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Full Length Research Paper

The Burden of Marital Vows: A Study of Domestic Violence in Benue and Kogi States, North Central Nigeria

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Research reports across the globe revealed that domestic violence was prevalent though largely under-reported due to the hidden and private nature of the phenomenon. Most studies however came to the conclusion that domestic violence among the low income group was more prevalent. This does not suggest that those in the upper income group are excluded from abuse. The study therefore investigated the prevalence, social context, causes, dimension and nature of domestic violence among the middle and upper income class of the society. Two sets of instruments were used for the study. The results of the investigations confirmed that domestic violence was prevalent among the target group studied with implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS and decline in productivity. The paper strongly recommended advocacy programmes through the media, public lectures and seminars and domestication of international agreements on Women Rights to change societal attitudes to women.

Keywords: Domestic violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological violence, spousal battering.

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is defined as a pattern of repeated physical, emotional and sexual abuse that risks or causes fear, distress and very often health damage. The phenomenon is adjudged as prevalent across countries (Council of Europe, 2006). A study in 2006 revealed that one fifth to one quarter of all women have experienced physical violence at least once during their adult lives and that more than one-tenth have suffered sexual violence involving the use of force. The alarming statistics from research conducted in United States, the United Kingdom, Columbia, Costa Rica, Brazil, France, the Philippines and in some countries in Africa confirmed the prevalence of the phenomenon although it was often under-reported, unrecorded and to a certain extent, condoned by culture and the legal system.

The alarming surge in reported cases of domestic violence resulted in an increase in the intervention of women’s advocacy groups in the last two decades who have intensified efforts to draw world attention to the harmful effects of violence against women. The organizations included the Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), Organization of American States, World Heath Organization, Inter-American Bank (IDB), United Nations Organization and its organs. The actions of these organizations also spurred research in various countries with startling revelations on the nature, prevalence and dimensions of violence against women. Domestic violence is often associated with families in the low-income group and rural communities, thus suggesting a strong correlation between social class and incidence of violence in the family. Women in the low-income group and who have low educational status are believed to be more likely to suffer from abuse than their counterpart who have higher educational qualifications and/or belong to the upper or middle income group (Odunjirin, 1993; RAO 1997; Dyessa, et al., 1998; Machera, 1997).

Domestic violence is often compounded due to the fact that gender discrimination generally intersects with other forms of discrimination that is based on multiple identities, examples include race, ethnicity among others to produce particular forms of violence and specific
stakeholders to obtaining justice, services and opportunities to move out of the situation they are in. These interconnect is more likely to place the burden of domestic violence on the low income group.

More recent studies however point to the contrary. Dauer (2008) opined that domestic violence is a problem that cuts across all backgrounds and socio-economic groups.

This study was designed to interrogate the nature, dimension and prevalence of the less studied group, i.e. the middle and upper income group in Benue and Kogi States North Central Nigeria. The study was a part of a larger study conducted in the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. The study was sponsored by Inter African Committee (IAC) with funding support from the Ford Foundation.

Justification of Study

This study could be justified on several grounds. First, women with a population of 69,086,302 (NPC, 2006) constitute almost half of Nigeria’s population of 140,431,790. Women’s contribution to the production process cannot therefore be overlooked. Violence often results in productivity loss as abused women are often deterred from contributing maximally to the production process due to physical injuries sustained as a result of violence or even emotional stress and fatigue which reduces productivity among other health related problems. The phenomena therefore should be contained.

Second, the women are the backbone of the society’s basic social unit, which is the family as they perform the role of a mother and wife. Domestic violence negatively affects the family fabric as family members fail to provide economic, social and emotional support for one another. A negative fall-out of this development is the possibility of children from distressed families who are delinquent and prone to aggressive and anti social violent behaviour. The need to ensure stable homes where well-behaved younger ones are produced and trained, call for action against domestic violence.

Third, there is a dearth of empirical studies on the dimension and social context of domestic violence in Nigeria. The few studies available focus on the low-income group and this equate violence with poverty. However, recent studies on domestic violence from a global perspective point to the fact that domestic violence confronts all women irrespective of race, creed and socio-economic group. The focus of the study on the middle and upper income group is desirable to explore the identified gap.

Four, violence against women, is against the laws of humanity, which seek to protect the fundamental human rights of all people. Violence against women has therefore emerged as a focus of international attention and concern since the early 1990’s. Although Nigeria is signatory to most conventions to eliminate violence against women, the dearth of empirical data on the nature and dimension of violence has created a gap in public health policy making and appropriate programmes for its eradication. This study is therefore desirable to unearth the dimension and consequences of domestic violence, one to contribute to the global body of knowledge on the subject and two to generate relevant data needed for policy formulation.

