

The Effect of Wife Battery in Lagos State: A Case Study of Amuwo-Odofin LGA of Lagos State

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Abstract

Wife battering has become a prevalent phenomenon across the world. Lagos State, Nigeria, is no exception to the menace. The study, which is an explorative study, delves into wife battering, the forms and the prevalence of domestic abuse and its impact on the socio-economic wellbeing of women. The study was conducted in Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos State. Amuwo-Odofin was selected because there is a shelter home for battered women there. Structured and unstructured interview guides were used to solicit for information from victims of spousal battering in Amuwo-Odofin Local Government Area of Lagos and from advocates of gender-based violence. The research proposes the establishment of family counselling centres and the need for the involvement of print and electronic media in educating the ill-effects of wife battering. Religious leaders and community leaders will also need to play more roles in helping to change the attitude of their followers towards spousal violence, and generally violence against women. The study concludes that the Nigerian government should work towards enforcing its legislation at all levels of governance against perpetrators of wife battering. This will help reduce the high incidences of wife battering and its attendant consequences, not only in Amuwo-Odofin but also, across the country.

Key Words: Wife Battery, Women, Amuwo-Odofin, Domestic Violence

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Introduction

Domestic violence has become a common phenomenon across the world. It is a phenomenon that cuts across various social strata sexes, colours, races and religions. Domestic violence has over time become a menace to humanity. Domestic violence is a problem affecting millions of women globally and this problem manifests in various forms, for instance, in the context of marriage or cohabitation, between siblings and between parents and their children (Lynn S., 2004). However, many feminist researchers have pointed out that domestic violence is a gender-neutral term and as such fails to clarify who the victim is and who the perpetrator is, masking the fact that in many relationships women are most frequently subjected to violence by men (Brodsky and Hare-Mustin, 1980). Wife battery is one of the many dimensions of domestic gender-based violence. This form of domestic violence involves overt physical force or violence perpetrated by the husband on the wife. In most cultures, wife battery is often socially condoned therefore making it more frightening (Afronet file, 1999 cited in McMillan 2011: 2). Also, the inequality existing between women and men fostered by culture has perpetuated domestic violence, and this reflection of culture in the law has made the law inadequate in offering protection to women as victims. Research that exists indicates that wife abuse is a common and pervasive problem and men from practically all countries, cultures, classes and income groups indulge in domestic violence (Law Commission of the United Kingdom in Law Commission No. 207, London, HMSO).

According to Dobash and Dobash (1979:63), women battery is an age long practice, and to understand wife battering, one must be aware and recognise centuries' old heritage of women as the suitable scapegoats of family violence. History has recorded decrees, etiquettes and folktales that show women being persecuted, maimed, and killed by their spouses such that when these acts became public knowledge, if the abusers were not applauded for their actions, their acts were at least ignored. Down through the ages, violence against wives has been accepted and promoted as "normal" behaviour (Pagelow, 1984:277). Poetry and proverbs also abound which support the theme of male violence being used to control women. An old English proverb states, "a spaniel, a woman and hickory tree, the more ye beat them the better they are," and a Russian proverb explains, "a wife

is not a jug, she will not crack if you hit her ten times.” Also, a phrase in one of Tennyson poems says, “Man is the hunter, the woman is his game.” In like manner, and a vaudeville joke quotes, “When did you stop beating your wife? Who said I stopped?” (Langley and Levy, 1977:29).

Gelles and Strauss, (1989) noted that women are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten and killed in their own homes at the hands of a loved one than any place else or anyone else in society, Gelles and Strauss (1975) cited in Gelles and Strauss (1989) indicated that one out of every six wives reported that she had been hit by her husband at some point in her marriage. Studies indicate that about one woman in every twenty-two is a victim of physical abusive violence each year with every battered wife being attacked on average three times a year in the United States of America. Carrillo (1992) cited in Oyekanmi (1997), indicated that in France, ninety nine percent of victims of violence are women while twenty five percent of women cited battery as the reason for divorce.

