

Review Article

Domestic Violence among Couples in Yoruba Society of Nigeria and Its Moral Concern for Church

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Abstract: Domestic violence is undue acts in the bond of marriage to exercise power and control over the victims' behaviours. Human's violation of God's principles of marriage leads to domestic violence. The wrong views that some individuals carry into marriage are responsible for domestic violence among young couples today. This paper classifies factors that promote domestic violence among couples in Yoruba society into four major categories, namely; socio-cultural, moral, economic and cognitive factors. This paper argues that domestic violence is evident among couples in Yoruba society of Nigeria with devastating effects on the children, couples, society, government and church. The contemporary church as the representative of God on earth is saddled with the responsibility of making known to the world, the divine mandate of marriage. Domestic violence is not morally and socially justifiable. This paper recommends that the church should create more awareness of the protection and empowerment of women in society. Every couple should run away from any practice and worldviews that give room for domestic violence. The perpetrators and victims of domestic violence should be open and objective to the pastoral counselling.

Keywords: Church, domestic violence, marriage, society, Yoruba.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is God's institution and it is a divine gift to man. God provides principles for sustaining marital life. However, human's violation of God's principles on marriage leads to domestic violence. The wrong views that some individuals carry into marriage is responsible for domestic violence among young couples today. The value and sacredness of marriage as long life commitment are daily reducing in society. Domestic violence is a destructive menace in the society which is causing a lot of problems in the church and society. Several husbands and wives have separated as a result of unresolved issues. Prayer Mountains and houses of prayers have become abode of some spouses as a result of domestic violence. There is alarming news of domestic violence on radio and newspapers.

Worst still, many marriages that were conducted in the church are not exempted from this menace. This paper argues that children and spouses who are victims of domestic violence are threats to stable homes, society and church of God. Domestic violence is daily affecting the future leadership of society and value of marriage. This poses challenge to the church as agent of transformation in the society. This paper examines domestic violence in Yoruba context from African Christian ethical point of view. Yoruba society consists of states in the southwest of Nigeria.

Overview of Domestic Violence

The perceptions of domestic violence vary based on region, religion and class. There are differences in the perceptions of domestic violence varying across reasons. Domestic violence is undue actions between husband and wife with the intention to control the victims' behaviours. Flury, Nyberg and Riecher-Roosler [1] are of the opinion that domestic violence is threat and force against another person with the purpose of harming and exercising power and control over them. The perpetrators and victims do belong to the same domestic environment. Similarly, Powell [2] considers domestic violence as acts of violence, power and coercion with purpose of controlling another person's behaviour. The victims of domestic violence whether husband or wife uses available means at

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their jurisdiction to control the victims' behaviours or characters. Thus, domestic violence is undue acts in the bond of marriage with the intention to exercise power and control over the victims' behaviours.

This paper adopts Slaber and Green [3] types of domestic violence which includes physical, sexual, psychological and economic assaults. Physical Assaults: This includes throwing objects at one another, pushing, littering, slapping, stabbing and beating. This also involves physical neglect, such as withholding or eliminating food, shelter and clothing. Sexual Assaults: This means forced sexual intercourse. This comes up when sexual activity is carried out without the consent of the woman. It is also referred to as marital rape, this comes when the male assumes that it is his right and privilege to have sex whenever he wishes, and in any form he desires without considering the disposition of the partner.

However, Traditional African men will not agree with forced sexual intercourse within the bond of marriage owing to the African patriarchal worldview which considers wives as their husband property. Psychological Assault: This has to do with intimidation, threats and destruction of victim's self-esteem through constant criticism and abuse to destroy self-worth. It also involves threatening to injure the partner or children, dominating woman's life, downgrading her personality. Economic Assault: This is the prohibition from employment or economic empowerment with the intention to weaken the victims and determine their fate.

