

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY IN THE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

In our society, many women are violently treated by their intimate partners while they suffer in silence. In some cases, domestic violence leads to the death of those women. This should not be allowed to continue because women are crucial to the growth and development of any nation and the world at large. They are homemakers, custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society; and permanent change is often best achieved through them. Full community development is impossible without their understanding, cooperation and effective participation. Considering all these, women deserve better treatment but opposite are usually the case. Wife battery affects the physical and psychological wellbeing of the abused women and even that of their children. It is on this premise that this paper discusses the meaning of domestic violence against women, types of intimate partner violence, effects of these types of violence on abused women and their children. This paper also discusses causes and management of domestic violence against women. In conclusion recommendations were made to eradicate this menace from the society.

Keywords: Domestic violence, women, wife battery, physical, psychological damage.

Introduction

Domestic violence is also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence and intimate partner violence (IPV). It is a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation. Domestic violence, so defined, has many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects), or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect; and economic deprivation (Seimeniuk, Krentz, Gish and Gill, 2010). Domestic violence and abuse is not limited to obvious physical violence. It can mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment and stalking (National Network to End Domestic Violence, 2011). The office of Violence Against Women (OVM) defines domestic violence as a “pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner”. The definition adds that domestic violence “can

happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion, or gender”, and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic and psychological abuse (Office of Violence Against Women, 2007).

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. The 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women noted that this violence could be perpetrated by assailants of either gender, family members and even the ‘State’ itself (United Nations, 1993). Worldwide governments and organisations actively work to combat violence against women through a variety of programmes. A UN resolution designated November 25 as International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

Women are crucial to the growth and development of any nation and the world at large. Women constitute half of the world’s population and they are homemakers, custodians of social, cultural and fundamental values of the society and permanent change is often best achieved through them. Full community development is impossible without their understanding, cooperation and effect participation. Considering the importance of women as mother, sometimes breadwinners, teachers and guardians, they deserve respect, recognition and better treatment but the opposite is usually the case. According to Davies (1999), women are enslaved in a circle of poverty and they suffer from neglect, discrimination and exploitation. They are also subjected to different forms of violence by their male counterparts. Some historians believe that the history of violence against women is tied to the history of women being viewed as property and a gender role assigned to be subservient to men and also other women (Harvey and Gow, 1994). In the UK, the traditional right of a husband to inflict moderate corporal punishment on his wife in order to keep her “within the bounds of duty” was removed in 1981 (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1911).

Types of violence

- a. **Common Couple Violence (CCV):** This is not connected to general control behaviour, but arises in a single argument where one or both partners physically lash out at the other.
- b. **Intimate Terrorism (IT):** This may also involve emotional and psychological abuse. Intimate terrorism is one element in general pattern of control by one partner over the other. It is less common than common couple violence, more likely to escalate over time, not as likely to be mutual, and more likely to involve serious injury.
- c. **Violence Resistance (VR):** This is sometimes thought of as ‘self-defence’. It is violence perpetrated by victims against their abusive partners.
- d. **Mutual Violent Control (MVC):** This is rare type of intimate partner violence occurring when both partners act in a violent manner, battling for control.

The various forms of violence against women include wife battery, denial of self-expression, female-child labour, childhood marriage, female genital mutilation, violence from in-laws, violence from sexual relationship, antagonism because of sex of new-born child, exploitation, violence by law enforcement agents, negative cultural attitudes and degrading traditional practices, e.g. widowhood rites and denial of female education.

Wife battery is an exposure of a married woman to serious beating or repeated injuries (Scott, 1991). Violence by the husband is higher and far more harmful form of violence, such as battery and the use of knives and guns. Domestic violence against women has deep roots in most cultures and religions and supported, even institutionalized by patriarchal values in most societies.

Only recently in Lagos State, Titilayo Arowolo, a 27-year-old mother of one was gruesomely murdered by her husband. Arowolo was allegedly axed to death by her husband, Kolade, in their Isolo home in Lagos. Before that, the scandalous story of wife battering by one Nigerian Ambassador and a traditional ruler who engaged his wife in a public brawl made the rounds, thus bringing the issue of spousal abuse once again to the front burner. There is an official acceptance of violence between 'Consenting' adults and people perceive domestic violence as a private affair. Victims of wife battery are reported to suffer from physical and psychological pain (Essen, 1999).