Scope of the Research

As already mentioned, the study was a part of a wider study aimed at a study of DV among the middle and the upper income group in Nigeria. 12 states, 2 each from the 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria were studied. The study was designed to ascertain the nature, prevalence and causes of domestic violence in Nigeria. The areas of study included Benue and Kogi States. This study focuses on the two states. The focus of the study was on the middle and upper income group in these communities. The target group in the study was imperative for several reasons.

One, there is a dearth of scientific studies on domestic violence in most developing societies Nigeria inclusive. While available literature on domestic violence in Nigeria indicated that studies had been conducted on some communities like the Yoruba and Edo speaking areas, such empirical scientific research was not available on the communities under study. The study was desirable to fill this gap and widen the scope of research on domestic violence in Nigeria.

Two, most of the communities in the area under study are patriarchal in nature. The effect of the social context within which spouses operate and its relationship to domestic violence in these communities is being subjected to analysis.

Three, alcohol consumption is very prevalent in most of the communities in the area under study. The effect of this on domestic violence is also being assessed.

Four, the incidence of HIV Scourge is found to be high especially among the communities in Benue State. The study sought to analyse if any, the relationship between HIV prevalence and domestic violence in the communities.

Limitation of the Study

Sourcing data on domestic violence was a herculean task. The victims of abuse were generally reluctant to discuss their experiences especially those that were still married. The rate of return of the questionnaires was very slow. The entry points earlier arranged for the collection of data did not improve the rate of collection of the questionnaires. Specifically where several questionnaires
were collected and distributed among a group, only a few of them were properly completed and returned. Most times, the returned questionnaires did not contain the names or identities of victims of domestic violence.

Researchers had to move around the locations of target population to personally administer the questionnaires. This entailed more visits by the assistants than was earlier envisaged. This method also forced some respondents to mention the names of victims to researchers who now approached such victims with some intervention from those who mentioned their names. In Benue State, the spouse to a female victim of domestic violence challenged the researcher for prying into his family affairs after the interview had been granted by his wife. Generally the study though interesting was very tasking as researchers had to be cautious to avoid misinterpretation of their mission. All respondents who were females were assured of anonymity in the presentation of our final report. The real names of victims were therefore not used in the study.

**Review of Related Literature**

Research on violence against women emerged only in the last thirty years despite its prevalence and negative impact on the lives of a group who are half of the world population. Most of the research on the phenomenon emanated mainly from Western Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand (WADP Manual, 1997:4). Few research on violence perpetuated against women had been conducted in developing societies, with only Papua New Guinea having a comprehensive and systematic study on the phenomenon.

In recent times, there is increasing clamour to increase women participation in the political process. This is important as their involvement at the higher levels of the decision making process would necessarily allow for those issues that are of specific interests to women to be put in the front burner of national issues.

Violence Against Women (VAW) was first established as a development issue at the United National Decade for Women’s meeting in Nairobi in 1985 (Machera, 1997:28). The United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women in 1993. Article 1 of the UN declaration defined violence against women as:

> “Any act of gender based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, Coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (CHANGE, 1999:3).

The declaration contend that violence against women also include acts of physical, sexual and psychological violence in the family and community. These acts include spousal battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, rape, including marital rape, and traditional practices harmful to women as in Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Others include, non-spousal violence, sexual harassment and intimidation in workplace and in school, trafficking in women and, forced prostitution. Violence perpetrated or condoned by the state such as official ‘pimping’ which entail the recruitment of young beautiful girls by business organizations to lure customers, and rape in war all fall within the ambit of violence against women.

Violence Against Women (VAW) generally includes any type of harmful behaviors directed at women and girls because of their sex (CHANGE, 1999:3). One prevalent form of violence that is interest to this study against women is referred to as domestic violence which includes all form of abuse of women within marriage and other intimate relationships. This takes the form of wife battering, dowry related violence, marital rape, etc.

Domestic violence also includes any form of violence perpetrated against any member of the family, namely violence against aged parents, boy-child and girl-child, house maids and even husbands. Majority of the victims of domestic violence are usually women and girl-children (Machera, 1997; Atinmo, 1997; Dyessa et al., 1997; Rao, 1997; Odujinrin, 1993).

For over two decades women’s advocacy groups around the world have been working to draw world attention to the harmful effects of violence against women. The Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) published manuals on the global dimension of violence against women and in 1985 called for concerted actions to confront the problem. These actions engineered varied reactions and commitments by institutions and organisations to put an end to violence against women. According to (CHANGE 1999:5), the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing brought together women organisations from around the world who advocated ending gender violence as a high priority. In March 1994, the Commission on Human Rights appointed and empowered the first special rapporteur on violence against women to investigate abuses of the human rights for women. In the same year, the Organisation of American States (OAS) negotiated the Inter-American Convention to prevent, punish and eradicate violence against women. This Convention had been ratified by about 27 Latin American countries as at 1994. Further to this, the 49th World Health Assembly adopted a resolution in May 1996, declaring violence a public health priority. Various organisations have initiated the funding of research on violence against women. These include a multi-country study on women’s health sponsored by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in collaboration with the Centre for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in September, 1998 brought together 400
experts from 37 countries to discuss the causes and costs of domestic violence and policies and programmes to address it in addition to funding research on violence against women in six Latin American countries, UNIFEM manages the Trust Fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women and disbursed US $3.3 million to 71 projects around the world in 1996.