Furthermore, Folami [4] reported an empirical work on domestic violence carried out in two heterogeneous communities in Southwest Nigeria; and affirm that women suffer high levels of domestic violence such as sexual abuse, economic and social deprivation. The study further revealed that 30.9 percent of the respondents in Akure affirm that tradition and culture were reasons for not reporting domestic violence to the police. The fear of unknown, what would happen to the home and children; consequences of reporting to the police affects women attitude of reporting to the police. The level of education of women has no significant effect on reported cases of domestic violence and 70 percent of highly educated women interviewed in the two communities did not see reporting domestic violence as best option. Instead of reporting to the police, women prefer to report to the family head, community leader, family friends, neighbours, and traditional rulers.

Factors Promoting Domestic Violence in Society

Factors that promote domestic violence in Yoruba society are divided into four major categories, namely; socio-cultural, moral, economic and cognitive factors and are spell below.

Socio-cultural Factors: The socio-cultural context of Yoruba society is patriarchal, which promotes domestic violence in contemporary time. The socio-cultural factors are:

Patriarchal Worldview of Life: In Yoruba context, many wives are considered as their husbands' properties. In Yoruba context, women refer to their husbands as "*Olowo ori mi ale elomiran*," meaning he who owns me and the concubine of another woman. Husbands sometimes live with their wives with this wrong view and abuse them. Kunhiyop [5] corroborates this position that African traditional beliefs often hold that a woman is a man's property. To prove this and to uphold his image as the "lion" in the family, a man will not permit any insubordination by his wife or children and resorts to physical and verbal violence to assert his control over them. The above assertion shows that women suffer from men. Sometimes, some husbands will like to dominate their wives because of patriarchal tendency in them. Not all wives will agree that their husbands should dominate them, especially at this contemporary time of civilisation.

Lack of Male Children: The values of male children are rated high in Yoruba context. They usually call them *arole* meaning "family sustainers or pillars." It could also mean a man who stands in as head of the family if the person (head of the family) is no more. For instance, if a man is looking for the so-called *arole*, he might be encouraged to get a concubine outside. If the woman gets pregnant, she becomes his wife culturally [6]. This narrow-minded initiative has contributed immensely to the high rate of domestic violence in society. The wrong view on the sex of children is a major socio-cultural factor that promotes domestic violence in Yoruba society.

Barrenness: Among Africans, especially the Yoruba tribe, childbearing is very important to the extent that if a woman does not get one in time, people will advise her husband to marry another wife. A typical Yoruba traditional belief is that "*Ori omo nipe omo wa saye*" meaning, "the birth of a child gives room to another" [7]. Kore [8] adds that a husband will divorce his wife or marry additional wives to have children. A childless wife, due to inability to conceive, abortion or miscarriage is looked down upon with shame and abuse. She may be accused of consuming her children in the womb. No matter how good a wife maybe, a husband will not be satisfied with her if she cannot bear children. In Yoruba context, having children is more valuable than the marriage itself. Bareness is a force that fuels domestic violence in Yoruba society.

Disagreement on the Number of Children to Born: As discussed earlier, the writer as a Yoruba man noted that in Yoruba society, a man with many children is usually respected and affluent in the society. The more children one has, the affluent one is in society. Fadipe [6] supports this position that the reference for children goes a long way to cover the nakedness of the family, and adds glory, honour and riches to the family. Yoruba people give birth to many children so that they may have person to send an

errand, somebody to look after their legacy. However, some couples at this contemporary time are still carrying this worldview into their marriage. Some husbands will like to turn their wives to children manufacturing industry, without minding challenges of school fees; cost of living; women's health and many of such factors. The disagreement of the wife on this issue can lead to domestic violence.

Moral Factors: The needs and interest of individual are different and that determines what is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable. Moral factors that promote domestic violence include:

Sex Starving: This is a denial of sex among the couple in marriage union. According to Kore [8], inadequate sexual satisfaction can lead to domestic violence, especially among polygamous families where a husband cannot adequately satisfy all of his wives sexually. Consequently, some wives engage in extra-marital sex, which may ultimately lead to domestic violence. A husband can also divorce his wife for inadequate services. Inadequate sexual satisfaction and extra-marital sex is a result of selfishness. In another view, sexual problem may come in marriage as a result of sublimation sexual urging for several possible concentrated interests in his or her work. He or she may suddenly have become disinterested in sex as an avenue of sensual happiness. One of the spouses could be nursing a grudge against another. It could be as a lack of sexual interest [7]. Sex starving is capable of tearing home apart and what has been acquired for so many years may be destroyed in a moment.