Africa has not been exonerated from the many incidences and practices of gender-based violence. The history of the African society is one in which women have been subjected to unspeakable cruelties. Until recently, women were considered first the property of their fathers and after marriage, the objects of their husbands. African men viewed their wives as properties, believing they had no right to decide their fates. Violence in marriage is cemented by the traditional belief that a husband is allowed to chastise his wife once in a while as a form of disciplinary measure. In most traditional settings, beating a wife was considered to be normal custom which is held strongly by the majority demands that wives should be submissive and not reveal domestic squabbles including beatings, (GBV Report, 2000). Wife battery as a form of gender-based violence is widespread in Africa and the many incidences of battering in Africa have been associated with its social and cultural acceptance as a means of physical chastisement of women. It goes with the belief that husbands have the right to discipline their wives. This is based on the assumption that at marriage, a woman automatically becomes the man’s property. Jejeebhoy, (1998) is of the view that husbands deserve the right to correct an erring wife, but this sometimes results to battery. This implies that many cultures condone physical chastisement of women as a husband’s marital prerogative (Badru, 2004).

In Nigeria, wife battery in form of domestic violence has become a rampant phenomenon. According to BBC online news (2018), Lagos State recorded over 1,000 reported cases of domestic violence in year 2017. The prevalence and several reported incidences of domestic violence led to the establishment of the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) in 2014 so as to look into matters relating to all forms of sexual violence thereby encouraging people to report such acts in order for necessary action(s) to be effected on the culprit(s). The report further shows that a total of 100 reported cases were brought to the team in 2015, 450 cases in 2016 and over 1000 cases in 2017. So far, 4 persons have been convicted for rape, 4 years each for two child molesters, and 12 restraining orders against husbands who abuse their wives in various forms including battering. According to *The Guardian News* (2018), marriage is considered a prized attainment and so there is a powerful social stigma attached to reporting all forms of domestic violence including wife battery with its attendant consequences. *The Guardian* in its findings reported that close to a third of Nigerian women have experienced physical violence which encompasses battery, marital rape and murder at the hands of the intimate partners. The report claims that 43% of women believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife for a number of reasons, including going out without telling him, or neglecting the children. Furthermore, most of the women who have, over the time, reported cases of domestic violence to DSVRT do not consider leaving their husbands as one of the options of putting an end to the battery and violence they are experiencing. They only want the violence to stop. This is discovered to be associated with cultural perception attached to a woman who separate from her partner or in the case of a marriage, request for judicial separation or divorce. A woman often times does not get the needed support from their families and friend when they separate from their partners as a result of domestic violence. This and other factors outlined have informed low reporting of cases of domestic violence against women in Nigeria in recent times.

Also, wife battering has sociological and psychological impact on the family and the society at large. A woman that is constantly battered hardly plays her role effectively. If a woman, who is very close to the children is badly battered, by implication the social and emotional life of her children

might be affected negatively. In a capitalist society, a woman is doubly oppressed, first as a worker whose employer must maximise profit by exploiting her labour power and secondly as a woman in patriarchal society. It has to be noted that women oppression is rooted in class society; therefore, it had existed before the advent of capitalism. Patriarchy exploits the labour of women; capitalism exploits the labour of the wage earners either male or female. In Nigeria and elsewhere, religion and tradition are instruments of women oppression. They constitute among others the ideology of the society, which is a superstructure on the socio-economic foundation of any class society. Many of the religious beliefs and traditions are dated back to the feudal era. They were designed to justify and sustain private property. They are retained until now because of the fact that feudalism might have come to an end, the private property still remains, except it has only changed character. Patriarchy is a by-product of class society. It came into being along with the private property, as it is the case of state, in order to preserve the interest of the early beneficiaries of the then new socio-economic arrangement (men). Tradition and religion support patriarchal society along with private property and class in the society. The patriarchal society sets the parameters for women's structurally unequal position in families and markets by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance rights and legal adulthood, by tacitly condoning domestic and sexual violence and sanctioning differential wages for equal or comparable work. Tradition or culture and religion have dictated men and women relationship for centuries and entrenched male domination into the structure of social organisation and institution at all levels of leadership. They justify marginalisation of women in education, labour market, politics, business, family, domestic matters and inheritance.

