

## **COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA**

**By**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines counselling strategies for the management of violence against women in Nigeria. The issue of violence against women has eaten deep into the fabric of the society in Nigeria. Most forms of violence against women were hidden under the cloak of silence or accepted. The research work revealed factors responsible for violence which include socio-cultural and psychological factors, while other forms identified are sexual violence, early marriage and trafficking in girls. Based on the outcome of the findings, the following recommendations were established as means of controlling violence against women. Counsellors should give enlightenment talk to parents on how to properly guide their female wards on marital relationship, create an alternative dispute resolution and give public enlightenment such as seminars and workshop on the need to put an end to violence against women. Conclusively, effective counselling will help to improve the self image of young female and facilitate the achievement of life task, it will empower women to participate and benefit from the economic and social development of the nation.

**Keywords:** Depletion, value orientation, violence, victim

### **Introduction**

Violence against women has eaten deep into the fabric of the Nigeria society to such an extent that many women who are victimized feel that they are at fault. The issue of violence against women in Nigeria and any other society cannot be emphasized. Every day we see images of male violence against women in the news. In the broadest sense, violence against women is any violation of a woman's personhood, mental or physical integrity, or freedom of movement through individual acts and societal oppression. It

includes all the ways our society objectifies and oppresses women. Violence against women ranges from sterilization abuse to prescription - drug abuse, pornography, stalking, battering, and rape. It is often unclear to a woman who has been victimized and to society as a whole whether a sexual violation was done out of sexual desire or violent intent or whether these motivations are even distinguishable, because violence itself has come to be seen as sexual or erotic.

Some years ago, most forms of violence against women were hidden under a cloak of silence or acceptance. As more and more talked with each other in the recent wave of the women's movement, it became apparent that violence against women occurs on a massive scale; that no woman is immune; and family, friends, and public institutions have been cruelly insensitive about it. Women have been mobilized to offer direct services to those who have encountered violence, to educate people about the range and nature of male violence against women, and to develop strategies for change (Moradian, 2015).

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The 2013 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, 2013). 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 effective participation.

According to Davies (2019), 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 & Gow, 2014). The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (2013) states that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.

## **Factors Responsible for Violence against Women in Nigeria**

There are many factors responsible for violence against women as stipulated by different theories. These include psychological factors that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social factors 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.

### **1. Socio-cultural Factor**

Socio-cultural factors responsible for violence against women in Nigeria may include;

**Financial or economic abuse:** This includes forcibly controlling another person's money or other assets. It can also involve stealing cash, not allowing a victim to take part in any financial decisions or preventing a victim from having a job.

**Family violence:** Is a broader term, this refers to violence between family members, as well as violence between intimate partners. It involves the same sorts of behaviours as described for violence against women. As with violence against women, the National Plan recognises that although only some aspects of family violence are criminal offences, any behaviour that causes the victim to live in fear is unacceptable. The term 'family violence' is the most widely used term to identify the experiences of indigenous people, because it includes the broad range of marital and kinship relationships in which violence may occur (Adebayo, 2013).

**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 & Sugarman, 2016).

### **2. Psychological Factor**

**Psychological and emotional abuse:** can include a range of controlling behaviours such as control of finances, isolation from family and friends, continual humiliation, threats against children or being threatened with injury or death.

**Sexual assault or Sexual violence:** can include rape, sexual assault with implements, being forced to watch or engage in pornography, enforced prostitution, and being made to have sex with friends of the perpetrator. Research has demonstrated that violence against women often involves a continuum of violence from psychological, economic and emotional abuse through to physical and sexual violence.

**Jealousy:** Many cases of 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 violence against women are 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).

**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. Most authorities seem to agree that abusive personalities result from a combination of several factors, to varying degrees.

### **Different Forms of Violence against Women in Nigeria**

#### **1. Sexual Violence**

Although women are more at risk of violence from their intimate partners than from other persons, sexual violence by non-partners is also common in many settings. According to the 2006 In-depth Study of the Secretary-General: "Sexual violence by 'non- partners' refers to violence by a relative, friend, acquaintance, neighbour, work colleague or stranger.

#### **2. Early Marriage**

The practice of early marriage is prevalent throughout the world, especially in Africa and South Asia. This negates peace and security of any nation because it is a form of sexual violence, since young girls are often forced into the marriage and into sexual relations.