Interference of the Extended Family Members and in-Laws: Many homes are scattered today due to interference of the extended family members and in-laws. Some in-laws and extended family members are ignorant of what marriage is all about. Some impose traditional ways of marriage on their homes in contemporary time which leads to Domestic violence. Kore [8] adds that some parents not only come into their son's marriage affairs by insulting the insulting daughter in-law, but they instruct their son to leave his wife. Some women also brainwashed their daughters with traditions and taboos. They warned them not to have a joint business or account with their husbands. Consequently, this makes some families lack co-operation. Thus, the African belief that a woman is not married to her husband alone, but to the whole family. Therefore, interference of extended family members and in-laws is a powerful force that promotes domestic violence in the society.

Marriage at very Young Age: When couples marry at very young ages, they have little idea of marital responsibilities, and when partners enter marriage too hastily without first counting the cost, they may be ill-prepared to face marriage responsibilities and challenges (154). Also, teenage and premarital pregnancy leads many people into impromptu marriage today without any preparation. Thus, this immaturity can fuel domestic violence. It is unfortunate that the two disobedient unprepared parents who give birth to children contribute to the problem of society, schools and church. **Migrant Labour:** This is the situation where husband and wife and their children are not living together as a result of career pursuits. Some couples have a strong desire for material acquisition to the detriment of their homes. This is a misplacement of priority and life values which often leads to domestic violence. **Different Religions:** This leads to domestic violence because of inadequate understanding or insensitivity to the issues. Sometimes, inter-faith marriages, such as a marriage between a Muslim and a Christian can lead to marital disharmony due to the difference in beliefs, practices and background.

Jealousy and Possessiveness: Some men are so jealous and possessive that they do not want to see their spouse even talking with another man. Any exchange with a man, no matter how innocent, will result in a confrontation. If the wife's responses are judged unsatisfactory, she will be battered [5]. Likewise, some women do not want their husbands to have any interaction with other women. They believed such a discussion could make them lose their husbands to them. Such attitude leads to domestic violence. **Drunkenness:** Some couples involve in alcoholism which makes them unable to tolerate any disagreement from their spouses or children and are liable to interpret any action as insulting or insubordinate, and they respond to this with violence. Furthermore, some women hate alcohol, while some men take pleasure in it. Some husbands drink alcohol to the point of coming home naked, wounded and vomiting at home vis-versa. This attitude leads to Domestic violence. Lack of transparency, sickness, superiority and inferiority complex are also moral factors responsible for domestic violence.

Permission for Divorce: Marriage is believed to be a lifetime commitment to both husband and wife. However, the Nigerian constitution and bye-law permit divorce when the couples feel they cannot continue with the journey. The court is allowed under the law to dissolve the marriage. This freedom also promotes domestic violence among some couples with intention to separate.

Economic Factor: This comes between husband and wife when they are unable to manage their finances well. One may be suspecting the other on the issue of funds. Also, financial secrets are capable of tearing marriage apart if not well managed. If the secrets are revealed to the other partners, it can lead to domestic violence. In other words, economic instability of some spouses put them in trouble. When the needs of the family are not met, it can result to violence. Consequent to unemployment, retrenchment, financial in-balance, poverty and living below expectation, at this contemporary time that materialism is a prime factor; so many marriages are ending up in violence. O'Donovan [9] corroborates the above position that the most common problems in marriage today come from disagreement about money.

Cognitive Factor: This factor deals with the acquisition of knowledge regarding marriage. It relates to the deficiency in the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception for stability of marital life. The cognitive factors are spelt below: **Poor Communication:** Communication is a fruitful channel of peace in the marriage.

According to Howell [10] poor communication hinders the loving relationship in marriage. It is also devastating to many aspects of marriage. In another view, communication is a favourite process today for ending the human relationship [11]. Many problems in marriage that could have been solved peacefully have resulted in domestic violence due to poor communication style in marriage.

