violence committed by individuals or groups preying on economically disadvantaged individuals. Such as withholding money, forbidding work or forcing the victim to work. Economic abuse as a form of abuse when an intimate partner has control over the other partners' access to economic resources.

The ultimate goal of economic abuse is to control the partner. Financial abuses include but not limited to the following strategies:

- Rigid control over income;
- Withholding money or credit card;
- Withholding basic necessities;
- Restricting the partner allowance;
- Choosing of career;
- Sabotaging job and career growth; and
- Stealing and taking partners money and making partner account for every penny in their possession.

Legal and Administrative Abuse: Abuse of power or abuse of authority, in the form of malfeasance in the house and is the commission of an unlawful act, done in an official capacity, which affects the performance of family life, such as use of institutions to inflict further abuse on a victim, for example taking out false restraining orders to deny the victim access to his children and pressuring through children.

Spiritual Abuse: Spiritual abuse involves preventing a partner from engaging in his or her religious practices. It could even involve the use of religious beliefs to manipulate dominate or control a partner. Religious beliefs, teaching and practices can serve as basis for the tolerance of abusive behavior in the family. Religious teaching can therefore serve as road blocks and as resource for victims of violence. Some abusers even justify their action by making reference to the bible verse that accepts male superiority and female submission. This argument is however countered that the use of violence by men is purely a misinterpretation of the role of men in the society. Domestic violence among Christians is complication by a culture of silence and acceptance of abuse.

Social Abuse: Social abuse is a hidden form of violating and can take the form of isolating a partner from his support networks. The perpetrator is attempting to control and assert his hold on the victim by isolating the victim from his associates and members of the community. Rigid social roles are used to limit the expression of feeling of anger and depression. The victim is

given the orientation that he is not as capable as their abuser. The police, legal system, medical system, social service by the action or inaction can support or promote social abuse by undervaluing request for help and blaming the victim of domestic violence for his or her ordeal.

CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence also known as domestic abuse, intimate partner violence or abuse may start when one partner feels the need to control and dominate the other (Susmitha, 2016; Goldsmith, 2020). Domestic violence and abuse stem from a desire to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner. Abusive people believe they have the right to control and restrict their partners, and they may enjoy the feeling that exerting power gives them:

- Abusers may feel this need to control their partner because of low self-esteem, extreme jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when they feel inferior to the other partner in education and socioeconomic background (Semahegn & Mengistie, 2015; Goldsmith, 2020).
- Some people with very traditional beliefs may think they have the right to control their partner, and that women are not equal to men. Others may have an undiagnosed personality disorder or psychological disorder. Still others may have learned this behavior from growing up in a household where domestic violence was accepted as a normal part of being raised in their family.
- A partner's domination may take the form of emotional, physical or sexual abuse. Studies suggest that violent behavior often is caused by an interaction of situational and individual factors. That means that abusers learn violent behavior from their family, people in their community and other cultural influences as they grow up. They may have seen violence often or they may have been victims themselves. Some abusers acknowledge growing up having been abused as a child (Susmitha, 2016; Goldsmith, 2020).
- Children who witness or are the victims of violence may learn to believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve conflict between people. Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and who see violence directed against women are more likely to abuse women when they grow up. Girls who witness domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to be victimized by their own husbands. Although women are most often the victim of domestic violence, the gender roles can and are reversed sometimes.
- Alcohol and drugs may contribute to violent behavior. A drunk or high person will be less likely to control his or her violent impulses toward their partner, so keeping such drinking or drug use episodes to a minimum may be valuable for a person living in a domestic violence situation (Goldsmith, 2020).

WHY VICTIMS DO NOT LEAVE ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP

Family, friend's co-workers and community professional are interested in founding out why most victims of abusive relationship are reluctant to leave their abuser. Some actually leave but come back after a period of time to the abuser. Victims of domestic violence are confronted with barriers and risk factors that determine whether they stay put or leave an abusive relationship.

The victims faced numerous individual, systematic and societal factors that dictate his action or inaction over his or her situation.

Fear of Fear of being Hurt or Killed

Fear of being hurt or killed by perpetrator of violence is a major factor why most victims are reluctant to terminate relationship. Most perpetrators of domestic violence often threaten their victim with threat of taking sole custody of children if the relationship is terminated. Some abusers even go as far as threatening kidnap as strategy of taking custody of the child.

Isolation

Isolation can be used as tactic to establish hold on the victims. They isolate them from established support system by denying them access to primary intimate relationship. The denial of access to other intimate relation may serve as deterrent to any thought of leaving the abusive relationship. In some abusive relationship, the victims are even those that detach themselves from friends and family because they are ashamed of telling their ordeal to other.

