



CHRISTIAN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

by

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Abstract

Violence in itself is bad and may be worse when it occurs within the family system among loved ones or people who are biologically related. This paper investigated domestic violence in the contemporary society and Christian ethical response to curbing it using Nigeria as a case. The paper adopted a descriptive method by presenting an overview of domestic violence with reviews of media reports and available statistical data from previous researches by government and non-government organizations. Thereafter, the paper enumerated various forms of domestic violence or abuse as including; physical, spiritual, emotional and economic abuses. Causes of domestic violence were identified as having internal and external factors. While some internal factors are family background and personality traits, external factors include cultural beliefs and social influences. Effects of domestic violence can be physical injury, psychological distress, social injustices and economic deprivations. Investigations into biblical view on domestic violence revealed that domestic violence is a menace which is not expected to thrive among people or in any society. Christian ethical response to domestic violence were identified to include creating general awareness against the act, providing Christian education emphases and enlightenment programs, effective pastoral care and counseling programs for the victims and families and positive contributions of the media to curbing the menace.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Abuse, Christian, Ethical Response,

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is a social syndrome occurring in virtually every society. As a pattern of abusive behaviour in any familial relationship such as marital, dating or cohabitation, friendship, and family by one party or member against another, domestic violence is rampaging in almost every contemporary society globally. In Nigeria, cases of domestic violence between married couples, parent and child, siblings and friends are common reports making headlines in the daily newspapers and social media. Occuring in many forms of abuse including physical, sexual,

emotional or psychological, economic and spiritual abuses, domestic violence does not exclude any race, gender, age or religion. Reports of wife battering, spouse desertion, child abuse, and family members neglect are common news in many nations of the world including Nigeria. While some cases are reported, many more are not brought to public notice and therefore do not receive adequate attention.

This paper sees domestic violence as a social-ethical issue violating human rights and in deprivation of human dignity which needs necessary response to curtail the menace. Therefore, the paper presented an overview of domestic violence, described some forms of domestic violence, causes and effects of domestic violence in the contemporary society particularly in Nigeria. A Christian ethical reflection and recommendations to curbing the menace of domestic violence were also highlighted.

I. OVERVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

The World Health Organization (WHO) defined domestic violence as the range of sexually, psychologically, and physically coercive acts used against women by current or former male intimate partners.¹ However, domestic violence does not occur only between married couples, it can happen between parents and children, siblings or any member of a family or household against another. Cases of domestic violence have been on the increase in Nigeria. However, due to non-availability of official statistics from appropriate segments within the society, it may be difficult to ascertain the extent at which domestic violence occurs in Nigeria.

Domestic Violence has been a prevalent phenomenon which is receiving media attention more prominently within the last few decades. Media reports on daily newspapers often bear captions or headlines showing that domestic and sexual related violence such as husbands killing

¹ World Health Organization, Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.who.int/prevalence/domestic/violence/ Accessed September 29, 2017.

or brutalising their wives, or wives stabbing their husbands to death, fathers committing incest against their daughters, or rape cases between young people in familial relationships, are prevalent in different parts of the country.

A review of reports from different daily newspapers in Nigeria reveals that cases of violence among intimate partners and relations occur at alarming rates. For instance, *The Punch* reported in 2017 that Amnesty International declared in 2007 that a third of women in Nigeria are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers.² Many of these victims endure the experience, believing they have nowhere to go and even if they reported the case, the law will not protect them. Similarly, the statistics presented by *This Day* in 2011 were frightening showing that about 50% of women have been battered by their husband. Surprisingly, more educated women (65%) were in this situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%).³ Among those affected as victims, about 97% of them were not prepared to report to the Nigerian Police. ON Aihie confirms that the culture of silence reinforces the stigma attached to the victim rather than condemning the perpetrator of such crimes.⁴ This implies that violence in the home, especially against women continued to be regarded as home or private affairs in many cultures in Nigeria and it is therefore shielded away from involvement of the public.

There was an unhealthy increment in the rate of domestic violence in Nigeria from 21% in 2011 to 31% in 2012 but with a 1% decrease in 2013 survey to 30%. The findings of the 2013 survey revealed that domestic violence ranks amongst the top for most common victimisations in Nigeria, with south East highest in rank with 43%, followed by the South West and the North

² Taiwo Ojoye, "Addressing the scourge of Domestic Violence" *The Punch* . June 12, 2017, www.punch.ng.com>addressing-the-scurge-0--new. Accessed October 2, 2022.

