

CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND CONTROL OF SPOUSAL VIOLENCE REPORTED IN SELECTED NEWSPAPERS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Spousal violence, a form of domestic violence, is rife in Nigeria and it is perpetrated with devastating consequences such as death and bodily harm. It is sad to note that the family unit which should be a place where love, peace and care reign supreme has now become a thriving ground for suffering, wickedness and death. It is even shocking to assert and arrest with prosecution of perpetrators is not serving as a deterrent factor. This paper did a content analysis of six published cases of spousal violence in six selected newspapers, both print and online to identify causes, consequences and how it can be controlled. Spousal violence is caused by excessive and uncontrollable anger; lack of adequate care, patience, tolerance and inability to forgive. Others are wife battering, assignment of gender responsibilities and rigid adherence to it, inheritance disagreement and lack of willingness to seek divorce or separation from an abusive relationship. The consequences include loss of parts of the body and lives. Seeking separation or divorce becomes essential when interventions by third party fails. The paper concluded that emotional intelligence is essential to enable spouses identify the right time to quit an abusive relationship. This, in our own opinion, is essential because divorce or separation is better than death.

Keywords: Spousal violence, Family, Causes, Consequences, Emotional intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

Violence can be described as any act that is carried out with the intention of hurting or killing a person. This can manifest in form of physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, cultural, verbal and financial violence as well as neglect (Violence Prevention Initiative, 1992). It has been in existence right from the time of creation and the first act of violence in human history is recorded in Genesis Chapter 4 verse 8 (KJV). This is the killing of Abel by his brother, Cain; which was considered an instance of violence within the homestead. Since then, violence has been persistently perpetrated in diverse forms in human interaction and has been recognized as a social problem that is prevalent in every society (WHO, 2017). Domestic violence occurs when a member of the family threatens, hurts or kills another member of the family. The perpetrator and victim could be either of the parents and child, husband and wife, siblings, step- parent and step- son/daughter, adult grandchild and grandparent (Jackson, 2017), and male and female in dating relationship, who may or may not be living together. It is sad to note that the family unit which should be a place where love, peace and care reign supreme has now become a thriving ground for wickedness and death.

In Nigeria, spousal violence or intimate partner violence is rife and “has assumed a disturbing dimension that even current

penalties have not been able to serve as deterrent” (Agbonkese & Onuoha, 2017). Spousal violence, which is a form of domestic violence, is perpetrated by persons in formal marital and dating relationships, as well as cohabitation which may lead to bodily hurt or death. The social vice is not just increasing, but also leading to death of either of the spouses or both and including. Below are some published incidents in both print and on-line newspapers:

- ❖ Wife killed husband over second wife in Zamfara-June 30, 2018, **Saturday Tribune**.
- ❖ I stabbed Dare because he wanted to kill me; I did not know he would die-June 12, 2018, **Alaroye**.
- ❖ Woman who poured hot water on husband arraigned-June 14, 2018, **Daily Post**.
- ❖ Details about Nigerian man who allegedly beats pregnant wife to death four months after wedding-June 16, 2018, **Nigerian Monitor**.
- ❖ Lagos lawyer kills husband and cuts off his private parts-May 4, 2018, **Punch**
- ❖ Because of adultery Ladayo stabbed his fiancée to death May 29 2018, **Alaroye**.
- ❖ Woman splashes husband with hot water mixed with pepper over son's health-April 3, 2018, **Daily Post**.
- ❖ Woman attacks her husband with acid after sex in Kaduna over infidelity- February 26, 2018. **National Helm**.
- ❖ Banana Island murder of wife and

daughter: Court remands Danish national in Prison Custody-April 12, 2018, **Vanguard News**.

- ❖ Man kills 8 month old pregnant wife after impregnating house maid in Plateau- July 6, 2017, **Daily Post**.
- ❖ Female lawyer, Yewande Oyediran, bags 7years for stabbing husband to death - November 27, 2017, **Vanguard News**.

It is shocking to note that despite the fact that the perpetrators are always remanded and prosecuted, spousal violence is increasing in Nigeria. Another startling discovery in this callous act in the family unit is that the trend is now changing and women who used to be victims of the violent act are now fighting back. They are hurting and even killing their husbands. It is worrisome to observe that the home is now becoming a place where violence is perpetrated with ease and where life is no longer valued. This poses a great challenge to peace and security in the society. This study is borne out of this concern. The study examined reported cases of spousal violence in some selected newspapers, both print and online, to identify the causes, consequences and control of spousal violence in Nigeria.