Financial Dependence

Victims with employment and income are faced with limited options. Such victims don't have access to finance and are not given opportunity to engage in productive ventures. Victims find themselves between homelessness and living in impoverished and unsafe community or returning to their abusers.

Guilt and Shame

Guilt and shame can constitute barrier to leaving an abusive partner. Some victims of domestic violence attribute the whole problem to their individual mistake in avoiding issues that lead to disagreement in the relationship. Moreover, the society at large still confronts victims for provoking the violence and not making deliberate and sustains effort at improving the situation.

They are even situation where victims don't want friend and family to know their circumstance for fear of been criticized. The acceptance of guilt and shame will prevent most victims of domestic violence from leaving their abuser.

Emotional and Physical Impairment

Abuser use of psychological strategies to break down their victim's emotional strength and self-esteem account for why most victims stay put in abusive relationship. The victim, under this scenario starts seeing realities from abusers' perception and becomes emotionally dependent on the abuser. Victims will come to believe they cannot function effectively in the society without their abusive partners.

Individual Belief System

A complex and intricate set of personal, family religious and cultural values of victims of domestic violence play significant role in the decision of either staying or abandoning. Victims most time do not seek for divorce because of religious inclination. Victims even believe leaving their home will destabilize their children emotionally.

SIGNS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

It is actually difficult to tell if someone is experiencing domestic violence. Those experiencing violence relationship do not want other to be aware of their situation but there are obvious signs that will indicate if an individual is into an abusive relationship.

Injuries and Bruises

Injuries and bruises are early warning signs of domestic violence. Bruises are signs of physical abuse at home. These signs are commonly seen on women. Facial, arm, neck head bruises and fractures, teeth and dental problem as well as abdominal pains are signs of physical abuse at home. Some victims of domestic violence will attempt covering up these bruises and at time will give feeble excuses and explanation of the bruises and injuries.

Becoming Withdrawn

Women experiencing domestic violence tend to be fearful, anxious, depressed and withdrawn. They show signs of stress and fatigue which if unchecked to lead suicide tendencies. Victims of domestic violence will eventually find it difficult to express love and show affection to others which will affect relationship with friends and family members.

Destruction of Self-Esteem

Self-esteem reflects how we feel about ourselves. Smith and Mackie (2007) posit that self-concept is how we think about the self. It entails the positive and negative evaluation of the self and an important predictor of achievements, happiness, satisfaction in marriage and relationship. Abusive domestic violence ensures the self-esteem of the partner is destroyed and victims eventually will come to believe that the violence actually result from their fault and they deserve what they are experiencing.

Emotional Strain

Emotional sign is an indication of abusive relationship. Emotional exhaustion is a chronic state or emotional depletion that result from continuous stress (Wright & Cropanzeno, 1998). It is manifested by physical fatigue and sense of been psychologically and emotional drained. In domestic violence, emotional strain result from sustain verbal and physical abuse at home. It will result in distinctive changes in personally and victim will withdraw from intimate relationship. The resultant low self-esteem and depression will manifest in poor performance of task at office for those working and will equally reflect on their relationship with the children.

Social Isolation

Abuser will do everything possible to isolate victims from their cycle of friends and work toward them been alone.

Drug and Alcohol Abuse

Victims of domestic violence will most time resort to drug use and alcohol consumption as possible escape mechanism from their ordeal.

Self-Blame

Self-blame is a common reaction to stressful events. Self-blame is a cognitive process in which individual attribute the occurrence of stressful event to one self which has implication for individual emotion and behaviour during stressful situation (Janoff-Bulman, 1979). This attribution in domestic violence if it results in negative appraisal will affect the victim of abuser. Depression will result if individual conclude they cannot change their situation.

Unrealistic Expectation

Expectations determine one's perception of reality and can impact on other people too. Much as we relate to people that will meet our expectation, unrealistic expectation is a potential source of conflict and early signs of domestic violence at home. Abuser expects the victim to meet all his expectation. Victims are expected to take care of all emotional and domestic needs.

Hypersensitivity

Hypersensitivity results in most abusive relationship. Abusers shows intolerance and feel insulted at the slightest verbal provocation. Abuser attribute set back as personal attack and react aggressively to immediate family members and friends.

Dual Personality

Dual personality which is a disorder is an early indication of domestic violence. The individual possess two identifies. The characteristic way the person thinks, feel and behaves becomes unpredictable.