³ Tess Wigwe, Domestic Violence: When law fails to protect. *This Day* (Sept. 20, 2011). <http://www.thisdaylive.com>. Accessed October 16, 2022.

⁴Aihie ON, "Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria Implication for Counseling" (2009) Edo J. Couns. 2 (1) 4.

East with 35% each. The South-South recorded a 26% incidence while the North Central and North West recorded the lowest with 29% each.⁵ These reports and findings on domestic violence reveal the prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria, though it takes different forms, women, girls and children are mostly affected. Peradventure this is so because the Nigerian society is basically patriarchal and women seems to be placed within the subordinate position in many cultures of the people.

In agreement to this assertion, Arhie affirmed that domestic violence functions as a means of enforcing conformity with the role of a woman within customary society.⁶ The news that often come to limelight are those affecting public figures within the society such as those involved in entertainment industries as actors/actresses, singers and those in business/financial institutions. The cases between Sulaiman Olalekan who killed his wife, Chika Egbo by pouring acid on her in November 2012, Akolade Arowolo killed his wife, late Titilayo, a Banker by multiple stabs in 2014; Mercy Aigbe, an actress was battered by former husband Lanre Gentry in 2017, and more recently in on going investigation, was the case of late Oshinachi Nwachukwu, a singer whose husband Peter Nwachukwu is alleged to have been involved in her death as a result of their marriage that was characterized with violence against the late wife.⁷

As at 2011, only four states, including Lagos State out of the 36 states in Nigeria and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja have passed laws against domestic violence. By 2015, however, the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPP) was passed into law as enacted by the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Assembly having been signed by the President of

⁵Kemi Okenyodo, Public Presentation of Findings of the National Crime Victimization and Safety Survey. (2013) CLEEN Foundation. www.cleen.org> Text Report of 2013 N... CLEEN Foundation is an NGO which aims to promote public safety, security and accessible justice in Nigeria and West Africa.

⁶Aihie ON, Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria Implication for Counseling (2009) Edo J. Couns. 2 (1) 5.

⁷ Editorial Board, "On Domestic and Sexual Violence Cases" in *The Guardian*. Nov. 10, 2022, Retrieved from <https://guardian.ng/opinion/on-domestic-and-sexual-violence-cases/> on 02/02/2023.

the federation on 28/05/2015 and is now known as the VAPP Act 2015.⁸ The Act purposes to eliminate violence in private and public life; prohibit all forms of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, domestic, harmful traditional or cultural practices including acts of discrimination against persons. It was also to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders or violators of the law.⁹ The VAPP Act 2015 is relevant and of great importance at this period considering the increased rate of domestic violence in the Nigerian society.

In a survey carried out by Obi and Ozumba on the factors associated with domestic violence, in South East, Nigeria in 2007 shows that 70% of the respondents reported abuse in their family with 92% of the victims being female partners and the remaining 8% being male.¹⁰ A year earlier, Project Alert, a zero tolerant to violence against women and girls organization through campaigns, advocacy and support services including provision of legal aid, counseling, medical and shelter conducted a research among women working in the markets and other places of work and young women and girls in Universities and secondary schools respectively in Lagos State. The reports showed that 64% of 45 women interviewed had been beaten up by their male partners either as boyfriends or husbands while 56% of 48 market women interviewed admitted experiencing violence by their loved ones.¹¹ Over the years, the Project Alert organization have conducted many researches almost annually with similar reports. In 2017 for instance, the organization reported that between July 2013 and July 2015, there were 1110 cases of domestic violence reported to the organization with child sexual abuse leading the toll in Nigeria.¹²

⁸ The Violence Against Person (Prohibition) Act. 2015. <http://lawpavillion.com>. Accessed October 6, 2022.

⁹The Violence Against Person (Prohibition) Act. 2015. <http://lawpavillion.com>. Accessed October 6, 2022.

¹⁰Obi S. N. and Ozumba B. C. Factors Association with Domestic Violence in South East Nigeria (2007). *Jn Obsterics Gynaecol.* 27 (1), 77.

¹¹ Project Alert. No Safe Haven: Annual Report of Attacks on Women in Nigeria. The Violence Policy Centre (VPC) Washington (2006). <http://www.projectalert.attack-women-nig.htm>. Accessed October 1, 2022.