According to the Nigeria Gender Based Violence Report (2000), wife battery is quite prevalent in Nigeria and statistics indicate that four in every ten women in Nigeria experience violence or has experienced one form of violence in their lifetime. Nigeria has demonstrated commitment and political will to deal with gender violence at various levels. At the international level, Nigeria has signed and ratified all the major international treaties. The problem of battered wives only came into the public eye in the early 1970's even in the United States; its public awareness corresponding with the

growth of women movement. In Nigeria, public concern about wife battering surfaced in the late 1990's, although it did not receive the same attention afforded other forms of family violence. The Department of International Development Bulletin (2009) as cited in Folami (2013) opines that in most African countries such as Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Ghana, at least three-quarters of women have experienced domestic violence either through physical or sexual abuse in their home. For example, in Nigeria, many women have visited the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit in places like Lagos to complain because their partners have beaten them. Odujinrin (2004) says that domestic violence is one of the major marital crises experienced by women in Nigeria, but most of the cases are not reported to the police. The consequences of domestic violence are so severe that many homes have either been separated or destroyed.

In 1993, the United Nations Declaration on domestic violence defines domestic violence as any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. Many cultures condemn domestic violence. According to Clifford Odimegwu (2000), Nigeria is divided between a majority Muslim north and a largely Christian south. There are three legal principles that operate in the north and south of the country. The south operates on the basis of a criminal code, while the north applies the penal code and Sharia law. In Northern Nigeria, for example, Section 55 of the Penal Code is based on punitive philosophy rather than a criminal legal procedure that allows a husband to discipline his wife. Once a woman is married, she is culturally expected to endure whatever condition comes her way in her matrimonial home. Odujinrin (2004) claims that in Nigeria, a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence, less than one percent of these cases are reported to the police. This absence of reporting and lack of official figures make the assessment of the extent of domestic violence an almost impossible task. Odujinrin (2004) assumes that most women in Nigeria have experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence.

CLEEN Foundation, Summary of Findings of 2012 statistics stated that 1,952 cases of domestic violence were recorded in 2009. This is a low figure compared with 5,567 cases reported from a victim survey carried out in some selected Local Government Areas in Lagos State, Nigeria in 2012. On the other hand, the consequences of reporting domestic violence are severe. A woman becomes a pariah to her husband, relatives, and the larger community if she reports a case of domestic violence to the police. Such a woman becomes stigmatised. The unreported cases of domestic violence to the police may be a major factor why the problem persists in Nigeria. This study therefore seeks to discuss the effect of battery on women in Amuwo-Odofin, Area of Lagos State Nigeria. It further seeks to create an increased awareness among women on the effect of wife battery. Lastly, the study seeks to identify the various measures that can be put in place to reduce the many incidences of wife battery in Nigeria and the world at large. The study employs a combination of historical/ documented research, as well as a key informant in-depth interview. The study population comprises of women within the ages of 20 to 50 years. A random selection of victims and survivors of battery was carried out in battery shelter home in Amuwo-Odofin LGEA of Lagos State.

Conceptualisation of Wife Battering

Wife battery has long been perceived to be a private matter within the four walls of the home and women are perceived to be the ones responsible for adjusting more adequately to the situation as dictated by cultural norms or developing an acceptable way of suffering silently. But as a result of tremendous efforts by various gender activists, this action is now recognised as a violation of human rights and a crime. Wife battery is any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm. (Tolman, 1992). Wife battery is the most common form of domestic violence faced by women in both developed and developing countries and due to its magnitude, is recognised as a substantial public health problem. One in three women worldwide is reported to experience battering or one form of domestic violence at some point in her life (Heise *et. al.*, 1999). Walker (1979:1) defines a battered wife as, “any married woman who is repeatedly subjected to any forceful physical, sexual, and/or psychological

behaviour by a husband in order to coerce her to do something he wants her to do without any concern for her rights” (Walker 1979:1).