Jealousy

Jealousy manifest and the abusers will harbour thoughts and feelings of insecurity, fear, concern and anxiety on the status of the marriage particularly the initial affection that brought them together.

DRIVERS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Cultural Norms

In some Nigerian communities, domestic violence is embedded and condoned within cultural norms. The use of physical abuse as corrective measures for women and children are often indirectly enhanced by these norms. For example, the practice of paying a bride price has been perceived as giving licence to husbands to physically assault their wives as they are seen to have “paid for” this right. Across the Niger Delta, including Rivers state, strong cultural expectations dictate that women ascribe to certain gender roles; be obedient, faithful, perform household chores, defer to their husbands on decision-making and bear children. When women are seen not to meet these expectations, this can result in the perpetration of violence (FIND/FFP, 2018; Maternowska et al., 2015).

Religious Beliefs

Religious norms can often be used to justify domestic violence against women. In some settings, the prevalence of the need for “submissiveness” by a woman is often preached in the religious community, cutting across many of the major faiths practiced in Nigeria. Like the Muslim religious that preached that a wife should be submissive to her husbands at all times, and therefore do not see anything wrong with a husband forcefully demanding for sex from this wife even if she refuses. Many women do not report domestic violence for fear of being stigmatized or being perceived as going against religious teachings, thus resigning themselves to the abuse being part of marriage. For many women married in the Christian faith, wives feel obliged to remain in matrimony (for better or for worse), even if the relationship is abusive.

Financial Insecurity

Financial insecurity can also be a contributing factor to domestic violence. During interviews with Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) working with domestic violence survivors in Rivers state, a common scenario described was when a male head of the household could not achieve a sense of dignity and respect through economic independence, he tends to exert authority over his family through physical dominance to avoid perceptions of weakness. For example, in one case given in Port Harcourt, a man physically assaulted his wife to vent his frustration over failing to provide for his family’s financial needs (FIND/FFP, 2018; Maternowska et al., 2015).

Reluctance to Report Domestic Violence

Due to the potential publicity and ramifications of going through formal justice mechanisms, survivors of domestic violence often choose to report domestic abuse to non-legal bodies, such as religious and traditional leaders, family members, or CSOs. When incidents are reported to the police, survivors may find officers unwilling to investigate the crime, or even in some reported incidents, officers may themselves perpetrate abuse. In most cases the law enforcement officers tend to view domestic violence as a “family matter” and either send women away to “settle it at home” or attempt to mediate the complaint without any meaningful punishment as a future deterrent for the abuser (FIND/FFP, 2018; Maternowska et al., 2015).

BROADER IMPLICATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FOR FAMILY AND SOCIETY

Domestic violence can have serious impacts on survivors, as well as effects within wider society. Women facing this form of violence often suffer physical and physiological consequences which affect their behavior and productivity in their homes, communities and places of work. It is a form of violence that degrades womanhood and makes the wife or spouse lose self-confidence and self-worth in the community abuser (FIND/FFP, 2018). This low self-esteem can negatively affect the participation of women in community life and economic development. Household abuse can also have intergenerational consequences, with negative effects on the psychological development of children.

According to a report by UNICEF (2005), children who witness domestic violence are more likely to be affected by violence as adults either as victims or perpetrators. Children who grow up in these homes and have witnessed or are victims of abuse may struggle to form relationships in adult life, or may be prone to perpetrate violence themselves. Research has also showed that children or teens who witnessed domestic violence were more likely to use violence at school or in the community in response to perceived threats, and more likely to commit crimes. The study also found that they are likely to become abusers themselves later in life; perpetuating the cycle of domestic violence across generations.

Severe cases of domestic violence which leads to divorce or separation between parents, can have negative psychological implications for children. It also threatens the stability of the family as parents tend to fight for the custody of the children. Young children from broken homes tend to feel insecure and often angry and withdrawn for fear of being abused by school mates and friends who are aware of their situation.

This can lead such children growing up to distrust people, going into relationships with an aggressive mode or becoming afraid to go into an intimate relationship. In a desperation to fill the gap of a missing parent figure, these children may be vulnerable to exploitation, such as recruitment into gangs and criminal activity.

Domestic violence became more routine and accepted by not only perpetrators but also survivors. Areas which have experienced periods of communal conflict and violence, domestic violence is part of this desensitization of violence (FIND/FFP, 2018).

THE EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FAMILY STABILITY

Domestic and family violence tears lives apart. One in 3 women experience physical or sexual violence, or both, caused by someone known to them. It affects women, children, the family and the community. And it has big personal, social and economic effects.