The study provides answers to the following questions:

1. What are the causes of the reported cases of spousal violence in the selected newspapers in Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of the reported cases of spousal violence in the selected newspapers in Nigeria?
3. How can spousal violence be controlled in Nigeria?

The aim of the study is to examine the causes, consequences and control of spousal violence reported in some selected newspapers in Nigeria. The objectives of the study are to:

1. identify the causes of some reported cases of spousal violence in the selected newspapers in Nigeria,
2. examine the consequences of some of the reported cases of spousal violence in Nigeria.
3. identify possible control measures for spousal violence in Nigeria.

This study is apt at this time when spousal violence is rife. Spousal violence, whether it leads to bodily injury, loss of body parts or homicide, is a social vice that is gradually eroding the peace, joy and cordiality that the family unit is known for. Some of the consequences of the loveless

relationship include: physical injuries, mental problems, poor well being, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation (Esere, 2009) dependence and death, all of which affect the children, relatives, religious organizations and the society at large. It is revealing to note that all these domestic strifes are avoidable. This is because either of the two parties involved can proffer solution to the social menace, since it takes two to tangle. As such, the findings of this study should be of great benefits to all these stakeholders. Specifically, the study should assist couples and intending couples to identify and embrace tolerance as an essential ingredient of a peaceful family. Also, it should assist religious organizations and the society to emphasize the need for the two sexes in marital relationship to demonstrate mutual respect for each other and respect the sanctity of life. Likewise, it should help couples and intending couples to be emotionally intelligent to discern when to quit an abusive relationship. This is because divorce or separation is better than death, as it is only the living that can claim conjugal union. Finally, the findings of the study should help peace practitioners to lay emphasis on the importance of the family unit as the bedrock of a peaceful society. Thus, topics such as family mediation, conflict resolution in the family and other related topics can be discussed at seminars, workshops and our different places of worship.

The study examines six cases of spousal violence reported in six Nigerian newspapers: "Saturday Tribune", "Alaroye", "Daily Post", "Vanguard", "Punch" and "Nigerian Monitor" to achieve the objectives.

For the purpose of clarity, violence and spousal violence are used as defined in this study:

Violence- This refers to any act that is carried out with the intention of hurting or killing a person.

Spousal Violence- This refers to a violent act perpetrated by one spouse against another spouse in an heterosexual marital relationship which can cause hurt to parts of the body, loss of parts the body or death.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Domestic violence is a dangerous and prevalent social vice in all countries of the world. It has been recognized as a global problem which cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture (Onuoha, 2017). World Health Organization, (2017) reports that one third (30%) of all women in intimate relationship have experienced physical or

sexual violence from their male partners. The report states further that 38% of homicides of women are committed by their intimate partners. In this perspective, therefore, it is a gross violation of the fundamental human rights of a woman (Ezeilo, 2011). Presently, the trend is changing, and as such, men are now being acknowledged as victims of domestic violence (Institute of Development Studies, 2016). Spousal violence is a restricted form of domestic violence, which is used to refer to all forms of abuses perpetrated by persons (man and woman) in marital or dating relationship and cohabitation. Since it is a problem that cuts across nations, this section therefore examines spousal violence in India and Ghana.

Spousal violence is a festering social problem in India. India's situation is particularly alarming because cases of "rape, sexual assault, physical and verbal abuse have strong roots in India culture" (Livne, 2015). According to Livne (2015) these cases are derivable from patriarchy, dowry and poverty. Patriarchy is a social system in which the man who is the head of the family holds unquestionable power over women, children, property and finance. Simply put, it is a system that places men above women. The patriarch owns everything and can use it as he likes. Related to this is payment of dowry. Dowry is a marriage custom in India where the family of a bride gives cash and or goods to the family of the groom as an accompaniment to their giving away a bride. This custom makes parents to see females as financial loss to them. Poverty in the homestead is another factor which exposes women to violence of all forms. Most of the women are not educated, and as such, they have no access to good health facilities and jobs; thus they are financially dependent on the men. This financial dependency energizes patriarchy and the women are oppressed further in every aspect of their life. Other factors associated with spousal violence in this country are: early marriage, alcohol use, women's employment, and justification of wife beating (Sabri & Campbell, 2015, Speizer & Pearson 2011, Ravinaran, 2016). The consequences include poor mental and physical health, lack of interest in pursuing employment and greater earnings, welfare dependence and death (Lalmalsawma, 2014). Some of the solutions include discouraging early marriage (Speizer & Pearson, 2011), women empowerment, use of mediation by self help groups to resolve spousal conflict (Tara & Nandika, 2017) and

regular visits of victims, especially women to Dilaasa- Consolation Centre, for both medical and emotional support (Ravinaran, 2016).