Globally the magnitude of wife battery has remained high. Worldwide, the prevalence of lifetime wife battery has been reported to be 10% to 71% of women in marriage or current partnerships (Ellsberg & Heise, 2005). In sub-Saharan Africa, the reported prevalence of wife battery ranges from 20% to 71%. According to the World Health Organisation’s multi country study on violence against women by their male spouse, the lifetime prevalence of physical or sexual violence ranges between 15% and 71%, and prevalence also shows a wide variation (4%–54%), with the lowest rates found in Japan and the highest in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Peru. The impact of gender relations on activities and on the status of women and vice versa is construed by a web of diverse economic, social, religious and cultural factors (Miller, 1998). For instance, in Nigeria, efforts made to draw attention to the issue of gender-based violence have been resisted from organised religion, health workers, judicial, police, social welfare officers, all of whom see the home as sacrosanct. In Nigeria, police will not intervene in domestic quarrels, and do not consider wife beating as a crime, because existing legal instruments do not treat wife abuse as a criminal offence. For instance, Penal Code Law Cap 89 laws of Northern Nigeria (1969) as cited by Odimegwu (2001) states that domestic quarrels are not an offence if committed by a husband for the purpose of correcting his wife.

Women are an essential part of labour source in the urban and rural economics. Women’s ability to participate in their daily activities highly depends on their personal security (Ganeshpanchan, 2005). Domestic Violence threatens the socio-economic and psychological wellbeing of a woman. This could restrict a woman’s daily activity and could stop her from maximising her full potentials, thereby also restricting women’s ability to participate in income generating activities, depriving them of the muchneeded household income and the ability to carry out their additional responsibilities of providing for the family and the security of their families. Women who do not have access to market and real economic opportunities are at greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence (Women Refugee Commission, 2009).

Theories of Wife Battery

Social Learning Theory

Social Learning Theory conceives of violence as learned and reinforced in childhood as a coping response to stress or a method of conflict resolution and practiced into adulthood. According to this theory, the family is the training ground in violence since it provides examples for imitation and examples of role models which are used by children in their later lives when they develop suitable parental and conjugal roles for themselves (Rosenbaum 1985:462). Since behaviour is learned through imitation, it follows that when children are exposed to violence on the part of their parents, they themselves will easily resort to violent actions. On these grounds, and supported by a great deal of research, Rosenbaum (1985:468) avers that exposure to family violence may send the message to children that violence within families is normatively and socially acceptable. Therefore, traditional sex-role socialisation often leads to the justification of violence against women in order to maintain the traditional distribution of power. Gentlemann (1984:118) says in this regard, “the abuse of women will go on as long as society continues to value dominance in males and submission in females.” Sex-role socialisation which teaches dominance/ submissiveness also encourages a belief system which is labelled learned helplessness in women. When children are socialised that women are helpless, the message is that “in order to be successful and popular with the boys, it is necessary for girls to give away their power.” Such learned helplessness contributes to low self-esteem and to exogenous depression and is suggested as an explanation for psychological paralysis on the part of battered women, leading them to maintain their victims’ status (Rosenbaum 1985:460). This learned helplessness may furthermore deprive women of the ability to develop appropriate skills to escape violence.