Effects on the Victim

- Death, illness, injury and disability: domestic and family violence is the leading cause of death, illness and disability for women aged under 45;
- Emotional and psychological trauma: the devastating impact on an individual's physical, mental and emotional health including depression, shame, anger and suicide;

- Homelessness: nearly one-third of people in Nigeria seeking help from homelessness services say domestic and family violence is an issue;
- Use of alcohol and other drugs to deal with the pain; and
- Physical health injuries and problems, which may not get medically treated.

Effects on the Family

Violence and the threat of violence at home creates fear and can destroy family environments and lead to the break-up of families:

- Frequent moving to avoid the abuser;
- Regular household conflict;
- Child protection or police involvement;
- Effects on the community;
- Children growing up without learning about positive and respectful relationships;
- Abusers going to prison; and
- Higher rates of alcohol and other drug use, and mental health problems.

Effects on Children

Of those women who experience violence, more than 50% have children in their care. Children and young people do not have to see the violence to be affected by it. Studies show that living with domestic violence can cause physical and emotional harm to children and young people in the following ways:

- ongoing anxiety and depression;
- emotional distress;
- eating and sleeping disturbances;
- physical symptoms, such as headaches and stomach aches;
- find it hard to manage stress;
- low self-esteem;
- self-harm;
- be aggressive towards friends and school mates;
- feel guilt or blame themselves for the violence;
- have trouble forming positive relationships;
- develop phobias and insomnia;
- struggle with going to school and doing school work;
- use bullying behavior or become a target of bullying;
- difficulty concentrating;
- find it hard to solve problems; and
- have less empathy and caring for others.

Children and young people need to grow up in a secure and nurturing environment. Where domestic or family violence exists, the home is not safe or secure and children are scared about what might happen to them and the people they love. Children who grow up in families where

there is violence may suffer a range of behavioral and emotional disturbances. These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life.

Intimate partner violence has also been associated with higher rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity (through, for example diarrhoeal disease or malnutrition). The impact of Domestic Violence is not limited to the survivors of the abuse alone, it also has negative impacts on family and society at large.

PREVENTION AND RESPONSE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

There are a growing number of well-designed studies looking at the effectiveness of prevention and response programmes. More resources are needed to strengthen the prevention of and response to intimate partner and sexual violence, including primary prevention or stopping it from happening in the first place.

There is some evidence from high-income countries that advocacy and counselling interventions to improve access to services for survivors of intimate partner violence are effective in reducing such violence. Home visitation programmes involving health worker outreach by trained nurses also show promise in reducing intimate partner violence. However, these have yet to be assessed for use in resource-poor settings.

In low resource settings, prevention strategies that have been shown to be promising include: those that empower women economically and socially through a combination of microfinance and skills training related to gender equality; that promote communication and relationship skills within couples and communities; that reduce access to, and harmful use of alcohol; transform harmful gender and social norms through community mobilization and group-based participatory education with women and men to generate critical reflections about unequal gender and power relationships.

To achieve lasting change, it is important to enact and enforce legislation and develop and implement policies that promote gender equality by:

- ending discrimination against women in marriage, divorce and custody laws
- ending discrimination in inheritance laws and ownership of assets
- improving women's access to paid employment
- developing and resourcing national plans and policies to address violence against women.

ROLE OF HEALTH CARE SECTOR IN PREVENTING AND RESPONDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

While preventing and responding to violence against women requires a multi-sectoral approach, the health sector has an important role to play. However, although violence against women has been accepted as a critical public health and clinical care issue, it is still not included in the health-care policies of many countries (Ansara & Hindin, 2010). The critical role that the health system and health-care providers can play in terms of identification, assessment, treatment, crisis intervention, documentation, referral, and follow-up, is poorly understood or accepted within the national health programmes and policies of various countries. Health-care professionals tend to regard violence against women as a criminal justice issue, and view partner violence in particular as a domestic matter. They are also ill-equipped to deal with the issues, since medical and nursing education in many countries does not address this problem. In order for health-care

providers to assume their roles in mitigating the effects of violence and fulfil their responsibility, it is necessary to sensitize them towards the issue and provide them with the information and tools necessary to respond sensitively and effectively to survivors. These guidelines are a first step in this direction. The health-care providers frequently, and often unknowingly, come into contact with women affected by violence, since abused women make extensive use of health-care resources (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Black, 2011). Health-care providers are in a unique position to create a safe and confidential environment for facilitating disclosure of violence, while offering appropriate support and referral to other resources and services. More also, the health care sector can:

- Advocate to make violence against women unacceptable and for such violence to be addressed as a public health problem;
- Provide comprehensive services, sensitize and train health care providers in responding to the needs of survivors holistically and empathetically;
- Prevent recurrence of violence through early identification of women and children who are experiencing violence and providing appropriate referral and support;
- Promote egalitarian gender norms as part of life skills and comprehensive sexuality education curricula taught to young people; and
- Generate evidence on what works and on the magnitude of the problem by carrying out population-based surveys, or including violence against women in population-based demographic and health surveys, as well as in surveillance and health information systems.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is one of the most common issues social workers come across. Social workers have worked with victims of domestic violence for years - in the courts, social services, accident and emergency, and in refuges (SafeLives, 2015). However, their role in helping victims and families includes:

- Social workers are skilled at engaging with the whole family and are able to link the experiences of every member of that family the victim, the perpetrator and the children.
- Making sure the children and the victim are safe are key tasks for the social worker;
- The social worker works with the parent to encourage them to see the world how their children do. This approach helps to motivate the parents to change the situation the family is in;
- Social workers also work directly with the children to strengthen the mother-child relationship, as it can be badly affected by domestic abuse especially if the victim separates from a violent partner;
- Social workers need to understand the impact of domestic violence on the mother's mental health and her parenting skills; and
- Also focus on the whole family, social workers engage in a safe way with the perpetrator, challenging them to change their behavior.

But domestic abuse is not a simple issue and responding effectively requires a truly holistic approach. That is why coordinated support from a whole range of agencies is crucial. Social workers can build strong links with other agencies and encourage better access to services for vulnerable families.

It is vital that social workers understand what an effective preventive and response to domestic abuse is. To offer the skills and knowledge needed to effectively help families, social workers ensure to keep up-to-date with domestic violence and abuse case law, learn from relevant serious case reviews and attend training. Social Work experts produce domestic violence preventive and response guidance, which will help to prevent domestic violence and achieve family stability (SafeLives, 2015).

CONCLUSION

Domestic violence is an issue that attracts silence; a silence engendered by shame, fear, stigma, and cultural taboos. This culture of silence surrounds cases of domestic violence perpetrated against women and girls in most states Nigeria, making it difficult to get a true picture of its extent. Domestic violence can have wide ranging physical and psychological implications for survivors, affecting all areas of their work, relationships and social lives and in some cases, the impact of domestic violence is fatal. The prevalence of domestic violence against women and children has serious implications for the family stability and development of the society. It also threatens the stable psychological development and social interaction of children in the society as children who are raised in violent homes can become vulnerable to further abuse, recruitment into cultism, criminality, or become perpetrators themselves. With social, cultural and religious norms underpinning the culture of silence around domestic violence, as well as barriers for access to justice for survivors, society and government must work together to address both social and structural issues. Preventing domestic violence against women and children requires sustained and systematic efforts at the levels of families, communities, institutions, and societies.

Recommendations

Through greater awareness and engagement on the issue across sectors, community leaders, policy makers and practitioners can work together to address the underlying drivers of domestic violence, as well as strengthen prevention and support efforts for survivors. As practitioners, policy makers and community leaders come together to address broader challenges around conflict dynamics in Nigeria such as cult violence, political tensions, criminality and militancy, as there is a need to also address how violence manifests itself within domestic. The recommendation includes:

- Appropriate laws and policies should be made at the state level to address domestic violence. Efforts should also be made to intensify the implementation of existing laws relating to domestic violence;
- Full implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP), 2015, the Child's Right Act, 2003, as well as the Rivers State 2017 Action Plan (SAP) for United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR 1325) on women, peace and security will go a long way in mitigating domestic violence within the state;

- To ensure the effective implementation of appropriate laws relating to domestic violence, there is a need for the judicial system to be strengthened. This will enable specialized units within the judicial system to focus on gender-based violence and ensure timely dispersion of justice. For instance, the existing family courts in every state in Nigeria will go a long way in addressing issues relating to VAWG if they are fully functional;
- Sensitization and training of front line service providers on VAWG cases including security agencies, traditional rulers and religious leaders, led by CSOs and government. This will ensure that stakeholders stop addressing reported incidents of domestic violence as minor family affairs, but as an issue of huge societal concern; and
- Social media can play a greater role in creating awareness and advocacy on issues relating to domestic violence and its impact on the family and the society at large. Social media can serve as an effective platform to change gender stereotypes, and can be led by CSOs, youth and community leaders.

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