In Ghana too, spousal violence is rife and it is a social vice that is culturally supported (Issahaku, 2017, Adjah & Agbema, 2016, Suuk, 2016). It is estimated that seven out of ten women have experienced violence perpetrated by men they are in intimate relationship with (Issahaku, 2017). As prevalent as the criminal act is, most Ghanaian women do not report, because they consider it as a private issue which should be handled outside the court (Campbell, 2016). Another reason for not reporting is the desire to protect their marriage (Suuk, 2016). Worthy of mentioning is the fact that women in Ghana are now rising up to attack their male partners (Accra, 2013) just as it is happening in Nigeria. Of course the men are stronger, but the women use sticks, cutlasses and hot pressing irons to overpower them. This is similar to what is happening in Nigeria where aggrieved wives use knife, hot water and acid to avenge wrongs done by their husbands. Despite this reprisal attacks, the number of women who are victims of spousal violence surpasses that of men. The causes of the violence include alcohol usage, age disparity between couples, current employment status, residential setting, level of education, polygamous marriage, presence of non-marital sexual partners, number of children and male dominance (Issahaku, 2017, Adjah & Agbema, 2016, Suuk, 2016). The consequences are physical injuries, depression, poor health, isolation, dependence, loss of jobs and wages, homicide and suicide (Institute of Development Studies, 2016).

An important contribution of the Ghanaian government towards the stoppage of this act is through the Domestic Violence Victims Support Unit (DOVVSU). This is a department within Ghana Police service that is saddled with the responsibility of protecting and promoting the welfare of women and children (Campbell, 2016). This is done by preventing and prosecuting crimes committed against them. This Unit, which now has 87 offices across the country, has, in essence, brought into the limelight an issue which was earlier considered private. Further, DOVVSU, partners with non-governmental organizations in the country to organize seminars and workshops at the grassroots level to educate men, women and children about domestic violence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is based on the Traumatic Bonding Theory developed by Patrick Carnes (1997). It is a strong emotional attachment between an abused person and his or her abuser formed as a result of the cycle of violence. This implies that the abused spouse finds it difficult to detach herself or himself from the abuser who uses both reward and punishment to maintain the relationship. The abuse, according to Cengage (2007:14) occurs in a three phase cycle:

1. Tension from a minor altercation builds up.
2. The situation escalates and eventually explodes into a violent episode.
3. Husband or Wife becomes genuinely contrite and treats his wife or husband lovingly.

This theory explains why a spouse remains in a toxic relationship, which may eventually lead to hurt or death.

THE METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the Qualitative Content Analysis method (Luo,2019). This is a research instrument that is used to study and interpret documents, texts, audio, video, books, newspapers, speeches etc The six cases of spousal violence were studied and analyzed as presented in the newspapers to identify the causes, consequences and control of the social malaise.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED CASES

Case 1

Wife killed husband over second wife in Zamfara

A housewife, Salamatu Shehu has killed her husband in Rafin Gero village of Anka Local Government Area of Zamfara state for trying to marry a second wife..... (Saturday Tribune, 30th June, 2018)

The incident above occurred because of the husband's decision to marry a second wife, despite the fact that he had erection problem. In the course of their argument, the wife Salamat grabbed a stool and hit her husband on the head. The man fell down unconscious and was rushed to the hospital where he died.

This homicide occurred because of the wife's uncontrollable anger. The fact that the man had erection problem is a good reason for her to be annoyed, while the husband's decision to marry a second wife heightened it. However, the two reasons are not enough for him to be killed. If Salamatu is not happy with her

husband's poor libido as well as his decision to marry a second wife, she can seek divorce. She has been arrested and would be prosecuted which may lead to her being imprisoned. Divorce, the option in this incident, is always frowned at in this society. Divorce, according to Abiade (2018:51) "is seen as a taboo in most cultures and religions. This is because of the devastating effects it has on the people involved, their families and the society at large. Also, it is stated in most, if not all religions, that the Creator hates divorce".

Case 2

I stabbed Dare because he wanted to kill me, I did not know he would die

"I did not do it intentionally; I had wanted to use the knife to threaten him... I did this when I discovered that he was about to kill me." This is the outcry of Olamide Akinbobola who stabbed her husband, Dare, to death at Igbogbo in Ikorodu, Lagos State.... (Alaroye, June 12, 2018)

This spousal violence which led to the death of the husband occurred because of lack of adequate care and wife battering. The deceased, who was fond of beating his wife, was stabbed in the neck with a kitchen knife by the wife. This 24 year old woman who has two children for the deceased stands the risk of death penalty as contained in Section 233 of the Criminal Law of Lagos state. It is sad to note that this woman had earlier being advised by her parents to divorce him, because of his regular violent attack on her, but she refused. She refused because she did not want to be labeled a divorcee and decided to endure the hardships. This incident lends credence to Cengage's (2007) assertion that cultural norms encourage women to put up with abuse. The two children of this couple are now orphans and may have to endure great suffering and hardships to make it in life. This is because foster parents can never completely replace a child's biological parents.