Cycle of Violence Theory

Cycle of Violence Theory holds that for battery to take place, it has a definite cycle it must have passed through. Battered women are not continuously abused, nor are their abuse exacted at totally random times (Walker, 1979:55). These phases are, the tension building phase, the explosion and acute battering incident phase, and the calm, loving respite phase

(McKendrick and Hoffman 1990:258). The tension building phase is the phase whereby the woman tries to calm the batterer by using methods that have proved successful before. She may become submissive, disciplined, and may anticipate his every whim, or may stay out of his way. She lets the batterer know that she puts up with his abusive behaviour as legitimately directed towards her. It is not that she believes she should be ill-treated, rather, she assumes that what she does will prevent his anger from mounting (Walker 1979:55). Furthermore, as batterers and battered women become aware of the increasing hostility during the first phase, it becomes more difficult for their coping strategies to work. Each becomes more frenetic and furious. The men step up their domineering smothering and ruthlessness. Minor battering incidents become more common, and the resulting anger lasts for longer periods of time. Tension becomes too much, and at last the process fails to respond to any controls. Once the point of inevitability is reached, the next phase, the acute battering phase, will take place (Walker 1979:59).

The acute battering phase is a phase whereby there is an increase in the tension. During this phase, the batterers completely admit that their anger is out of control. They may begin by justifying their behaviour to themselves and furious that they cannot control their behaviour. When explaining the acute battering phase, batterers concentrate on justifying their behaviour. They often enumerate a great many insignificant aggravations that happened during phase one. The trigger for moving into phase two is rarely battered women's behaviour, rather, it is usually an extraneous force or the internal state of the men (Walker 1979:60). This phase which is usually associated with violence on the woman by the batterer leads to the third phase which is the kind and loving behaviour phase. This phase is associated with an unfamiliar spell of tranquillity. In this phase, the batterers continually act in a kind, pleasant, and loving manner. They are usually regretful of their deeds as carried out in the previous phases and they communicate their repentance to the battered women. They beg the women's forgiveness and promise them that they will never do it again. They also believe that they have taught the women a lesson that the women will never again behave in such a manner, and so they will not be tempted to beat them again. They will give up drinking, dating other women, or

whatever else affects their internal anxiety state (Walker 1979:66). Also, during this stage, the battered women convince themselves that the batterers can and has changed. The batterers' reasonableness and their loving behaviour support the victim's belief that the batterers can do what they say they want to do. Their behaviour becomes the women's reinforcement for staying in the relationship. At this point, most battered women will usually drop charges, if any were laid, back down on separation or divorce, and generally try to patch things up until the next acute battering incident (Walker 1979:66).

Discussions of Findings

Wife battery is a pattern of forced behaviour, including act or a threatened act that is used by a spouse to gain power and control over a current or former spouse. Wife battery includes physical or sexual violence, emotional and/or psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, stalking, economic control, harassment, physical intimidation, or injury. Wife battering is a performance and productivity concern. In Nigeria, in any one year, more than 20% of employed women take time off work because of domestic violence, and 2% lose their jobs as a direct result of the abuse (Eze-Anaba, 2010). These figures are likely to understate the true impact of domestic violence on a woman's career: research in Nigeria has suggested that up to 50% of women have at some stage in their lives had to give up a job because of wife battery. According to a 2014 press release from the Nigerian Police Force, nearly one in four large private industry establishments (with more than 1,000 employees) reported at least one incidence of domestic violence, including threats and assaults, in the past year (Gberevbie, Osibanjo, Adeniji and Oludayo, 2014). Also, Amnesty International's report on Nigeria (2005) reveal that on a daily basis, women are beaten and ill-treated for supposed transgressions, and even murdered by members of their family. In some cases, acid attacks leave them with horrific disfigurements. Such violence is too frequently excused and tolerated in communities, and not denounced. Husbands are responsible for most of the violence against women. The most common forms of domestic violence are slapping, kicking, and verbal abuse, denial of financial resources, rape, and murder.

Effects of Battery on Women

About 95% of the respondents were victims and survivors of wife battery with bruises, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleedings sustained as a result of the beatings. Most of the respondents added that they had visited hospitals as a result of the battery experienced. Sometimes, the victims were hospitalised. About 40% of the respondents further added that they developed chronic health challenge such as irritable bowel syndrome and arthritis. Also, 55% of the respondents who were pregnant during battery experienced miscarriage, pre-term labour, as well as injury or death of the unborn baby.

