

WIFE BATTERING AND THE CHALLENGES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Wife battering exists in various cultures of the world. It takes many subtle forms from aggression, use of verbal words to manifestation of strong hostility and threat to life. These acts result in obvious emotional disturbance to swellings on various parts of the body. Women across the world are expected to bear and endure such as part of family life. This paper discusses the definition of violence and battering. Ways to recognise a potential batterer and reasons women do not seek help and continue to stay in abusive situations are highlighted. Challenges for national development are outlined.

Introduction

The family according to Nwodi (2000), is the corner-stone of the society. It is the oldest and most fundamental of human institutions. It consists of a man and a woman who are legally expected to produce children, care for them and help train them in the way of their culture. Thus the family is a corporate unit of interacting and interdependent personalities who have a common mission, goal, have a commitment over time, share resources and living space. Any threat to the family is a threat to its integrity. Once the foundation of the family is shaking, a lot of problems would result. One of such family problems is violence.

Violence according to United Nations (1992) in Adidu (2001:88). Is any act of gender-based violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts as coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. Violence against women is any act of violence that is committed against a woman or girl, simply because she was born female. These acts tend to result in physical, sexual or emotional suffering to the woman. This is domestic violence. The term domestic violence according to Viano, (1992) refers to a cycle of destructive thoughts, feelings and actions that often involve physical battering accompanied by psychological,

social or property violence. Most acts of violence are carried out by men toward their female partners.

Violence against women has been on from time immemorial and in different cultures of the world, to the present day. Threats of violence are many, on the increase and in different proportions. Family relationship and importance of family ties as a form of belonging and security, have undergone changes under the influence of modern societal development. This agrees with what Okon (1984:12) declares as the rapid social change, ignorance, poverty, traditional beliefs, attitudes and the gradual industrialization of the country are in part responsible for some of the disrupting influences in family and home life. There are some parents who can not spare time to discuss matters of common interests with their children and wives. This is an example of the type of relationship which exists in our homes and abound all over the world. Violence can take many subtle forms from an invisible powerful barrier to physical one.

Battering according to Young and Long (1998) is a pattern of behaviour in which one person establishes power and control over another person through fear and intimidation, often including the threat or use of violence. Battering occurs when barterers believe they are entitled to control their partners. Battering includes emotional abuse, economic abuse, sexual abuse, manipulation of children, exercise of male privilege, intimidation, isolation and a variety of other behaviour designed to maintain fear, intimidation and power. It is extremely common and happens in all types of situations. This would mean the family could be rich or poor, educated or uneducated; employed or unemployed, large or small in number. Even the rural and urban areas experience manifestations of battering. Battering of women occur everywhere and at anytime of the day or night. Sandler (1991:18) gave this example of a woman who confessed to being beaten. "He beats me like the devil ... when he came home drunk, he broke down the door He had some problems on the street and, he came to reciprocate with me...."

Another example by a Chilean woman reported the following experience of hers. "Sometimes I thought about ending all this, ending everything, ending even myself. I endured my husband's blows for 15 years. He would call me ugly, hit me, and I would run outside with my kids..." Sandler (1991:18). Wife battering is not just that of physical attack alone, it also involves intimidation, threats and psychological abuse used repeatedly on the wife by the husband. It is a general belief that women are weak, fragile, dependent and objects of admiration by their men. These beliefs resulted to the relegation of women in all societies to the background in all endeavours of life. Women therefore, are to content themselves as companions;

wives, helpers, domestic managers and child rearers. It really baffles one to realise how women are roughly handled by their once admirers. Now it is the said weak, fragile and object of admiration that has miraculously turned to a strong, hard rock or object that receives beatings in order to be softened or moulded into what the man desires.