Temperament and Psychological Disposition: Every spouse is unique and different in their reaction to issues. If temperament and psychological disposition of each couple are not well controlled, domestic violence will ensue. The environment of the Upbringing: The background of upbringing of husband and wife can also cause domestic violence. The husband characters may be differing from that of wife due to the environment within which they were raised. **Lack of Premarital Counselling:** Premarital counselling prepares young adults for married life, and it is indispensable for a peaceful home. Parents, guardians, pastors, counsellors and experienced couples are providers of premarital counselling. Any couple who fails to undergo premarital counselling may experience marital instability which can lead to domestic violence.

Effects of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a destructive menace, and the victims are affected in one way or the other. It has devastating effects on the couple, the children, the church of God, the government and the society at large. These effects are discussed below:

Effects on the Couples

Domestic violence has so many effects on couples. Before domestic violence occurs, the couples must have felt alienated and nursed bitterness against each other. This is capable of making them have health challenges which can make them perceptually depend on the drugs for the remaining days of their lives. Physical abuse can lead to injuries and fracture which can damage life of the victims. Death can result from physical injuries and personal suffering. Some couples have lost their lives in the cause of domestic violence.

Domestic violence leads to insincere confession of love. Love is an essential lubricant of a happy home; without it, the marriage relationship is characterised by strife and end up in violence. Olayinka [12] adds that genuine love is as strong as death. Thus, domestic violence also denies couples marital blessings. It also makes the family environment not to be conducive for planning together as couples and upbringing of children will be incomplete. Similarly, when a wife flees a violent marriage, she may have to leave her children behind, to be raised without the loving care of their mother. If she is allowed to take female children with her, they will be raised without paternal influence. But if the mother stays and endures the violence, the children will be scared by the home environment [5].

Effects on the Children

The numerous resultant impact of domestic violence on children from such homes are devastating and too damaging. The children suffer from domestic violence more than couples. Domestic violence leads to harsh and inconsistent parenting, whether parents stay together or not. Marriage marked by violence is worse for children's well – being because they are emotionally wounded. Proper child upbringing is a combined task, and children who suffer domestic violence, according to Adedeji [13] may develop a dysfunctional relationship with other people. Thus, the children in this category mostly lack respect for elders and moral discipline.

The environment of violent marriages is polluted and can affect the children in terms of availability and frequency to worship God. Their prayer and meditational lives may be severely affected due to the environment they grew up. Meier [14] asserts that the environment in which children develop starting from pregnancy to adults plays essential roles in their physical, emotional and spiritual life. Environment can take specific measures to intervene the development of the children. Reflection on the above assertion reveals that the children who grew up in pollute family environment as a result of domestic violence may likely have spiritual deformity due to lack of joint spiritual upbringing. Kunhiyop [5] adds that children learn from what they see happening around them. They will learn violence as they watch their fathers beat and molest their mothers and vis-versa. Children who have been abused often become delinquent and abusive in their relationships with other children.

Domestic violence reduces learning capacities in children and makes them have high feelings of abandonment, mistrust, and emotional instability which can have negative impact on children educational pursuits. The writer's experience with domestic violence makes him know that some of the children from violent marriages are troublesome in the schools. Truancy, lateness to schools, poor relationship with school mates is the attitudes of students who are products of passionate marriage. In another way, many of these children with high academic potentials and dreams end up in villages living with grandmothers or fathers due to dissolutions of marriage of their parents. Some of them are fortunate and live fulfilled lives. However, many of them live unfulfilled because of the family environment they found themselves.

Effects on the Society

Family is a unit in the society and the coming together of different families who share the common values become the society. According to Oderinde [15], society is a people who live together in an organised community, and it is a network of relationship. This is because human beings of all ages and both sexes live in groups and the members of these groups share their respective cultures. Reflection on the above position shows that the moral value of every family in the society determines its level of moral uprightness. Yoruba society has close affinity and individualism is not rampant among the society members. This makes the society members relate with one another. However, domestic violence contributes to noise pollution in the society as the couples fight and shout on one another. This hinders peaceful co-existence of the society members, consequent to domestic violence which makes their neighbours intervene and reconcile between them.