The efforts by various International Organizations have spurred series of research in various countries with startling revelations on the nature and dimension of violence against women. It was generally observed that domestic violence is prevalent in all societies although it is often underreported, unrecorded and to a certain extent condoned by culture, tradition and even the legal system. Battering is however still the most common cause of injury to women by their spouse.

Dyessa et al (1997:84) said in the United States of America, wife abuse is the leading cause of injuries among women of reproductive age resulting in high medical costs in addition to reduced productivity. Dyessa et al (1997:91) reported that 20% of Colombian women have been beaten by a partner at least once in their lifetime and a study in Costa Rica indicated the 51% of women are reported being beaten up several times in a year. The practice is also common in France, Philippines, Brazil and Zimbabwe. In Austria, studies have revealed that the Australian Community consider wife abuse to be a private, non-criminal matter. Davies reported that in Papua New Guinea, wife beating is so common that it is seen as a normal part of married life. In the United Kingdom, Dobash, and Dobash in (WADP Manual 1997:7) revealed that the societal perception of the subordinate place of the women to the men leads to abuse.

Researches on domestic violence are emerging in African societies. Machera (1997) reported that Kenya is known to have the highest rate of wife battering in Africa. Although domestic violence is often unreported unless when violent, Results of a study of reported cases of domestic violence in three Kenyan newspapers within a period of six months indicated a total of 71 cases of domestic violence which were severe in nature. 28 of these cases were against women by men in the family. Machera reported a correlation between domestic violence and economic deprivation. With an average record of 12 severe cases monthly the result of the study suggested the prevalence of the phenomenon in Kenya. Despite this situation a bill to outlaw wife beating in Kenya in 1986 by the Commission on Law of Marriage and Divorce was opposed by all male members of parliament because it was considered as private affairs and traditional.

A study of domestic violence in Ethiopia was undertaken by Dyessa et al (1997) to determine the dimension and context of the phenomenon in a rural community in Ethiopia. The study found a high prevalence of the phenomenon in the area with 45% of the married women having suffered from physical violence, which has resulted in minor and in some cases serious somatic injuries and in some cases, to permanent damages to the women concerned. The study found that violence against married women is more prevalent in the rural areas than the urban centres. It is also more common occurrence among women with low educational status than the highly educated.

In Nigeria, Odunjirin (1999) reported that 81% of the 1000 women surveyed suffered from verbal and physical abuse from their male partners; 6.2% of them on a regular basis; 77.4% - occasionally; 46.2% of them in the presence of their children with serious implications for the children’s health and future attitude towards violence. The mass media also reported several cases of violence against women across the country. In September 2002, the country was told of the fate of Amina from Bauchi who had one of her legs chopped off by her husband for allegedly exposing her buttocks for injection to a male. She was also accused of telling the man about her family problems (NTA Network News). Several other cases have been reported in Nigeria. According to a non-governmental organization – Project Alert, (Sawyer, 2001) Deborah was said to be married to a wife batterer who at the slightest provocation would kick, shove and beat her until she moved away from her matrimonial home. Susan, a mother of two, lost her eye after her husband beat her to a state of coma and hit her with a bottle. He accused her of infidelity. Iyabo, a pregnant woman, though married to a pastor was subjected to constant beating, until she ran away from her matrimonial home, Veronica Onyene, and Awawu Koleosho who was nine months pregnant both died as a result of physical violence meted to them by their husbands. Jumoke Martins had chemicals forcefully poured into her by her pastor husband and died.

Dosunmu (Sawyer, 2001:19) attributes the prevalence of domestic violence to the belief in Africa that women and children are properties of men and as such they must be under the control of men. Some African tradition also prevent women moving out of their matrimonial homes even when faced with abuse. Other common forms of violence Atere (Sawyer, 2001:19) said include forced marital sex, not providing the unkeep allowance and the decision of a man to deny a wife the right of association.

Chukwuma (Sawyer 2001:19) reported the lack of specific legislations and necessary support services in Nigeria to prevent and provide security for battered women. Project Alert is desirable to protect abused women by making available to them counseling, legal aid and shelter.

Most of the cases of domestic violence are under-reported largely due to the hidden and private nature of the phenomenon. The patriarchal nature of societies is reflected in cultural approval of violence directed at women by their spouses.
The different studies on domestic violence in Nigeria also suggest a correlation between poverty and violence. Specifically, therefore, domestic violence is said to be more prevalent among the low income group.