Recognizing a potential batterer

Young and Long (1998) observe the following as warning signs of an individual who has tendency towards violence:

- Experienced physical or psychological abuse as a child.
- Had a father who battered his mother.
- Displayed violence toward other people
- Lose temper frequently and more easily than necessary
- Uses alcohol excessively
- Display unusual amount of jealousy
- Expects partner to be present or available at all times.
- Becomes enraged when he gives advice and it is not taken
- Exhibits a sense of overkill in his cruelty or kindness
- The partner is afraid of his anger, preventing him from being angry becomes an important part of the partner's behaviour.
- Has rigid ideas of what people should do. Is usually determined by male or female sex-role stereotypes.

Batterers tend to possess other identifiable characteristics including depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, dependence, paranoia, dissociation from their feelings, poor hostility toward women Viano (1992). They need a close relationship but they fear intensity of a relationship and the possible loss of control. Passive abusers tend to gravitate toward assertive women. Sometimes abusers are resentful of their victim life achievements. They may be jealous of the amount of Education their partner has received or jealous of the amount of money made. All in all the abusers perceive the victim of abuse to be more efficient in life often as a result of the abuser's low self-esteem (Marino 1994).

Several obvious reasons are given in defence of these attitudes of admirers towards their objects of admiration. Adidu (2001:88) states that "The fundamental issues underlying violence against women are women's inferiority position in the society and the unequal power relationship between men and women. So men wish to exert their position of power over women and the lack of fundamental respect for

women as equal to men have led to violence being used to dehumanize women who are deemed to be weaker.

Tradition, culture and religious beliefs also worsen the situation by maintaining women in a subservient position with regards to men. Women are recognised only as objects of desire, to be used by men for their own needs. They receive repeated threats of being sent away from their matrimonial home any time the man deems so. She could be denied control or contact with family members e.g. her children.

A violent person's behaviour is in the genes, wife-battering is a means by which violent men get their anger, anxiety, and stress released in their daily lives. It is a private affair between husband and wife and no one should intervene when a man beats his wife. Such women should continue to stay in violent relationship. Violence begets violence. Some men whose fathers used to batter their mothers, when they grow up and established their own home, tend to batter their own wives. The vicious circle of battering continues in the family. This is likely to be so because people who are beaten are likely to beat others. People learn to be aggressive through the things they observed.

How to recognise violence

Signs of domestic violence according to Adidu (1992:89) include obvious bruises and swelling around the face and body parts, being too quiet, broken limbs, black or red eyes, emotional disturbance, stiff walk, a tendency to have too many "accidents" etc. The behaviour of family members towards a violent father/husband may show extreme fear for instance, the house becomes unnaturally quiet upon his appearance and when he asked any member to do anything for him, you would see them jittering or shaking trying not to be wrong or offending.

Perpetrators of violence or battering are often very difficult to identify because they seem like normal people to us. Most violent men are not violent anywhere else but in the home and to their victim. Thus, it is very difficult to recognise that violence has occurred unless the victim can admit it has happened. Often, a woman will deny even when asked that she has been beaten. This explains the cases of an apparently happy woman later going mad due to the stress and injury of being battered and abused. It may increase the mother's violence against her own children i.e a battered woman may also batter her children. Violence reduces efficiency in the work place, results in lack of promotion or loss of job or frequent queries.

Reasons women do not seek help

In real life situation no one should expect to be beaten at any time in their life.

Instead of recognising that no one deserves violence, women often blame themselves for acts committed against them. This may be because of the social belief that it is culturally permissible for a husband to beat up his wife or a father to beat his children. In this women ought not to complain. Similarly, too often society assumes that a woman who has been violently abused has done something to deserve it, i.e. branded as troublesome and blamed for having invited the violence despite the fact that, the huge majority of violent acts are triggered by very trivial things. And that violence should never be justified.

Sometimes there is a cycle of beatings followed by remorse and promises never to do it again, followed by yet more beatings. Continual abusers often say they are sorry they didn't mean it and it will never happen again-until the next time. After a long time of being abused, women may become accustomed to it fearfully and therefore unable to take steps to leave the situation of abuse. Women may also fear being stigmatised or divorced or a future inability to find a husband.