Domestic violence against women constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large. It occurs at home, in public places like streets, parks, familiar places like homes of friends and relatives, offices, involving highly placed executives; and also in churches and mosques. Domestic violence that occurs in private within the family, including wife battery, rape, acid attack, and sexual abuse affect the physical and psychological wellbeing of women; and as such, they seem to erode the position of women, both at home and in the society at large.

Causes of Domestic Violence against Women

There are many different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure stress and social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

- (i) **Psychological:** Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. Personal traits include sudden bursts of anger, poor impulse control, and poor self-esteem. Various theories suggest that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse observed or experienced as a child lead some people to be more violent in adulthood (Kalra, 1996). Dutton and Golant (1995) suggested a psychological profile of men who abuse their wives, arguing that they have borderline personalities that are developed early in life. However, these psychological theories are disputed by Steel (1974) and Strains (1980) who suggest that psychological theories are limited. They argue that social factors are important, while personality traits, mental illness or psychopathy are less factors.
- (ii) **Jealousy:** Many cases of domestic violence against women occur due to jealousy when the spouse is either suspected of being unfaithful or is planning to leave the relationship. An evolutionary psychology explanation of such cases of domestic violence against women is that they represent to male attempts to control female reproduction and ensure sexual exclusivity for himself through violence or the threat of violence (Goetz, 2010).

- (iii) **Social Stress:** Stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation, with increased pressures. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer and Kalmuss, 1988). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence, due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes, 2002).
- (iv) **Social Learning:** If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate it. If there are no negative consequences and the victim also accepts the violence with submission; then the behaviour will likely continue. Often, violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner (Crowell and Sugarman, 1996).
- (v) **Power and Control:** Abusers abuse in order to establish and maintain control over the partner. Abusers' effort to dominate have been attributed to low self-esteem or feelings of inadequacy, unresolved childhood conflicts, the stress of poverty, hostility and resentment toward women (misogyny), personality disorders, genetic tendencies and social cultural influences (Wikipedia, 2012). Most authorities seem to agree that abusive personalities result from a combination of several factors, to varying degrees.

Effects of Domestic Violence Against Women

1. **Effect on Children:** There has been an increase in acknowledgement that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare (Dodd, 2009). Some emotional and behavioural problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family and authorities. Problems with attitude and cognition in schools can start developing, along with a lack of skills such as problem-solving. Correlation has been found between the experience of abuse and neglect in childhood and perpetrating domestic violence and sexual abuse in adulthood (Sadeler, 1994). Additionally, in some cases, the abuser will purposely abuse the mother in front of the child to cause a ripple effect, hurting two victims simultaneously. It has been found that children who witness mother-assault are more likely to exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Lehmann, 1995).

2. **Physical Effect:** Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Jones, 1997). Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Berrios, 1991). Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence relationship experience greater risk of miscarriage, pre-term labour, and injury to or death of the fetus (Jones, 1997).

3. **Psychological Effect:** Among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported. Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for 'provoking' the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship, and have a greatly increased risk of suicidality (Barnett, 2001). The most commonly referenced psychological effect of domestic violence is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to Vitanza, Vogel and Marshall (1995), PTSD (as experienced by victims) is characterized by flashbacks, intrusive images,

exaggerated startle response, nightmares, and avoidance of triggers that are associated with the abuse. These symptoms are generally experienced for a long span of time after the victim has left the dangerous situation. Many researchers state that PTSD is possibly the best diagnosis for those suffering from psychological effect of domestic violence, as it accounts for the variety of symptoms commonly experienced by victims of trauma.

4. Financial Effect: Once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy. Due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators (Stop Violence Against Women, 2010). In addition to lacking financial resources, victims of domestic violence often lack specialized skills, education, and training that are necessary to find gainful employment, and also may have several children to support.

5. Long-term Effect: Domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims, all of which are very relevant for a professional working with a victim. Major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty.

Management of Domestic Violence

The response to domestic violence is typically a combined effort between law enforcement, counselling services and health care.