Atinmo (1997:121) noted that although domestic violence is prevalent among the low income group, this does not suggest that those in the upper income group are excluded from abuse. This study is therefore desirable to study the prevalence, social context and nature of domestic violence among the middle and upper income class of the society.

Theoretical Framework

Theories to explain violence directed at women have undergone some evolution. Initially, the phenomenon was considered a developmental issue. The United Nations (UN) adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in 1993 introduced a new framework for the understanding of domestic violence. Domestic violence under the human rights framework raised the issue as one of public rather than its earlier treatment as a private matter. By adopting violence as a human right issue, public authorities are compelled to prevent, investigate and punish offenders. In more recent times, theories emphasize gender-power relations.

Abane (1997:5) classified existing theories on domestic violence in to three categories. First, is the intra-individual theories that relate causal factors of violence to certain individual characteristics which tend to enhance violent behaviour in an individual. The theory is also referred to as the Bio psychological perspective (Loue Sana, 2001). Some of these theories attribute violent behaviour to certain personality abnormality or defects. For example, violent tendencies among males are seen to result from certain biological composition of their make up. It is argued that certain chromosomes and hormones in males result in lower intelligence among them which result in low educational achievement, limited occupational opportunities and increased frustration. The male are therefore likely to resort to anti-social behaviour and the use of violence to attain self-fulfilment. Other studies also found a causal relationship between aggressive behaviour in male and levels of androgens such as testosterone and serotonin among such other biological characteristics of the male.

The Social Learning Theory links DV to individual experience and exposure to violence. The Personality Characteristics, Psychopathology, Theories and the Biological Theory (Jasinski, 2001) all fall within the intra-individual theories. People who engage in the practice of domestic violence do so because of some inherent characteristics which could be as a result of their experience and exposure to violence or some personality disorder (physiopathology). Others are known to engage in domestic violence largely due to the process of natural selection. For example, men rape women as an extreme response to the biological role of men to reproduce.

However, a general critique of the intra-individual theories is that it portrays not only a situation of helplessness of victims of DV, in addition victims concentrate efforts in surviving rather than seeking redress or getting out of abusive relationships. Such theories are also criticised for the tendency to eliminate responsibility for the offender (Jasinski, 2001).

Second, Abane (1997) said, the social psychological theories on the other hand posit that the interaction between an individual with other individuals, groups and organizations provoke violence. The social learning theory and the role modeling theory fall within the ambit of the social psychological theories.

Children for example learn violent behavior from their experience in homes where domestic violence is prevalent. Violent behavior can also develop among children and the youth when they watch violence on television or when they are brought up in a conflict-ridden society.

The Exchange theory which also falls within this categorization asserts that interaction among spouses is characterized by an attempt to continuously maximize rewards while minimizing cost. Men therefore can resort to violence to release anger and frustration as well as use violence to accumulate power and control of the home.

The Social-Psychological theory also includes the resource theory. He theory posits that violence is used as a resource to attain ones desires in a manner similar to the use of money status and other personal attributes. The extent of material resources controlled by husbands and wives determine the authority each exercises over major decisions in the home and their control of marital power. Thus, violence becomes the ultimate resource which is deployed when other resources are perceived to be insufficient or have failed to obtain the desired response. Men who lack material and other resources resort to force and violence. On the other hand, women with significant resources become less willing to put up with abuse.

The conflict theory also falls within the socio-psychological theory. Violence is regarded as inevitable in social-relations specifically among individuals in the family and in the community due to conflicting interests and goals among individuals. The desire by men to claim a greater share of domestic resources irrespective of individual contribution by their spouses results in domestic violence.

The third theory on violence according to Abane (1997) is the socio-cultural theories. The theory suggests a strong correlation between domestic violence and the social institutions and social structures in society. Economic crisis within the larger society can result in stress and frustration, thereby provoking violent
behaviour, according to Harlan Hann and Joe R. Feagin in (Salami, 1994:80).

“Aggression is always the result of frustration. Given the requisite conditions, an individual, whose basic desires are thwarted, and who consequently experiences profound sense of dissatisfaction and anger is likely to react to his condition by directing aggressive behavior at what is perceived as being responsible for thwarting those desires or at a substitute. The greater the perceived importance of the desires and the more comprehensive the checking, the more vigorous the aggressive response”.

Domestic violence going by the theory is prevalent among the low income group, with low financial resources, reside in overcrowded neighbourhood and the unemployed.

The Marxist theory is also considered along the perspective of the socio-cultural theories. The Marxist theory posit that capitalism places women among the deprived class in the society as they are denied economic control of sources of production, political power, and status. The patriarchal capitalist system which foster control of women by men who control societal resources constitute a generic factor for the use of violence by men as a control mechanism.