¹² Sexual Violence in Nigeria: A Silent Epidemic (2017, Revd. Edition). Project Alert Publication, 2017. Accessed <https://projectalertnig.org/research-and-documentation/> on Feb. 12, 2023

II. FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence may be expended in one form of abuse at a time, repeatedly in the same or different ways, or occurring in multiple manners at different times. Some of these forms of abuse are hereby discussed briefly;

- **Physical Abuse:** This is the use of physical force in a way that injures the victim or put him or her at the risk of being injured. This form is one of the most common forms of domestic violence including acts of grabbing, pinning, biting, hitting with objects and shooting.¹³ It includes beating, kicking, knocking, pushing, choking and in similar ways.
- **Spiritual Abuse:** This includes denying a person his/her right of religious association; therefore preventing a person from enjoying or engaging in his/her spiritual or religious practices or using one's religious belief to manipulate, dominate or control the victim. In spiritual abuse cases, the victim is forced to observe or deprived of performing religious rites, festivals and practices.
- **Emotional Abuse:** in this situation, the victim is According to Adebayo, this includes intimidating a person or his / her possession or damaging a person's sense of self-esteem by putting him/ her at risk of various behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders.¹⁴
- **Sexual Abuse-**which includes all forms of sexual assaults, harassment, or taking undue advantages sexually by exploitations, extortions, and denial of sexual rights especially between married couples. A study carried out in different parts of Nigeria by the CLEEN Foundation confirmed an alarming increase in sexual and gender based violence in forms

¹³ Ishrat Batool Naik and Abdul Raffie Naik, "Domestic Violence: Its Causes, Consequences and Preclusion Strategies" in IJARIE, Vol.2, Issue 2, 2016. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/36037822/Domestic_violence/ on 12/02/23

¹⁴ Adebayo Anthony A. "Sociological Implication of Domestic Violence on Children's Development in Nigeria." Journal of African Studies and Development 6 (1) (2014), 10.

of rape, incests and physical assaults with some resulting in deaths.¹⁵ Describing the situation as epidemic. The different government agencies and arms at the appropriate levels were urged to respond to the issues with urgency while the foundation declared its commitment to monitoring and reporting the implementation of policies designed to tackle the menace.

- Economic Abuse: which includes stealing from or defrauding a loved one of material possessions, withholding money meant for essential things or confiscating properties of economic values, exploiting family members for financial gain, preventing a loved one from working to earn some income, and similar issues.
- Psychological Abuse or Neglect: In this situation, there may be intimidation, blackmailing, harassments, or stalking. Deliberate failure on the part of the benefactor to provide for the victim dependents; adults or children constitute domestic violence. Neglect is also seen as a form of domestic violence by Fareo Dorcas characterized as denial of parental responsibilities of basic needs of life by lack or inadequate provisions of food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and protection from harm to family members.¹⁶ This form of violence may also be grouped with emotional, or economic abuse as it may apply to some cases.

No list of the different forms of domestic violence or abuse is exhaustive. For instance, Ishola added that forced marriage, underage marriage, hard labour or child labour, and abuse of widows,¹⁷ are common cultural practices among some people groups in Nigeria which constitute a form of abuse resulting into domestic violence. Each of the different categorizations manifests

¹⁵ Benson Olugbuo, "CLEEN Foundation Observes Sexual and Gender Based Violence Epidemic within a Pandemic.." June 15, 2020. Retrieved from <https://cleen.org/2020/06/15/cleen-foundation>. On February 25, 2023.

¹⁶ Fareo Dorcas O. "Domestic Violence Against Women in Nigeria" *European Journal of Psychological Research*. 2(1) (2015), 26.

¹⁷ S. A. Ishola, "Domestic Violence: The Nigerian Experience" in *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry*, 13 (2016); 10.. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21806/aamm.2016.13.01>. Retrieved on November, 16, 2022.

or is practiced in diverse ways against the victims by the abuser with whom they are expected to be in some familial and love relationship.

III. CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

Many factors are attributed as causes of domestic violence including individual personality or traits, mental dispositions and characters, social status, and tolerance of violence and more. These factors can be categorised as internal and external factors.