- i. **Medical Response:** Medical professionals do not see themselves as being able to play a major role in helping women with regards to domestic violence. Injuries are often just treated and diagnosed, without regard for the causes (Sugg and Inu, 1992). Many doctors prefer not to get involved in people's "private" lives. Health professionals have an ethical responsibility to recognize and address exposure to abuse in the patients, in the health care setting. For example, the American Medical Association's code of medical ethics states that "Due to the prevalence and medical consequences of family violence, physicians should routinely inquire about physical, sexual and psychological abuse as part of the medical history."
- ii. **Law Enforcement:** A study was conducted by Lawrence Sherman in 1982, The Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment, to evaluate the effectiveness of various police responses to domestic violence calls in Minneapolis, Minnesota; including sending the abuser away for eight hours, giving advice and mediation for disputes, and making an arrest. Arrest was found to be the most effective police response. The study found that arrest reduced the rate by half of re-offending against the same victim within the following six months (Maxwell, Garner and Fagan, 2001). In the replication studies which were broader and methodologically sound in both size and scope, arrest seemed to help in the short run in certain cases, but those arrested experienced double the rate of violence over the course of one year (Schmidt and Lawrence, 1993). Generally, it has been accepted that if the understood victim has visible (and recent) marks of abuse, the suspect is arrested and charged with the appropriate crime.

- iii. **Counselling for Person Affected:** Since marital violence is major risk factor for serious injury and even death, and women in violent marriages are at much greater risk of being seriously injured or killed; counselling intervention is much needed. Initial assessment of the potential for violence in a marriage can be supplemented by standardized interviews and questionnaire which have been reliable and valid aids in exploring marital violence more systematically. Counsellors and therapists should also make the distinction between situations where battering may be a single, isolated incident or an ongoing pattern of control. If it becomes apparent to the therapist that domestic violence is taking place in a client's relationship, the therapist must explore options with the client; and also refrain from blaming the partner or telling the client what to do. It is unreasonable for the therapist to expect that a victim will leave her abusive spouse solely because she disclosed the abuse. The therapist should respect the victim's autonomy and allow her to make her own decisions (Lawson, 2003). Therapists must be aware that supporting assertiveness by a battered wife may lead to more beatings or even death. Even in few cases, when the wife leaves because of life threatening situation, therapists should not relax their vigilance after a battered wife leaves her husband. Some data suggest that the period immediately following a marital separation is the period of greater risk for the women. Many men will stalk and batter their wives in an effort to get them to return or punish them for leaving.
- iv. **Counselling for Offenders:** The main goal of counselling for offenders of domestic violence is to minimize the offender's risk of future domestic violence, whether within the same relationship or a new one. Treatment for offenders should emphasize minimizing risk to the victim, and should be modified depending on the offender's history, risk of re-offending and criminogenic needs. The majority of offender treatment are conducted in a group setting with groups not exceeding 12 participants. Groups are also standardized to be gender specific (Colorado Domestic Violence Offender Management Board, 2010). According to Roberts (2002), anger management alone has not been shown to be effective in treating domestic violence offenders, as domestic violence is based on power and control and not on problems with regulating anger responses. Anger management is recommended as a part of an offender treatment curriculum that is based on accountability, along with topics such as recognizing abusive patterns of behaviour; it also requires a great deal of personal change and the construction of a self-image that is separate from former abusive while still being held accountable for it. Any corresponding problem should also be addressed as part of domestic violence offender treatment, such as problems with substance abuse or mental illness.

Domestic Violence: What's the role of the Church?

The church, locally, regionally, and nationally, needs to do at least three things:

- (i) Discover the problem(s),
- (ii) Define the problem(s) biblically, and
- (iii) Then develop and direct people towards God-glorifying solutions.

Discovery: We have our work cut out for us. We need to understand and apply God's instructions for being peacemakers in a violent and hostile world. We need to discover the reality all around us. We must have biblical eyes to see. The church must be careful in this

discovery process. On the one hand, we must not adopt worldly view points and see "abuse" in every imperfect, fallen action. Today, many people view any exercise of authority as abusive by definition. But authority is not always abusive. God wields an awful lot of it and sometimes he delegates it to others. He certainly never abused his authority. On the other hand, we should not think that every mention of abuse is part of a liberal conspiracy to get government social workers into every home or to get our children into lesbian-run day care centres.

Why must truly oppressed victims face churches that increasingly treat people humanistically rather than biblically? People, including church members, are sinners, capable of cruelty, violence, and lying to cover their sins. We Reformed Christians, above all others, should take total depravity seriously. Sinners sin. Should we be shocked? Grieved, yes; shocked, no.