#### **3. Trafficking in Girls**

Trafficking involves the recruitment and transportation of using deception, coercion and threats in order to place and keep them in a situation of slavery, forced labour or servitude. Women are trafficked into a variety sectors of the informal economy, including prostitution, domestic work, street begging, mining, agriculture, cottage industries (Erturk, 2016). While exact data are hard to come by, UNESCO, (2014), estimates of the number of trafficked persons range from 500,000 to two million per year, and a few organizations have estimated that up to four million persons are trafficked every year. Although women and men can become victims of trafficking but the majority of victims

### **Value Orientation**

In most sub-Saharan African, especially in Nigeria, societies, have in the past, been held together by element unique of the region, some of these elements include the following: The extended family system, including the clan and the tribe, Chieftancy, Taboos, Various forms of initiation, Close links with ancestors and the elders in the community

The village here is the focal point of the society. All the elements are important in ensuring that the value are in helds. In most cases the chiefs and the elders were regarded are a vital link between ancestors and the present generation. This links were strengthened by rituals, ceremonies and taboos attached to them. It was easy then, to guide and counsel the young ones, the rituals or ceremonies were also aimed at preparation for adult roles in t6he society.

The extended family, the clan and the village, made society supportive. No individual regarded him/herself as alien, counsel was readily sought and provided. The difference contradictions in present-day counselling have their origin in the social and historical forces that have shaped modern culture people in all society and at all times, especially, the female ones, have experienced emotional or psychological distress and behavioural problems as a result of depleted values presently experienced in our societies.

In Nigeria presently, we have and still experiencing many cultural and social changes, which has in turn resulted in depleting the morally acceptable values that were experienced before and has such weakened the structure of the society. The most outstanding of such moral and value changes are:

1. We have gradually shifted from the extended to pure nuclear family unit, or single parent family unit, with women at the receiving end, most of the time. That is why we are presently witnessing single parents when the man will abscond and leave the woman to carter for the children, while the man is still hibernating with another woman, probably a single parent also.

2. Changes in political demands and expectations:-We depend mostly on our dishonest political leaders who do not belief in woman capacity to hold reasonable political offices, and it is the woman folk that cast the highest vote yet they a least appreciated with any political office.

3. High level of urbanization, with high level of unemployment compounded by high level of illiteracy:- The highest level of illiteracy in Nigeria. More than 50% of Nigerian women are still illiterate because of the vulnerability. And the rate at which people from rural areas are migrating to the urban centres, had led to a lot of completion for social amenities in the urban centres, most of them had forget their moral ethnics once.

4. High population growth rate: The geometrical proportion of the present population had put the country in a serious crises. In those days, when polygamous was largely practiced by our forefathers, they have proper arrangement on how to cater for their extend family. Unlike the present scenario where a typical okada man will have more than three wives and does not have any other means of livelihood than the bike. Eventually he will not be able to carter for the wives and the children, eventually he will disappeared from the rented house and allow the wives to carter for the children, without any clear source of income. The value has so deputed to the extend that the man will abandon both the children and their mothers. The product of such homes are the one we are managing now, who had become social miscreant, armed robbers, area boys and so on.

5. Infiltration and acceptance of western culture:-We have thrown our own culture, value, norms into extinction, while we now embraced western culture in other name of civilization. This has done a lot of damage in depleting our values, that are generally acceptable. This foreign cultures are adopted through, films, television, videos, series of magazines etc. we have completely deviate from our values and cultures. For example,

in the western world, they did not have regards for respecting elders and seeking their counsel when need arises. The issue of fulltime wife, where women are not allow to work, and at the end of the day, the man will dump the women and marry another women, having her in perpetual suffering.

6. The issue of political instability, epidemics and war: all these led to increase number of options and refuges, in all top camps mostly in the western part of the country. In these group, women are mostly vulnerable. A visit to any IDP (Internal Displace People) in the northern part of Nigeria, will refilled over 70% of women, who are majorly victims of, kidnappers, banditry, Boko haram, and so on. Because of this most of them are widows, whose husband had become a victim of attack. The women are now left to care for the family, and without any reasonable means of livelihood the children become beggars or atmost gain any of thesebandit groups. In those days Nigeria was peaceful and our values is held in high esteem, but all these aforemention problems has accelerated greater depletion of our values and we need new orientation.