Case 3

Woman splashes husband with hot water mixed with pepper over son's health

A housewife, Mrs Janet Mohammed, of Mandela area of Minna in Niger state on Monday poured hot water mixed with pepper on her husband, Mr Alaska Mohammed after a brawl. The quarrel was over their 11 month old son's health....

(Daily Post, April 3, 2018)

The above incident, which is almost similar to that of Case 2, occurred as a result of

wife battering. The cause, as reported, is the wife's non charlatan attitude to their son's health. The wife wanted to take the child to the church instead of the hospital as advised by the husband. This led to a fight which was settled by Mr Mohammed's mother. However, the wife promised to make him regret laying his hands on her and she did. Both the argument and the fight that ensued could have been avoided if the couple had been patient and tolerant. Forgiveness is another marital virtue that is absent in this relationship. Tolerance, patience and forgiveness are essential qualities in peaceful marital relationship. Another factor that contributed to this tragic event is assignment of responsibilities with strict adherence to it. There is no doubt that one of the responsibilities of a woman is nursing a child; however if a woman fails to perform this role, a man can take it up .After all ,the child belongs to the couple and it is their joint responsibility to take care of him.

Case 4

Lagos lawyer kills husband and cuts off his private parts

Diamond Estate, Sangotedo, Ajah, Lagos State, was in turmoil on Thursday after a lawyer Udeme Odibi stabbed her husband, Otite Odibi, to death. The suspect was also said to have cut off the private parts of the deceased who was also a lawyer, and stabbed herself....

(Punch, May 4, 2018)

This callous homicide committed by a lawyer occurred as a result of disagreement over inheritance. The deceased's three year old marriage to Udeme was childless and filled with domestic violence. Otite Odibi who was also a lawyer had informed his wife of his decision to will all his properties to his daughter from his failed marriage .This infuriated Udeme and she threatened to kill him and she actually did. She stabbed him, ripped open his stomach, and cut off his private parts which she placed on his right hand. She then stabbed herself but was rushed to the hospital for treatment before she was arrested.

This death occurred because of the lack of willingness to quit this toxic marital relationship, either through separation or divorce. The deceased's failed marriage may have contributed to his decision to endure the turbulent relationship. The reason is that the society accords little or no respect to a man or woman whose marriage has failed. "...There is more to life than marriage, even though marriage

is important but every individual has a purpose. There are things that an individual can contribute to the society, to humanity and nothing is worth losing that privilege for, not even marriage." Abiade (2018).

Case 5

Banana Island murder of wife and daughter: Court remands Danish national in Prison Custody

A Lagos Magistrate's Court sitting in Yaba, yesterday remanded a Danish national, Peter Nielsen, 53, who allegedly killed his wife, Zainab, and his three year old daughter, Petra in Ikoyi Prisons...

(Vanguard News. April 12, 2018)

This spousal violence that led to the death of a mother and her daughter occurred as a result of the lack of courage to walk out of the abusive relationship. This relationship, according to Vanguard report was known for domestic violence in the neighbourhood. The possibility is there that Zainab remained in this loveless marriage because she had imbibed the idea that a woman should endure abuse; divorce is a taboo and that it is the responsibility of the woman to sacrifice everything to protect her marriage from failing. It should be asserted that marriage is to be enjoyed and not to be endured, and as such abuse should be resisted. Further, divorce should not be perceived as an ignoble act; divorce or separation is better than death. Lastly, since it takes two to tangle a peaceful marital relationship can only be achieved when the spouses are genuinely committed to make it work.

Case 6

Details about Nigerian man who allegedly beats pregnant wife to death, four months after wedding

A Nigerian man identified as Samuel Mgbeodinma has allegedly beaten his wife, Gloria to death in Lagos...It is also gathered that the late Gloria was six weeks pregnant...

(Nigerian Monitor, June 16, 2018)

It is shocking to assert that this marital relationship which had notable records of domestic violence lasted for only four months. In a chat with Tireni Adebayo, Gloria's mother reported that Samuel Mgbeodinma and ,his two sisters were always making trouble with her. Not just that, the perpetrator's father, few days to her death, had slapped her for an undisclosed reason. Gloria's mother who promised to intervene delayed her coming and eventually Gloria was killed in another violent attack by her husband.