Similarly, domestic violence destroys the social outlook of society. It increases the rate of social vices [5]. The children from violent marriages because of neglect by the parents end up destroying the peace of society. Many of these children today are involved in armed robbery, cohabitation, alcoholism, occultism, drug trafficking, prostitution and sex trafficking, rape and thuggery; thus end up destroying the peace of the society. The couples who are victims of domestic violence are threats to society as they create violence because of their loose freedom. Sometimes, they snatch the spouses from a peaceful marriage.

Domestic violence is wasting the life of so many people in society. The writer recalled the incident of a pastor and his wife, who were coming back from the church on Sunday after one year marriage anniversary thanksgivings. They met a couple who were seriously fighting and the man of God and his wife stopped and was making peace among them. However, the wife threw one big stone at her husband in revenge for his deed; unfortunately, the stone missed its target and heated the pastor who was a peacemaker at the fore nose. The pastor fell because he had internal bleeding and was rushed to the hospital. The pastor eventually died prematurely after some days in the hospital and left his pregnant wife behind. Domestic violence causes irreparable loss in society.

Effects on Government

Domestic violence has adverse effects on the government at all levels. The children of today are leaders of tomorrow. The kind of children in every society determines the future. Hence, the type of children in Yoruba today determines the future of the society. Children from violent marriage sometimes initiate electoral violence, political thuggery, riot in higher institutions of learning which lead to destruction of properties and death of innocent students. Some of these children are members of secret societies in higher institution of learning. Some of them involve in internet robbery, money rituals, campus prostitution, nudity and hooliganism. The negative image of the society being displayed by these children affects the integrity of the land.

Effects on the Church

Church as the gathering of believers in Christ Jesus on earth is not without domestic violence. The menace affects the church evangelistic and social ministry. When couples who are Moses and Ruth by name, who got married in the church end up in the court of law on the note of domestic violence, thus the image of the church is already questioned. If the church reaches the world with the gospel message, the human instrumentality must be above reproach. Domestic violence is a reproach on the church and stigmatises her integrity as the body of Christ on earth who is established to show the world God's moral standard on marriage. The menace also affects her spiritual sanctity due to the violence and separation that exist among her members. This can also truncate the growth of church. To the writer as Yoruba person, domestic violence among influential members of the church can breed church crises. If pastors are not careful to intervene and reconcile the concerned spouses, the peaceful co-existence in the society is at stake.

Ethical Issues Arising from Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in society today raises some ethical issues for discussion. When domestic violence becomes unbearable for the couples, and probably it is about to claim lives; what should be the way out? Indissolubility and dissolubility are two significant issues for discussion in this heading.

Indissolubility of Marriage

This holds that marriage According to the biblical standard is a covenant not a contract. Contracts are establish and managed by people with the state as guarantor, whereas covenants are witnessed by God with him as guarantor. Covenants always imply the expectation of permanence in a way contracts do not. Contracts can be broken; covenant is established by God. Biblical teaching about marriage suggests that the bond is indissoluble, invariably the language of Genesis 2:24 "forsaking", "cleaving" "one flesh" and Jesus commands that no man should put asunder what God has brought together (Matt. 19:6) are cited as proof that God has created the bond, and it cannot be broken [16].

Some appeal to Deut. 24:1-4 and the Old Testament concept of kinship as evidence against dissolubility of marriage. It is claimed that marriage establishes kinship (i.e. blood relations) between the husband and wife. Not only are there vertical lines of kinship with ones' with spouse. This is seen as the ultimate meaning of becoming one flesh (Gen. 2:24). In Deuteronomy 24, Moses says that if a woman is divorced and remarries, and if her second husband either divorces her or dies, she may not return to her first husband. To do so is an abomination before the Lord.

Indissolubility of the marriage bond is argued from the nature of human sexuality. The sex act at its best in marriage is the most intimate and complete reciprocal self-giving of which two people are capable. Sex with one partner has physical and spiritual effects on both partners. The sexual history of anyone is difficult to forget because of its indelible impact. The psychological and physical bonding produces in the married couple cannot be broken; no matter how many times one is married. All of this is seen as further evidence that the marriage bond cannot be broken.