The feminist theory explains domestic violence as occurring as a result of a male-dominated social structure and the socialization process that engender gender-specific roles for men and women.

The feminist theory for example, suggests that the institution of patriarchy as practiced in most societies is a system of domination which conditions women psychologically into accepting a secondary status by embracing a process of sex-role stereotyping thus perpetuating and promoting domestic violence as an instrument of female control by the male. Bograd (in Loue Sana, 2001) identified some basic characteristics of DV from the feminist perspective. These include the fact that, first, men as the dominant class, have greater access to material resources, therefore devaluing women as the subordinate group in society. Second, DV is considered as normal and an acceptable feature of family life.

Feminism is criticised for its universalisation of issues rather than paying attention to specifics. As Henrietta Moore would argue, domestic violence can not be thoroughly understood without a basic understanding of the specific contexts within which it occurs, i.e. the local culture, the local language and even the local politics within which it takes place. (Moore, 2004). Jasinski (2001) also observed that feminism does not account for violence by women against men with whom they have intimate relationship and in lesbian relationship.

To Moore, Anthropology as a method of analysis in itself is biased as its definition abinitio engenders some bias against female. Specifically, the definition of Anthropology as the “study of man” connotes the superiority of the male gender (Available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/feministanthropology).

A general critique of the socio-cultural theories is that they risk the increases in the rewards for violent behaviour as the use of violence is seen to have cultural approval.

A combination of these theories is helpful in seeking explanation to the causes of domestic violence. Three propositions can be derived from these theoretical postulations. One, It is inherent in the character of some men to subject women to abuse. Two, violence is deployed as a resource by a man to ensure control over other family members. Three, the patriarchal nature of most communities in Nigeria is responsible for the abuse of women by their spouses.

**Methods of Data Collection**

The study aimed at determining the prevalence, nature and causes of domestic violence among the middle and upper income group in Benue and Kogi States of Nigeria.

Two sets of instruments were used for the study. The first a structured questionnaire was designed to determine the prevalence, nature, causes and social context of domestic violence in the communities under study. It also aimed at assessing the widespread and knowledge of the phenomenon among men and women in the communities. Earlier research in the field suggested that question formats that required a woman to self-identify as abused turned out results that generally underestimated the level of abuse in intimate relationships. The question formats in this study were largely structured to search for indirect evidence on the phenomenon understudy.

The second instrument was also a structured questionnaire aimed at eliciting response from women who had or still experience any form of domestic violence. The instrument was applied through in-depth interview on all respondents. The aim was to provide avenues for the victims of abuse to relate as vividly as possible their experiences.

The target population were, largely women in the middle and upper income groups in the states under study. A purposive sampling technique was adopted. The entry points were employers of labour where we have women in the middle and upper income groups. These included Government Departments and Parastatals, Universities, Tertiary institutions and secondary schools. Professional and Women associations were also used as entry points. The income variable used to determine their experiences.

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variables used included family ownership of property such as car(s), house(s), and etcetera. The respondents belonged to the middle and upper income groups (77% had an annual income of between N101,000- N500,000 and 8.14% had income above N500,000. 84% had higher education; 66% owned at least a car in the family; 43% resided in their personal houses; and 90% owned televisions.

The first sets of questionnaires were randomly administered on all respondents that fell into the senior staff category. The target population for this study was 800 male and female in the middle and upper income group in Benue and Kogi states. A total of 1200 questionnaires were administered in the two states. Only 740 were duly completed and returned. Therefore, valid number of respondents used for the study was 740.

The target group was therefore women either in the public or private sector with income or living conditions that was adjudged above average within the Nigerian setup.

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Frequency distribution and percentage analysis were used to compute and summarize the results.

RESULTS

The People of Benue State

Benue State that has Makurdi as its capital is made up of 23 Local government Areas (LGAs). The State is inhabited by a number of ethnic and linguistic groups: the Tiv who number about two million; and Idoma, one million; the Igede who are politically speaking a part of the Idoma number about 300,000; including smaller ethnic groups like the Etulo, the Eloyi (Epe), the Idoma, and the Jukuns.