We also must do the work to define the biblical view of domestic violence and how to deal with it. Again, extremes must be avoided. On the one hand, we cannot accept the world's victim mentality, which focuses on individual rights and entitlements. We are image bearers of God and responsible to him, not pawns in an evolutionary chess game. We not only are sinned against, but sin.

On the other hand, while we do not have a biblical primer or handbook on domestic violence, there are Mosaic laws that relate to violence in general, expounding and applying the sixth commandment. Some deal with particular abuses in the family. The "general equity" of these laws, statutes, and judgments cannot be ignored without sinking into a quagmire of relativistic sentimentality or a bog of personal biases. Passages such as Ex. 20:13; 21:10-27; 22:20-24; Lev. 19:13-18, 33-37; 20:1-5, 9; 24:17-23; 25; Num. 5:5-31; 15:22-31; 35; Deut. 12:29-31; 13:6-11; 16:18-17:20; 19; 21:1-9, 15-21; 22:13-29; 24:1-25:16 are more than covenantal museum pieces, ensconced in their Old Testament trophy case. There are many other passages, in both the Old and the New Testament, that direct our paths from violence to peace. Is the work difficult? Yes! But is the work necessary? Yes! But if you and I do not do it, do not expect the church in general or the world to do the job for us.

Direction: Once discovery and definition are in process, the church needs to direct people. Primarily, the church needs faithful shepherds who are willing to get dirty and even hurt while feeding and wrestling with smelly sheep. If we do not have elders who are worthy of the Good Shepherd, the job will not get done. The work is tough, smelly, serious, solemn, and often dangerous. Elders must deal with the everyday issues that affect the sheep and then be ready to deal with the tough cases. If they don't, we should not be surprised when government agencies step into our family lives. Elders must live with the sheep to care for and direct them. Shepherds should follow Christ's model as our mediator. Imitating his threefold office, they should prophetically proclaim God's will to people from the pulpit and house visits, etc., teaching God's will for family life. The sixth commandment must be taught.

The elders should persist in priestly pleading with God for patience with his people. This involves prayer, fasting, counselling, discipleship, and peacemaking both between God and man and between man and man. They must bring sheep to repentance; biblical counselling is a must.

They should also provide kingly protection. Priests must not try to be Rambo. They are shepherds, not cowboys; kings under Christ, not Kung Fu masters. But they must protect. The elders must set up "cities of refuge" within the borders of the congregation—that is, safe houses, to protect both the victims and the perpetrators. People trained in biblical counselling and reconciliation should oversee the counselling and reconciliation process, including these live-in situations. Older couples could be mentors. This help is as necessary to the work of reconciliation as shepherding homes are to the pro-life movement.

Priests must trust God and use the process set forth in Matthew 18:15-20. Especially in the tough, violent cases, they must be willing to employ the keys of the kingdom and not withhold this blessing. The sword of the Spirit applied in loving discipline is much more powerful than the state's literal sword. This is necessary so that 1 Corinthians 6:1-9 is not violated and God may honour their work. The church need to have working positions or papers on the issues involved in domestic violence and how to apply them pastorally to all who are involved. In certain extreme instances, they need to render judgments as to the application of 1 Corinthians 7 to individual cases as possible grounds for divorce. They act as judges of God's people. This is serious indeed, but necessary.

Along with the church, she must see to the practical, physical concerns of the family members involved. If the church offers safe houses correctly, the state's foster-care system for the children may be avoided. The perpetrator may need a place to stay while reconciliation is being sought. In rare circumstances, there may be medical problems that contribute to the violence or result from it. The church may help to insure proper medical care. If the church can help financially, the family can be protected economically and in some cases legally. Also, temporary protection may create a need for transportation, as well as a need for shelter.

Recommendations

1. Comprehensive and extensive premarital counselling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationship.
2. There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative effects of domestic violence against women, especially wife battery.
3. Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against marital violence in their places of worship.
4. Youths should be encouraged and taught to detest and not imitate brutish treatment of wives around them.
5. Medical professionals are in position to help abused women; after physical treatment, they should refer them to counsellors and psychotherapists.
6. Punishment given to grievously offending husbands should be publicized, so that it can serve as deterrence to others.

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