7. High level of moral decadence: High level of moral decadency and behavior maladjusted has led to high level of depleting in our value, norms, even our cultural beliefs. The aftermath of broken home, and single parenting that is common nowadays, where the women has failed in obeying their husband, and the husband's inability to adequately provides for his family. Leisefaire types of leadership is what is operating in most family and such will continue to breed, morally decadent children.

Going by all these, there is a need for urgent value re-orientation, we should trace back our morally acceptable values and beliefs, our culture and traditional way of life should be adhere to, and these may reduce the rate of value depletion and pave a new way for value rebirth and value re-orientation.

### **Consequences of Violence against Women**

**1. Denial of Fundamental Rights.** Violence against women is recognized as a violation of human rights. As early as 1984, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly identified violence against women as an abuse that threatens the security of women and their fundamental rights to life and liberty, as well as freedom from fear and want. Che and Cleland, (2004). Also in December 1993, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights published the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women or Violence Against Men. Section 34(1)(a) of the Constitution also provides that every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly, no person shall be subject to torture or to inhuman or degrading treatment.

**2. Lack of Development.** Violence against women causes human suffering, impediments to personal development and reduction in the contribution women can make to the lives of others. Violence against women does not avail women the power to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. Ushie, (2011). Violence against women has incalculable costs to present and future generations

and limits a woman's personal growth, her productivity and her socio-economic roles. Also, women's aspirations and achievements are inhibited, not just by the injuries of physical attacks but by the implicit threat to social development. By subjecting women to violence and without a social structure that endeavours to stop this practice, the women could be made to believe that they are actually inferior to their counterparts and that they deserve the abuse.

**3. Health Consequences.** Violence against women is a profound health problem that compromises women's physical and mental health, and erodes their self-esteem. In addition to causing injury, violence increases women's long-term risk of a number of other health problems including chronic pain, physical disability, drug and alcohol abuse, and depression. Women with a history of physical or sexual abuse are also at increased risk for unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections, and miscarriages. For many women, the psychological consequences of abuse are even more serious than its physical effects. The experience of abuse often erodes women's self-esteem and puts them at greater risk of a variety of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, phobias, post-traumatic stress disorder, and can also result in alcohol and drug abuse.

**4. Impact on Children** The most important actors in any child's life are often, and should most often be, his or her parents. As such, the family can be the single most important factor in determining whether or not a child is protected. On the other hand, given the centrality of the family in the child's life, it can also be a frequent source of violence, abuse, discrimination and exploitation. Children who have witnessed their mothers being subjected to one form of violence or another, tend to follow suit because they feel that is the best way to deal with their wives too. They could on the other hand, avoid women due to the fear of repeating what their fathers did. Also, children fail to receive adequate care and attention from battered women who are too busy nursing their wounds or trying to find a way out of their predicament. This is especially when injuries inflicted on them by their husbands leads to their death. Violence against women in pregnancy is of particular concern because of the implications for safe motherhood and child health.

### **Conclusion**

Violence against women is an issue which must be dealt with on time before it gets out of hand. Women's lives are at risk when they reside in the same house with people who could end their lives just because of trivial issues or because they cannot control their temper. Violence against women not only affects such women, but it also affects their children, their aged parents and the society as a whole. Women who constantly suffer violence cannot render any positive help towards the society. They cannot govern people and be at the helm of affairs of business, government and their own lives. Victims of violence and other forms of abuse might have reduced concentration and effectiveness at work or in life. More so, they cannot help their fellow women who have been widowed or

who are less privileged. Violence against women is a reality and we must act now and always to prevent our society from collapse.

The need for counselling in this contemporary situation in Nigerian has become paramount in order to promote the well being of the citizen. Effective counselling should help to improve the self-image of young female and facilitate the achievement of life task, it will also empower the young female to participate fully in, and benefit from, the economic and social development of the nation

## **Recommendations**

### **1. Counselling**

The following recommendations were offered as a means of controlling violence against women.

To remedy the violence against women situation in Nigeria, all stakeholders must be involved; the communities, religious groups, institutions, government at all levels. In schools, during Parents' Teachers' Association meetings, the school counsellor could give enlightenment talks, encouraging parents to use disciplinary measures, which are non-violent on their children and avoid exposing children to violence against women of any form.