The study also revealed that battery on a wife has negative effects on the children. Close to 80% of the respondents agreed that children born or fostered by wives or women being domestically abused encounter challenges developmentally and psychologically such as increased aggression, anxiety, anti-socialisation with family, friends and authorities. Also, such children experience cognitive and attitudinal problems in school. They equally suffer loss of care and neglect in cases of permanent damage (physical, psychological and emotional) or death of the mother resulting from battery.

Also, 85% of the respondents who live with their perpetrators agreed that they experienced perpetual fear, and anxiety, high degree of stress, and most times depression leading to suicidal tendencies. The victims claim that they feel responsible for provoking their partners. About 65 % of the respondents claim that they have become victims of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PSTD), a condition characterised by flashbacks, intrusive images, exaggerated startle responses and nightmares. This disorder lingers for a long period of time in victims, even when they are out of immediate danger. About 75% of the victims interviewed claim that a state of financial handicap occasioned by battery robs them of good wellbeing. The respondents claim that they incurred financial indebtedness while caring for their health and well-being as a result of acts of battery.

Conclusion

Wife Battery in Nigeria is an old practise that has survived the process of social change. While many harmful traditional practices are slowly dying in contemporary life, wife beating seems to have defied this trend. Even in recent times, cases of wife battery has led to severe injuries and death.

The rates are alarming and Amuwo-Odofin as a Local Government has had its own fair share.

It is therefore apt perhaps to conclude that women are trapped in a vicious circle of violence arising from deeply rooted patriarchal power structures within the family that push them into positions of dependency on men generally and husbands in particular for survival. It is apparently clear that women in this study carefully considered their options and calculated the costs and benefits of leaving their husbands before arriving at the decision to remain in intimate relationships with their abusers. It is evident that men feel superior to women they live with, whom are seen as their possessions that can be treated according to their whims and caprices. Women thus deserve better treatment from men and wife battery as a form of domestic violence should never be considered as an option for any man under any circumstance.

Recommendations

It is expedient that all men and women should detach themselves from cultural stereotypes that encourage abuse to both genders and disregard the fundamental human rights of all persons. Gender balance should be mainstreamed in all government policies and spheres of human endeavour. With this, women and men will be treated equally and the fundamental human rights of all persons will be respected. Researchers and women activists should not relent in creating evidence based and sufficient enlightenment to the government cum general public on the grave implications of violation of women's right and present solutions on how the problem can be tackled.

Sufficient and comfortable shelters for battered women and their children should be made available by the relevant authorities. These shelters will provide a safe haven in which battered women can avoid violence, assess their past, plan for the future, and contact community services to explore options. Battered women need outside assistance in stopping the abuse, and since direct confrontation can accelerate it, they need safety while deciding what to do to prevent further abuse. Shelters offer many other benefits to battered wives besides protection. Depending on the particular shelter, they may provide assertion and/or parental training, psychological,

and legal counselling, and self-help groups. Many battered women in this study reported that the secure environment provided by shelters allowed for to self-rediscovery, identity affirmation, and making effective decisions. Batterers should also be encouraged to undergo anger management and other counselling sessions. The customary technique used by most counsellors is to teach the men nonviolent ways of behaving.

Furthermore, they should be taught how to translate their anger into words or express them on objects rather than people. Rehabilitated abusers should be used to teach other batterers about the implications of abusing women. On being asked about services needed to help battered women, majority of the respondents cited enrolment in self-empowerment courses and issuance of bursaries in order to continue their studies. Thus, opening up educational opportunities, including proper career training for battered women will empower the affected victims, and thus reduce their dependency on batterers. Again, there should be stringent acts of legislation that will prosecute batterers. These legislations should be backed up with proper enforcement so that citizens will in a bid to avoid the resultant stiff penalties desist from acts of battery

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