Bohannan (1957) contended that marriage among the Tiv is most disturbed in their round of life. Although the colonial government abolished the exchange marriage system (Iyamen I Kwase), is believed by the Tiv to be the authentic and best form of marriage. The Tiv believe that it is the only “commodity decently exchangeable for the fertility of a woman was that of another” (Downes, 1933). In practice a small group of agnatic kinsman (Ingol group) distribute its female members (daughters, sisters or daughter of a close agnate) in marriage among its male members who were called their guardians. Each man trades his marriage ward for a wife. The exchange marriage system persists as the Tiv people continue to form and to use Ingol groups. Rather than the exchange of wards for wives, bride wealth in the form of money is obtained in return. Elopement is very common among them due to the rigidities and complex network of debts that is incurred through bride wealth and the exchange systems. Alcohol consumption is very prevalent among the men in Benue State. The national ranking of HIV prevalence in the year 2001 showed that Benue State has the highest prevalence in the survey among rural communities with 16.0%

The Idoma is a patrilineal society. But the position of Idoma women can best be described as ambivalent. Idoma women enjoy a high social status within the community because of the titles, formal salutations, and elaborate funeral that they are accorded. However, there is evidence of sex antagonism and discrimination against them. Women are prevented from participating in all levels of the society – from the clan to family compound. The inferior status of women is also manifested in certain ritual practices: e.g., women are not permitted to participate in men’s secret societies, dance groups, and ancestral cults. Several Idoma adages underscore the inferior position of women: A wonya ne – you are a woman; Onya woyi dune – A female child is also a human being; and Aonya ge woche Eyi a- people of female descent shave the king’s (chiefs) head.

By and large, the petty traders among Idoma women are beginning to translate their social and occupational statuses into political power and influence. Their erstwhile unorganized and politically quiescent posture is giving way to a vibrant and aggressive push for recognition.

Some aspects of Idoma tradition are applicable to the Igede, Etulo, Jukun, Doma and Eloyi. The Igede though an independent linguistic group have cultural and political ties with the Idoma.

The People of Kogi State

There are twenty-one Local Government Areas in Kogi State while its capital is at Lokoja. The major ethnic groups are: Ebira, Igala, Okun, Bassa, and Nupe. The Ebira people are patrilineal. A household consist of related kin living under the control of the oldest male member. Wives do not become members of the extended family (Temple, 1965). However, a wife belongs in a sense to the whole family just as children. A married woman is responsible to her husband’s parents, paternal uncles, their wives, and elder brothers and she is expected to assist them whenever they require it. This trend persists to-date.

Although the first ruler of the land, - The Attah Igala, was a woman – Ebelefonu, the community remains patriarchal. Women are subordinate to men. Despite the subordinate position of women to men in Igalaland, the strong character of a princess – Inikpi who laid down her life to save the community from a devastating war is still highly eulogized.
The Okun people of Kogi State are also patrilineal. Women are subordinate to men and several Okun sayings attest to this. One of such sayings is Okololowo ori aya meaning the husband is price-owner of the wife’s head. Another common saying is Oko lade ori aya, - meaning the husband is the crown upon the wife’s head and aya togbo toko abгадun, oko, eyi ti ko gbo toko agba kunmo lori, meaning the wife that obeys her husband enjoy the husband, the one who does otherwise is at the mercy of the rod. Obirin ti oloko ko yato si alakon, - meaning a woman without a husband is like a crab without a head.

Wife betrothal is common among the Ife-Olukotun communities (a sub group of the Okun). Married women cannot just opt out even when they are abused. To opt out for this reason is to incur the curse from their parents who arrange the marriage. Children that are born outside wedlock among the Yagba belong to the husband, to whom the woman is married. They are treated as legitimate children. There is therefore a common saying in Yagba: Kosi omale ni Yagba, meaning there is no bastard within Yagba land.

One common trend among the ethnic groups in Kogi State is the penchant for several wives. The Ebira people think that it gives children the opportunity for step brothers and sisters. A man with one wife is derided as being weak. The women bear the responsibility for the education of their children because their husbands only train a few of the children that are selected from each wife. Women are therefore often over burdened with the constant struggle to eke out a living.

Nature of Domestic Violence

Physical Abuse

Pushing and shoving accounted for a high percentage of physical abuse against women with 26% of the women in Benue and 13% in Kogi States claiming that they were pushed and/or shoved once or several times. 17.9% of the Benue Stat and 11.4% of Kogi State women reported that they were battered by their spouses once or several times. Other serious forms of abuse include choking, stabbing, and being shot at.

Wife battering was common among the communities that were studied. However, the data from the quantitative analysis reveal a low percentage of female respondents admitted that they were physically abused by their spouse (9% in Benue and 5% in Kogi States). The physically abused women suffered from injuries like bruises and lacerations (viz, 30.8% in Benue State and 12.8% in Kogi State). 16.3% of the abused in Benue; and 4.5% were from Kogi. Grace, a secondary school teacher indicated: I got married 22 year ago and have six children. After his marriage to two other wives he abandoned me for the past fourteen years. He was diabolic, that is having dealings with traditional medicine men. His mother contributed a lot to making him hate me. He hated me and did not hide it. He was always beating me mercilessly and I often get injured in the process; this started right after the birth of our first child. There was a time he beat me with an 8 month old pregnancy. Most of the fighting was because of girls. He was very unfaithful right from the beginning. If I asked any question about his girl friends, he would almost kill me especially at night. By then he had furnished houses for girls outside. My husband beats me in the presence of anybody, parents, friends and the children. He acts as a brute even to the children. Any attempt to save the children from his hands would result into my being thoroughly beaten by him. My marriage had been the regret of my life except for my children.