Internal Factors: These are characterized by family background, personality, and personal mental conditions. Personality traits and mental characteristics: are characterized by attitudes resulting from a sudden burst of anger, poor impulse control, and also poor self-esteem. Dulfon and Golant, in their book; *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile*, opine that many offenders of women abuse have a borderline personality that is developed early in life.¹⁸ However, these psychological theories are disputed by Steele, in domestic violence who thinks that social factors are essential and contributes greatly to total man than a personality trait, mental illness or psychopath (a person who is mentally ill, who does not care about other people, and who is usually dangerous or violent.¹⁹ Assertively the personality trait of a person contributes to how he treats and relates to others.

Family upbringing and social learning: individual upbringing contributes to one's behavioural pattern; it plays a significant role in the way that a person treats others. If a person grew up in a hostile environment or family, there is tendency that such person may be involved in domestic violence. Rosenberges opined that abusive parents are often found to have grew up in homes where their parents were emotionally uninvolved, physically absent, abusive or

¹⁸ D. T. Dulfon & S. K. Golant. *The Batterer: A Psychological Profile*. Basic Books 1995.
<http://www.worldcat.org/oc/c/243827535>

¹⁹ Steele, B.F, *Domestic Violence: A Psychiatric Study of Parents Who Abuse Infants and Small Children*. 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/domestic_violence. Retrieved October 1, 2017

involved in substance abuse.²⁰ This issue may be one of the least reasons for domestic violence but it serves as one of the foundational causes of it, because children learn more by observation, learning how to behave by watching their parents or close family members. The implication here is that if a boy grew up in an abusive home, he is likely to be abusive in inter-personal relationships when he becomes a man. A woman who grew up in a home characterized by hostility, quarrel, and violence may exhibit similar conduct in bringing up children in her care. Thus, growing up in environment of violence could more likely be a factor to cause imitation of violence. Crowell and Sugarman corroborated this opinion, they wrote that often, “violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner.”²¹ Consequently, a man who grew up in a family where the husband battered, or openly abused the wife without the former being challenged by any constituted authority against such acts may end up being involved in domestic violence by maltreating and abuse of family members.

External Factors: These are environmental factors emanating from where the individual grew up or was raised characterized by cultural beliefs, social stress and other environmental influences.

Cultural Belief: Culturally, women and female children in many parts of Africa, including Nigeria are seen as subordinate to the man and male children. Whereas the man is seen as superior and the authority of the father is such that must be obeyed, the woman , and no one dares question his authority. According to Danfulani, “the image of women is rather low among the Nigerian ethnic group surveyed. Women are regarded as a source of sexual satisfaction for the man; they are regarded as man’s property and treated as such; even some religions consider

²⁰ Margaret, Rosenberge, *Issues in Focus: Gaining a Clear Biblical Perspective on the Complex Issues of Our Time* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books.1999), 29.

²¹ Crowell, B. and Sugarman, D.B; *An Analysis of Risk Markers in Husband to Wife Violence: The current State of Knowledge, Violence and Victim* (n.p, 1996), 102.

women as inferior to men.”²² Culturally, major ethnic groups in Nigeria; Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa have strong patriarchal societal structures that encourage men to see themselves as having privilege or are entitled to power and control over their partners that lead to the justification of domestic violence.²³ In their opinion, Kritz and Makinwa Adebusoye agreed that the Hausa are more supportive of domestic violence and view it as an inherent right of a husband, the reason being that many women look up to their husbands for everything.²⁴ Culturally many tribes in Nigeria, hold that women and in some instances, the children also should be concerned only about house chores and care of the home and not interfere in other matters about the home. This perception has encouraged violence against the woman or child who tends to be involved in issues regarded as strictly men affairs.

Social Stress: this is a situation which threatens healthy relationships, esteem, or sense of belonging within a group, or broader social context one may belong to including the family.²⁵ Stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation with increased pressure, it can also emerge in the context of evaluated performance situations,²⁶ therefore when the abuser or victim is not up to the expectation of the other, it could lead to domestic violence. As it is an external factor, it may not be true to all situations in a relationship if it is well managed. The financial issue can be the problem because a couple in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence due to increased stress and conflicts about finance.²⁷ Traditionally, the man is considered the breadwinner of the home with an expectation to make money available for the

²²Danfulani Kore, *Culture and the Christian Home: Evaluating Cultural Marriage and Family in Light of Scripture* (Bukuru: Africa Christian Textbook, 2009), 18.

²³Bisi Olateru-Olagbegi, and Afolabi, Biola Akiyode (nd). *Nigeria Women's Situation*. http://www.wildafao.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article. Retrieved Oct. 3, 2017.