Dissolubility of Marriage: The dissolubility of the marriage bond is not in agreement with the biblical standard. The dissolution of the relationship of marriage is based on Paul's advice to the church at Corinth (I Cor. 7:12-16). However, this is not an original intention for marriage. This paper submits that dissolubility of marriage is possible and may resolve some domestic violence especially when the life of spouse or both are in apparent danger. But this must be done with caution. The pastoral care should also carry the church along when there is the need for dissolution of marriage bond. Furthermore, the writer observed that within primitive Yoruba context, separation between husband and wife due to the domestic violence is a little difficult especially if the union is blessed with children. The woman will not like to go back to their father's house to become *omosu* (meaning a woman who returns to leave in her father's house after marriage). Therefore, some women will endure to the point of death. The reverse is the case in contemporary society due to civilisation and modernisation. This paper submits that enduring domestic violence to the point of death is dehumanising and violation of human right. When the domestic violence could not be settled, and it is about to claim life, separation for reconciliation between two of them should be considered as solution. It is better to live alone than to live in a marital home with damage and risk of premature death.

Church Moral Concern to Domestic Violence

The church is a gathering of believers in Christ Jesus on earth. Grudem [17] observes that the church is the gathering of all true believers in Christ Jesus for all time. The church consists of Christians from all nations, ethnic groups, colours, races and cultures. According to Dairo [18], the church is the means of Christ's work in the world; it is his head and feet; his mouth and voice. As in his incarnate life, Christ has a body to proclaim his gospel and do his work. So in his resurrection life in this age, he still needs a body to be the instrument of his gospel and his work in the world. The contemporary church which comprises all denominations is the body of Christ through which God continues his works among the creations.

The contemporary church as the body of Christ on earth is not static but living. The church is the instrument and vessel through which God's work will continue to wax stronger and bring glory to his holy name. Donovan [9] in his view asserts that church is the extended family of God on earth where God's children are equipped. Thus, the church as the body of Christ on earth has significant roles to play in curtailing domestic violence among couples in Yoruba society. The church by her composition is in the best position to improve the quality of family life and ensure its stability according to the will of God.

The contemporary church should educate her members and society at large on the values to manage family life and its stability to fulfil the divine mandate. The paper submits that greater emphasis on education and knowledge in matter of sex, marriage and parenthood is needed in the contemporary Yoruba society. Many marriages experience violence because of ignorance or conditions that could have been overcome if additional education is provided. The church should constantly preach the mind of God on marriage. Domestic violence is against the will of God. The culture of beating a spouse is dehumanising and should be condemned. Men must be taught that Jesus is to be their example when it comes to the way they treat women and children. Where wives are loved as Christ loved the church, there will be no space for violence against each other. Women are God's image and should be treated with respect and dignity and the church should inculcate this truth into the children. Pastoral counselling is indispensable for peaceful homes and the contemporary church should provide premarital, marital, and family life counselling for the church members. This is believed to curb teenage and premarital pregnancy that leads to impromptu marriage. The church should not wait until the marital life of her members leads to violence before the intervention. The church should organise mutual dialogue between violent couples. The dialogue can lead to reconciliation and will bring restoration. However, when the perpetrator and victim of domestic violence cannot be reconciled there is the need to seek for legal counsel on the matter with sole purpose of rescuing the children, home and duo.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work has examined domestic violence and its effects on couples, children, and society. Domestic violence is evident in Yoruba society of Nigeria with devastating effects on the children, couples, children and society. Domestic violence is a violation of divine plan for the marriage. Domestic violence is undue acts in the bond of marriage with the intention to exercise power and control over the victims' behaviours. God who instituted marriage also hates domestic violence. The contemporary church as the representative of God on earth is saddled with the responsibility of making known to the world, the divine mandate of marriage. Domestic violence is not morally and socially justifiable. Thus, the paper recommends that the church should create more awareness on the protection and empowerment of women in society. Every couple should run away from any practice and worldviews that give room for domestic violence. The perpetrators and victims of domestic violence should be open and objective to the pastoral counselling. The intending couples should utilise the insights in premarital and marital counselling to build their homes free from domestic violence. The church is to teach and preach against norms of assaulting women among her members. The church should provide pastoral counselling for the couples to escape challenges of domestic violence.

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