Shade was betrothed to her husband at the age of 14 as permitted by the culture of her community – Ife-Olukotun. She reported that her husband would beat her at the slightest excuse which resulted in bruises that hurt terribly. At times, for three days she would not be able to put on clothes. She was forced to dress up in pains to go to work. Bimbo, who wept in the course of the interview reported that her husband was always violent when he talked to her and she replied. When he was angry she beats her up even during pregnancy. On one occasion, he beat her until the belt he used cut. Her baby was only two months old then, she was so annoyed that she poured hot water on him and he had to be hospitalized. The different forms of abuse suffered by women often result in psychological problems for the victims.

SEXUAL ABUSE

Forced sexual intercourse and denial of sexual intercourse among spouses are considered as domestic violence. The study indicate the prevalence of sexual abuse among spouses in Benue and Kogi States. There is a high denial of sex among spouses. 48% of the respondents from Benue State and 45% from Kogi State knew of women that were denied sex by their spouses. 60% of the respondents from Benue State and 53% of Kogi State knew men that had this experience. The other punishments include extra marital affairs, rudeness, disrespect, lack of care, refusal to cook etc. Most women noted that denial of sex is a coercive tactic that is used by men against erring wives.

Nguveren reported that:

About a year ago I went to a part of town where my husband is living in one of his houses. He literally pushed me away from the house. He accused me of bewitching him. He said that whenever he was with me, he was a man (that is, he could sleep with me as a man) but when he
was with another woman, he instantly become impotent. He claimed he traced his impotency to my devilish practices aimed at keeping him to myself alone. He explained that he was receiving treatment for his impotency and that the medicine man advised him to keep away from his wife until all his powers return to him. He no longer provides for me as his wife. He has painted me in a very bad image before the Benue community. There is no kind of torture that can be more damaging than the one I am going through. My family does not have any history of witchcraft; I am not in any way interested in diabolical things. How on earth can I seize my husband’s potency and keep it to myself alone?

Rekiya from Kogi said this about her husband:

That man is an animal, heartless, he oppresses you and is naturally stubborn. He can deny you sex for three to five years if he thinks you’ve offended him. He has one other wife and has paid a dowry for the third. My second has the same experience as I do.

Sadetu in her case reported that her husband strangled her and left her unconscious when she refused sex. She was then five months pregnant.

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional and Psychological Abuse of Women

A high percentage of respondents were aware of the different forms of abuse against women. The abuses resulted in emotional problems for them. Women were subjected to humiliation that affect them psychologically.

Msurshima from Benue State said:

Things have been very rough with my marriage psychologically. The material things are there but there is no joy in my home. My husband is no longer the man I knew 26 years ago. He was very frank, honest, polite and kind. Now he is rude and brutal. The behavior affects his health, as he has grown very old untimely because he misuses his body with women both old and young. He drinks excessively and keeps late nights.

Odema reported that:

I was married for three years and I have a child. I was the only wife of my husband. Initially it was good but after I had my baby, he started going out with one woman. He eventually went away with the woman even after I left the house. This was at Katsina-ala. It might be that the woman married my husband or my husband married her. We quarreled only about that woman. Initially, he will go out for 2 to 4 weeks without coming home and he would not give me feeding money. All efforts by members of his family at Katsina-ala such as his brothers to change his attitude proved abortive. He would not listen to advice. He would beat me whenever I questioned him about his nefarious activities. I left before it affected me psychologically. I almost went mad. I was thinking too much expecting that he would come home. I almost had heart attack.

This occurrence also happened to many men in Katsina-ala town. It is very common in Katsina-ala. The women they go out with are usually married before coming to hijack other women’s husbands. I was a complete housewife at his house. I left his house when my child was 9 months and the boy is 5½ years now. The man has not set his eyes on us since then. He is a lawyer.

DISCUSSIONS

Causes of Domestic Violence

The study found that cultural factors (viz, the patriarchal
nature of society which makes women subservient to men), the nature of some men that makes them exhibits violent behavior, and the upward mobility of women in their chosen carrier are the key factors in domestic violence. Figure 1 reveals that victims of domestic violence cuts across the various ethnic groups

Although 63% of women respondents from Benue and 76.4% from Kogi felt that physical violence against women is not normal and a part of the culture of the communities, there are certain cultural beliefs and practices which condition women psychologically to lower social status. Mimi, Ene, and Ajuma said that the Idoma culture more than the Tiv culture makes women totally subordinate to men. According to Dorshima the reason why Tiv women are not susceptible to violence form men is because they can opt out of wedlock fairly easily and quickly. However, the Idoma culture frowns at single women or divorcees and as such they do not opt out quickly.