This incident shows that it is suicidal to remain in a toxic relationship. The fact remains that there will be disagreements between spouses but battering; pushing, kicking and slapping should not be used. Finally, family members who have knowledge of instances of physical violence between couples should intervene promptly to ensure that the conflict does not escalate.

Results and Findings

From the above analysis, it can be deduced that one of the causes of spousal violence is excessive and uncontrollable anger. Anger is a normal feeling that is used to express a lack of satisfaction of an act, idea or a person. Anger has to be used with moderation because excessive and uncontrollable anger destroys. It can maim just as it can kill. Excessive and uncontrollable anger has led to the death of countless number of couples. It is essential that married partners learn how to defuse anger when there is disagreement. Staying calm is one of the strategies which must be learnt to achieve this

Lack of adequate care and provision is another trigger of spousal violence. When a couple lacks the financial strength to provide the basic needs of life-shelter, food and clothing for the members of their family, incessant quarrel becomes the order of the day. It can lead to physical assault which may result in loss of lives or fatal body injury. Provision for the family member should be a major consideration before the nuptial knot is tied. Marriage is essential, but it is not compulsory. There is the need for couples to have good and stable means of income to ensure that welfare provision is guaranteed. Skill acquisition and professional certification are essential in this empowerment effort.

Marriage is a relationship that thrives in an atmosphere where patience, forgiveness and tolerance abide. The absence of these three qualities in a marital relationship is an invitation to chaos. This is why many marriageable men and women are afraid of going into it. And it is a good decision.

Another cause of spousal violence discovered is assignment of family responsibilities with strict adherence to it. The family unit will survive where both husband and wife jointly perform their required responsibilities for the well being of the members. Strict adherence to gender roles is inimical to the well being of the family. Peace, joy and understanding reign supreme where

both husband and wife see each other as partners in progress and perform complementary roles as may be necessary.

Disagreement over inheritance is another factor that causes spousal violence. Joint ownership of properties in marital relationship is highly desirable especially where there is mutual love and trust. But if mutual love with trust is absent, it is a risky venture. Spouses in such relationship can acquire, manage and administer their properties separated as they desire to avert fatality.

Finally, lack of willingness to seek divorce or separation when a marital relationship becomes toxic is the last factor. Divorce or separation is perceived as a taboo in the society and this makes it very difficult for most couples to demand it. The reason for this stems out of societal perception of marriage as a lifelong relationship which should be so maintained at all cost. As such, any married man or woman who opts out of it is considered a failure. However, the increasing rate of fatality nowadays is a confirmation that if lives are to be preserved and sanity maintained; divorce or separation is an option that should be considered. Considering it critically, divorce signifies the death of a marital relationship, and as such, it brings along sadness. This sorrow emanates from a sense of loss-loss of a spouse, a friend, in-laws and children among others. Other sources of sorrow include fear of future, marital relationship, acceptability among colleagues and societal stigmatization. All the reasons mentioned above can discourage an abused spouse to seek divorce or separation. Despite this, there is no need for a man or woman to remain in a loveless and life threatening marriage. The fact that there are some divorced or separated spouses who are doing well is an indication that there is life, indeed, good life, after the harrowing experience. A good understanding of the dynamics of marriage is needed to actualize this. The consequences of spousal violence which include homicide, disability, imprisonment, death penalty, orphaned children and destruction of the family unit can be avoided. This can be achieved through dissolution of the marriage or separation with or without restraining order.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Marriage is an institution that demands great commitment from people because it is the foundation of a peaceful society. It is therefore

essential that spouses should settle their conflicts without recourse to violence. A peaceful family generates a peaceful and progressive society.

The following recommendations, if applied would, provide a serious resolve to spousal violence which can lead to disability or homicide.

1. Marriage is important, but not compulsory. Therefore, it should be contracted when spouses are ready to sacrifice everything to make it a success. The sacrifices include genuine love, patience, tolerance and forgiveness.
2. Marriage is an individual's choice; therefore it should not be used as a

yardstick to measure a person's achievement.

3. Couples who are experiencing hardship should seek counsel from expert marriage counsellors and experienced married couple.
4. Divorce or separation in marriage is better than death; therefore couples should be emotionally intelligent to identify the appropriate time to quit an abusive or life threatening marital relationship.
5. Finally, perpetrators of spousal violence should be promptly prosecuted and punished to serve as deterrent to other couples.

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