²⁴M. M. Kritz. and Adebusoye Makinwa, “Ethnicity, Work and Family as Determinants of Women’s Decision-Making Autonomy in Nigeria (2006) Population and Development Programme” www...

²⁵ Gouin J.P.& Hanston,L.Close relationships,Inflamation, and Health.Neuroscience and Biobehaviour Reviews, 35 (2010); 1, 33-38.

²⁶ S. S. Dickerson, and M. E Kemeny, “Acute Stressors and Cortisol Response: A Theoretical Integration and Synthesis of Laboratory Research” in *Psychological Bulletin*, 130 (2004) 3, 355-391. www.apapsychological.org. retrieved Oct. 9, 2017. <http://links.sringes.com>>---

²⁷R. Jewkes, “Intimate & Partner Violence: Causes and Prevention” (2002). *Lancet*. 359 (9315). 10.1016/50140-6736 (02) 08357-5

family upkeep. However in contemporary situation, the woman also takes up some work to supplement the family income. Where this is not forthcoming, for reasons such as economic hardship or business failure, the relationship is threatened and may lead to domestic violence. Ishola opined that at this stage, the couple might be co-habiting and not be living as a happy family. Love and respect are lost between the couple and the result may breed violence.²⁸ Although violence is not always caused by stress it may sometime be a way that some people respond to stress.

Drugs and Alcoholism: Anyone acting under the influence of drugs or alcohol will be dangerous to the wellness of any relationship to which they belong. In a drunken state, the violent person is unable to tolerate any disagreement from the spouse or children. Kunyyop affirmed that anyone in this state is liable to interpret any action as insulting or insubordination, and may result into violence.²⁹ Deviant behaviours resulting in domestic violence have been traced to drugs and Alcoholism. Wives of alcoholics are often subjected to different forms of alcohol-related abuses and violence. A research conducted by American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress indicated that 50% of marriages in which only one spouse drinks heavily end in divorce, and that 12-70% of adults who abuse children are alcoholics.³⁰ Drugs and Alcoholism contribute in significant way to domestic violence in every society.

Social Tolerance: Lack of sanctions against perpetrators in domestic violence is another factor responsible for the menace. Relatives or family members such as parents, and other relatives do not encourage women and children to leave violent and obscene relationships. Instead, they urge them to stay in the marriage, especially for the sake of the children, in the case of adopted children, or cohabitant like house maid, cousins or nephew they are encouraged to

²⁸Simon Adewuyi Ishola, "Domestic Violence: The Nigerian Experience" *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission and Ministry* 13 (2016) 10. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21806/aamm.2016.13.01>. Retrieved September, 2017. (3-16).

²⁹ Samuel Waje Kunhiyop, *African Christian Ethic* (Nairobi:Hippo Books, 2008) 245.

³⁰"Effective of Parental Substance Abuse on Children and Families. American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress" Website <http://www.aets.org/article230.htm>. Accessed Oct.5, 2017

stay because of financial hardship and poverty. Thus, the lack of law or measure for controlling or punishing those who involve in domestic violence, sanctions on those who perpetrate domestic violence contributes to the increase in domestic violence issue in the society because many communities or state has no serious until recently when human right activists and NGOs are coming up to the rescue of victim of domestic violence.

Consequently, as the list of the types or forms of domestic violence is inexhaustive, so it is with possible causes. For instance, Kunhiyop opined that majority of unresolved issues in marriage sometimes lead to violence. He enumerated some causes of domestic violence as; physical and emotional weakness of women, demonstration of power and control over the victim, denial of sex, lack of sexual satisfaction, polygamous marriages issues including jealousy, envy and possessiveness.³¹ Other causes, Ishola added to the above mentioned causes are religious belief, childlessness, and the male-child syndrome.³² It implies that the more the forms of domestic violence there is, the more the list of the causes is also likely to grow because the forms of violence are sometimes causes of domestic violence and vice versa.

IV. EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence has great effects on both victim and family members, especially children who witness such incidence. It can result to long term-effects inflicting physical, emotional and psychological pains on the victim. Some of these effects are;

- Physical Effect: Bruises, broken bones, head injuries and internal bleeding are some of the effects of a domestic violence incident that requires medical attention and hospitalisation.³³ Victims may also experience pregnancy-related complications. Berrios

³¹ Kunhiyop, 244-245.

³² Ishola, 10-11.