Odema noted that:

There are cultural expectations of a woman and these lead to violence where a woman does not observe them. For example some women choose to visit their parents home anyhow without the permission of their husbands. Kneeling down in greeting which some women may not want to do is considered as stubbornness which must be corrected. Improper dressing that does not depict the culture of the tribe could lead to violence. Some eating habits can lead to violence. For example a woman is not expected to put soup on the food, this may bring problem in the house. Talking straight to the husband and lack of proper approach can lead to violence. A woman is expected to go to the back of the husband, kneel down before talking to him for approval.

Amina, Maminetu and Binta from Kogi also agreed that culture encourages violence against women. They opined that the culture which permits men to marry several wives leads to domestic violence. As a respondent, Funmi noted, No woman wants to share her husband with another woman.

Agada from Kogi reported that her husband could not withstand the thought of her obtaining a doctorate degree and he sent her packing Figure 2 and 3.

Effects of Domestic Violence

The different abuses suffered by women from their spouses have varied consequences on them. While Saadetu from Kogi State almost lost her life through strangulation Nguveren in Benue State had to contend with serious emotional and psychological torture. Ngunenge took to alcohol and started acquiring other sexual partners to remain sane. Ene, Mimi and Ngunenge suggested that domestic violence forced women to move out of their matrimonial homes and to acquire sexual partners with dire consequences. One, broken homes affect children up bringing; two, indiscriminate sex as solution to emotional problems could lead to sexually transmitted infections and the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Reasons for Staying in Abusive Relationships

The study found that most of the victims of domestic violence remained in abusive relationship. 75% of the
women who claimed that they were abused remained in their marriage and did so because they wanted to remain with their children and/or not become separated due to social stigma. Parental pressure also kept them in marriage. Consequently, few women opt out of abusive relationships. Most women remain until they are threatened with death or forced out by their spouses. A respondent Ajuma observed that:

My parents encouraged me to leave my husband when he no longer cared. My father said he made sure his daughters were educated so that they do not suffer and to be independent. Our men (Idoma) are generally very oppressive and they maltreat their wives. Our community however frowns at single parenthood or divorcees. I already had a Masters degree at the time I got married so I opted out and got a job. I take care of our only daughter and my other siblings. Possibly if I were younger and not as educated I might have remained in the relationship. I think younger girls are more afraid of getting divorced, so they remain in their matrimonial homes and even fear their husbands when they are abused.

The Hidden Nature of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is much more prevalent than is admitted by women. 74% of the male respondents and
73% of the female said that one of the ways by which men maltreat their wives is by beating them. 56% male and 64% of the female indicated that men deny their wives sex while 61% male and 71% female claimed that men often threw their spouses out of the home. 75% of the male and 89% of female indicated that women were often denied financial support by their spouses; For example, Amina a respondent from Kogi State said: I know of a woman whose husband is the Chief Executive of a State. She said that her father forced him to marry her so he beats her often and denies her sex. He frustrates her guests and relations asking the houseboys to watch over their movements so that they do not take away anything from his house. He instructs his houseboys to spy on the guests to know what they say. Although they have grown up children, he brings other women to the house and frequently forced the house girls to sex. Most women who suffer domestic violence do not talk about it. Religion makes them not to open up. A lot of women confide in me but would not want to discuss it with other people. I have personally suffered physical abuse, and even now, I suffer from emotional problems.

And from Benue, Ngunenge opined that:

I do not only see women going through hard times but I have sisters or relations passing through hard times. We have a clinic which has a social welfare outfit so we encounter domestic violence often. The hardships are in many forms, economic, social, psychological and even religious. Women are saddled with the responsibility of providing funds for family upkeep while the men use their money to drink and marry more women. Women are seen as babies so men think, speak or feel for them. Even in religion husbands tell their wives the Christian denomination to which they should belong or whether they should go to church at all.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Domestic violence is prevalent among the middle/upper class in Benue and Kogi States. The women that are subjected to abuse by their spouses are unable to contribute to development. The culture of most Nigerian communities that places women in subordinate position vis-à-vis men is largely responsible for violence against them. We agree with Castells (1997) that Patriachialism does permeate the entire organization of society from production and consumption to politics, Law and culture.

In view of the foregoing, we strongly recommend advocacy programmes through the media, public lectures, and seminars to change attitudes to women. Non-governmental organizations at the local, state, and federal levels with the support of all tiers of government should spearhead such advocacy programmes. The organizations can provide assistance to women in abusive relationship most especially for those of them that wish to opt out of such relationships. There is also no doubt that such organizations need the support of government in terms of the required legal backing to operate, and funding for their programmes.

REFERENCES


Johns Hopkins University.