Most women do not know that there is sometimes a possibility of getting justice from the police or the courts. There is also a fear that the police or other authorities will not take a woman seriously when she complains about being abused, whether physically or emotionally. Also a woman may fear that if she complains, the person abusing her may abuse her or some one she cares about, even more than before, for having dared to complain. She may fear that she will lose her children if she complains or become a destitute as a result of complaining.

Reasons women stay or return to abusive situations

According to Young and Long (1998) the following are some of the reasons women may tolerate their partners:

- She has low self-esteem, she thinks she deserves the abuse she has received.
- She models her mother's behaviour and considers it normal for women to be battered.
- She believes she does not have enough money or other resources to leave.
- She fears the abuser will find her and hurt or kill her.
- She is dependent on her abuser's decision making and does not think she can manage by herself.
- She loves him and believes she can change him.
- She feels embarrassed to admit she has been abused.
- Her abuser has agreed to seek help
- He only gets abusive when he drinks.
- She believes she has control of the situation ("he only hits me when...")

The challenges for national development

It is not traditional in any country for women to be violently assaulted and even if it were, there is no reason for it to continue. Therefore, there is need for government in Nigeria to enact laws through the legislative bodies to protect women from being battered by their men. The existing laws are not offering enough protection for women. The law enforcement agencies that are supposed to offer security, take the issue casually as just a private affair between husband and wife. They would ask the woman to go back home and reconcile with her husband and be more obedient next time to avoid being battered.

For the nation to experience positive development in all ramifications there is a strong need to maintain peaceful co-existence and harmony in the home. Once a home does not experience peace there can be no growth. It is very important to provide counselling services in various locations both in the rural and urban areas. This would be an avenue for battered individuals to seek for help and become functional members of the society. The batterer too would be assisted to understand himself and seek ways to reduce his aggressive tendency. These would greatly help to restore and improve their self-esteem.

There is the need for government to rise up to her responsibility by providing means of empowering her citizen/people so as to reduce the weigh of poverty which is affecting the citizens. Poverty is a serious disease that eats up the individual. There should be provision of small scale loan facilities which the ordinary man/woman can get with little ease. Payment can be done instalmentally with little or no interest. Government can do this at the rural areas too.

The religious places of worship teach virtues such as honesty, love, respect, obedience etc. as part of their regular preaching. As parents and children nurture they should care, love each other and also reverence God, become models that can be imitated and extend to other social relationships. Similarly, the various roles and work habit learnt at home would help to lay foundation for their personality. Families where children imbibe these virtues and right attitudes tend to enjoy relative peace which Njoru (2001) notes is a prominent characteristic of a civilized society and which will help to curb future battering in the nation.

It is the reflection of cultural traditions that problems should be settled within the family unit so as to protect the family against public shame and humiliation. This is an ineffective institutional response to a growing social problem. The welfare agencies have not been able to assert themselves effectively as an extension of the family problem solving process, hence the reluctance of the public to turn to them for assistance. The consequences of violence in the home can be devastating and far-

reaching. The psychological effects of battering can last a lifetime and may lower the sense of self-worth of an individual. Also, it can result in inability to relate with others, reduce attention span, isolation, and depression.

Trained social workers often have difficulties in resolving the problems that battered persons bring to them. This aggravates the situation of the battered person making them to see reporting to agencies as of no use. Efforts should be made within the society to ensure that battered persons are identified and reported for treatment. Enact laws that require professionals in law enforcement, medicine and welfare agencies to offer help to victims. The legislation should define what punishment should be given to an abuser. Department should be created to assist and implement programmes on cases, remedy and prevention of battering if the nation wants to develop.

Conclusion

Battering of women though on the increase in our society, there is need to seek for help. Positive virtues and values should be encouraged in the family system. There is the need for battered wives to be assertive, and report cases to the right agencies. Family members should be sensitised to seek for redress.

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