³³ Jones, R. H., The American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist: A Decade of Responding to Violence Against Women. (2007). *Internal Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics*, 58,1 (43-50).

added some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence as arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome. Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence relationship experience greater risk of miscarriage, pre-time labour, and injury to or death of the fetus,³⁴ which sometimes cannot be repairable.

The result of a study carried out around 2005 in the Federal Capital City (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria on pregnant women attending the antenatal clinic of the National Hospital revealed that, physical, sexual, and psychological abuses among pregnant women was prevalent. One third of the women who responded to the study experienced domestic violence. Physical abuse takes second rank after psychological abuse followed by sexual abuse. In terms of the psychological abuse, about 20% of women required medical treatment due to the nature of the abuse and most frequent medical complication reported was premature labour³⁵ which may result to psychological depression on the women.

- **Psychological Effect:** It is commonly reported among victims who live with their perpetrators especially with cases of child and sexual abuses; feelings of isolation, depression, stress, fear, and self-destructive behaviour, anger, hostility, and poor self-esteem.³⁶ Particularly, victims of sexual abuse usually develop relationship problems finding it difficult in trusting others, especially those of the opposite sex. According to Vitanza, Vogal and Marshall, the most common psychological effect of domestic violence is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is characterised by flashbacks, instructive images, exaggerated startle response, night mares and avoidance of triggers

³⁴Berrios, D. G., Domestic Violence: Risk Factors and Outcomes (2011). *Western Journal of Medicine*. 17 (2) (133-143).

³⁵Efetie, E. R. and Salami, H. A. Domestic Violence on Pregnant Women in Abuja, Nigeria. Retrieved on October 6, 2017. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed>.

³⁶Barnett, why battered women do not leave: External inhibiting factors, social support and internal inhibiting factors. (2001). *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*. 2 (1), 5. <http://www.violence.abuse/women-n-htm>. Accessed October 4, 2017.

that are associated with the abuse.³⁷ Living with PTSD could be traumatic as the victim may be affected from living a normal life in any area of life.

- **Social Effects:** There has been an increase in acknowledgement that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse while growing up is at a higher risk of developing disorders socially.³⁸. Some social and behavioural problems that can result due to domestic violence includes; increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and mood swing in relating or socializing with friends, family and acquaintances. They carry a stigma that makes it difficult for them to relate well in the society. Children learn from what they see happening around them. They will learn violence as they watch their parents involved in domestic violence. Kunhiyop asserted that children who have been abused often become delinquent and abusive in their relationships with people. He further stated that the bullies in the streets are often those who have been physically abused at home.³⁹ Which eventually affects some of them later in their marriage relationship, some of them even find it difficult to go into relationship for the fear of having such experiences.
- **Economic/Financial Effect:** Some victims of domestic violence end up being affected financially. The Advocate for Human Right group in their report are of the opinion that “the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence is financial problem, and it is the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators.”⁴⁰ Economically dependant victims of domestic violence who are often children or women become perpetually violated as long as they remain independent financially. Once victims leave the perpetrators with little or no money of their own to live on, they may

³⁷ Vitanza, S, Vogal L. C., Marshall L. L., “Distress and Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder” in Abused Women. (1995). Violence and Victim. 10 (1): 28, 23-34. <http://www.researchgate.net/publicatio>. Accessed October 10, 2017.

³⁸Dodd, L. W. Therapeutic Group Work With Young Children and Mothers Who Have Experienced Domestic Abuse (2009). Education Psychology in Practice. 25 (21)

³⁹Kunhiyop, 246

⁴⁰ The Advocates for Human Right: Stop Violence Against Women (2010). http://www.stopvaw.org/domestic_violence_and_housing.html. Accessed on

eventually return to the abuse or bear the effect of lacking the basic needs of food, clothing and shelter.

V. CHRISTIAN ETHICAL RESPONSE TO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Several cases of domestic violence were recorded in the Bible. Careful study of these events and the way some of them were handled reveal the Christian perspective to the menace. Beginning with the first recording of domestic violence in the Bible; the killing of Abel by Cain his brother, it is observed that not only did the incidence bring sorrow into the family of Adam and Eve, but God also frowned at it and punished Cain for it. (Genesis 4:8-16) “Then the LORD said [to Cain], ‘What have you done? Listen! Your brothers’ blood cries out to me from the ground’...Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him.” (Gen.4:10, 15b, NIV). It is important to note that God did not allow for Cain to be killed by anyone so that violence does not continue within the family. Thus, domestic violence against family members is detestable to God.