The school counsellor could organize group counselling sessions for the different age groups and classes, on the advantages of a violence free society. Churches and mosques should organize seminars and outreach programmes where professional counsellors are invited to enlighten the people on the need for a violence free society with the home as the cradle. Young couples planning to get married should be guided on the ways to avoid violence in the intimate relationship of marriage.

The government should establish and fund counselling centres at the community, and Local Government levels and employ professional counsellors to help victims and perpetrators of violence against women. Counselling can also be coupled with treatment procedures for men whose main reason for committing such crime is drunkenness, genetics, behavioural disorders and such other reasons that can be treated. It is very important that perpetrators are counselled on the ills and consequences of beating their wives. They need to know that the fact that they beat their wives in front of their children will have a psychological effect on those children in so many ways.

Such men also need to know that battering their wives will never make her happy and could result to depression, ill health or even suicide. It will therefore be a challenge for these women to take care of him, their home and their children. The root causes of such violence should be determined and addressed. Women also need to be counselled on many issues. It is possible that emotionally some could be a wreck and they need to be placated not to take any rash decisions that would cause havoc to her and her family. The needs to be taught patience and for those who may have sustained bruises in one way or the other, referrals to hospitals should be done.



## **2. Family Courts**

Family courts which deal with sensitive issues such as rape, battery, sexual assault, among others, should be private and only parties, their lawyers and the judge should be allowed to witness the proceedings. This is because many victims of violence against women would prefer their matters being kept out of the public glare. This is because sensitive issues will be discussed and the victims will be encouraged to report such cases when she knows it will be a private matter.

## **3. Alternative Dispute Resolution**

Women don't usually want their partners who have battered them to go to jail because of the financial consequences to them and their children. This is especially when the woman is financially dependent on the man. Also, some men come back from jail, more bitter than when they were convicted and continue battering their wives even in a worse manner. The litigation process itself, independent of the event which initiated the claim, is a source of stress for litigants (Brent 2004). The litigation process can be a traumatic experience and can cause psychological stress for some people for so many reasons (Brent, 2004). It is very likely that while the case is going on in court, the relationship between the two will be very strained and the end result could even be divorce. Also, lack of enough proof to prosecute the perpetrator, lack of funds and the fear of stigmatisation that follows a discharge and acquittal of the accused are all reasons why some victims of violence against women are reluctant to take their cases to the courts. Violence against women cases could be better handled through Alternative dispute processes. Alternative dispute resolution (ADR) is a process for settlement of disputes without going through the strict procedure of the court of Law. This process is resorted to with a view to reducing the burden of legal proceedings pending different levels of courts, cost of proceedings and length of time required for disposal of litigation.

## **4. Public Enlightenment**

Seminars and workshops should be organized for the purpose of alerting people on the need to put an end to violence against women and to educate people about the consequences and ways by which victims can be helped. For the states that have laws already, people should be educated as to the existence of these laws and where they can get help if they are victimized. Some participants at a seminar on law against violence against women organised by the Women Empowerment and Legal Aid (WELA) in Lagos State, openly confessed their ignorance of the existence of the Lagos State Law against violence against women codified since 2007 (Famoroti, 2012). Most people are not aware that Laws that seek to protect victims of violence against women now exist in some states in Nigeria. Some people don't also know that what they are being subjected to is wrong and could be stopped by speaking out and reporting to the appropriate authorities. Thus, the public should be enlightened as regards all these through programmes in the communities, media, efforts of NGO's, among others.

### 5. National Legal Framework and Implementation

National frameworks protecting women from violence against women should be put in place in Nigeria. States should also enact laws to protect women. Apart from putting these laws in place, implementation is very important. Law enforcement officials have to be trained to enable them have a clear picture of the demands of the new legislation.

Law enforcement officers are at the frontline of the criminal justice system. Their attitude and response to all involved in acts of violence can have a dramatic impact on ensuring developments, including the prevention of future violent acts and the protection of victims. In 2010, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (uNopc) published a handbook on effective responses to violence against women. Designed for first-responders such as the police, it gives practical guidance on how to prevent, intervene, respond and investigate acts of violence against women. Feminist organisations who had been offering legal and psychological support services to victims of violence against women reported that few women who had the courage to approach the police and file a complaint against their abusive husbands were discouraged by untrained law enforcement officers. Thus, law enforcement officers must be adequately compensated so that they will be happy to do their jobs and willing to learn. Citizens should also refrain from giving them bribes and should be respectful to them.

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