Sexual abuse as a form of domestic violence occurred with Lot offering to give his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom when they wanted to attack the men that visited Lot; He [Lot] said “Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don’t do anything to these men, ...” (Gen. 19:8, NIV). Other records of instances of sexual form of domestic violence in the Bible are those against Dinah, the daughter of Jacob by Shechem (Gen.34:1-31) and Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, and daughter of King David by her half brother, Amnon (2 Sam. 13:1-38). The response of the sons of Jacob resulted into communal clashes, hostility and fear which eventually led the family to migrate from Shechem. Similarly, the response of Absalom brought further violence within the family resulting to murder of Amnon and going into exile of Absalom. Thus, domestic violence often resulted into family and community clashes that claim lives.

Sometimes, violence within the family against women or children is justified by some biblical injunctions which approves of headship of the husband over the wife as “for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the Head of the church...” (Ephesians 5:23, NIV) and parental discipline to be exercised over children in “whoever spares the rod hates his son, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them” (Pro.13:24,NIV). Kunhiyop opined that much domestic abuse arises from a man’s determination to prove that he is the head of his family. However, the biblical definition of what it means to be the head of the household as husband or parent conveys more of responsibilities of love and care rather than allowing the abuse of such positions with violence. The Bible clearly presents Jesus Christ as head of the church for which He demonstrated absolute love and God as the responsible father who shows love in discipline. Therefore, there is no moral or biblical justification for domestic violence.

The Bible is the final authority and manual for Christian guidance in behavior or attitude. Perpetrators of violence must be reminded that every human being; man or woman, boy or girl is made in the image of God. No religion or socio-cultural practice or bias is morally justified to defame or subjugate another person by acts of violence. Domestic violence is perhaps one of the worst kinds of violence anyone may receive because it often comes from people who were supposed to care for and protect the one that has become the victim in their hands. God expects that all human being be treated with respect, honour and dignity. Therefore, the church and Christians need to respond against domestic violence in the following ways:

Create General Awareness: the need to create awareness to the general public beginning from the home, school and church to the society that domestic violence is a grievous offence is necessary. Cases of abuse should not be handled secretly anymore, rather, reporting and involving the law enforcement agencies including the Office of Public Defender (OPD),

established to safeguard the fundamental human rights and freedom of the vulnerable and less privileged⁴¹ should ensue.

Christian Education and Enlightenment Programs: Churches and para-church organizations should regularly organize educational and enlightenment programs for the general public in form of seminars, workshops, public lectures and researches in places where domestic violence may be prevalent. In addition, sermons and teachings to address issues of violence in the home should be regular by ministers in churches. There is need for the church to teach and emphasise on the dignity of man and biblical perspectives on humankind. Through these avenues, the people would be exposed to various legal provisions available in defence of the victims and curbing the wrongdoers.

Pastoral Care and Counselling: There is need for emphasis on domestic violence during premarital counseling for intended couples to be handled by pastors in the ministry. In addition, as a matter of urgency; ministers of the gospel should emphasis more on the biblical ways of handling widows, orphans and other less privileged in their families and society.

Media Contributions: There is need for media house, apart from creating awareness on the prevalence of domestic violence; to always enlighten the public on necessary steps to be taken in case of domestic violence. Furthermore, regular follow up on cases through prosecution processes of the offender should be given wide publicity to serve as caution for others who want to involve in such act.

CONCLUSION

Christian ethical reflections depict domestic violence as an infringement on human right and dignity. The Bible teaches that all human beings irrespective of gender, age, race or tribe, social status or qualification are divinely and equally created in the image of God. Therefore harmony

⁴¹ Office of Public Defender,(OPD) Lagos State. Opd.lagosstate.gov.ng>responsibilities-2.accessed Oct. 4, 2017.

and love should be reflected in all relationships beginning with members of a family. The wellbeing of every community is dependent on the safety and welfare of every member of the families and households that make up the community and by extension, their society. If every family which is the smallest unit of the society enjoys good interpersonal relationships among members there would be happiness and peaceful coexistence stemming from intrapersonal relationships among members of the community and the society they all belong. Whatever will jeopardize the wellness of families and hence the society such as domestic violence must be avoided by all stakeholders. Therefore, domestic violence should be condemned in strong terms from the family, to the church and the government of every society including Nigeria.

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