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Influence of African Cultural Factors on Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence is a range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male partner. Domestic violence leads not only to physical injury and death, but also to severe effects upon the mental health of its victims, including an erosion of self esteem, depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide at the extreme cases. In African culture especially in Igbo culture of eastern Nigeria, domestic violence takes on culturally specific forms. In an attempt to forestall domestic violence prevalent in our society, this study investigated influence of culture on domestic violence. A total of one hundred and sixty-one (161) married people comprising 56 males and 105 females sampled using accidental sampling method from the population of married residents of Enugu metropolis of Enugu state, south-eastern Nigeria. A 9-item questionnaire designed by the researchers was used as research instrument. Cross-sectional survey design was adopted, while chi square was used as a statistical tool to analyze the scores of the participants. The findings revealed that there are strong significant influence of cultural factors on domestic violence such as gender inequality ($X^2=13.72$, $P<.01$), non involvement of women in family decisions ($X^2=60.88$, $P<.01$), making sexual advances by men alone ($X^2=4.52$, $P<.05$), denial of women access to property and resources ($X^2=71.12$, $P<.01$), patriarchal system ($X^2=82.14$, $P<.01$), different training giving to male and female ($X^2=20.20$, $P<.01$), and relegation of women to the kitchen ($X^2=17.44$, $P<.01$). The patriarchal system had the highest coefficient ($X^2=82.14$, $P<.01$), and as such proven to be the strongest cultural factor that promotes domestic violence, while making sexual advances by men alone ($X^2=4.52$, $P<.05$) yielded least factor of domestic violence. It was therefore recommended that there is need to change these African cultural factors that mediate domestic violence in order to forestall domestic violence and its devastating consequences.

Keyword: Africa, Culture, Domestic violence, Marriage, Healthy life

Introduction

Marriage is an institution ordained by God. God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man, and the man said, “this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, for she was taken out of man” (Genesis 2:22&23). Osarenren (2002) sees marriage as usually a union between an adult male and adult female. Hariland, Prins, McBride and Walrath (2011) see marriage as a socially or ritually recognized

union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws. Eri (2004) sees marriage as a contract between a man and a woman to live as husband and wife after performing the ceremony of payment of dowry. Eri (2004) also emphasizes that the essential requirements of a valid customary marriage are: agreement between the two parties; formal introduction of two families; the payment of dowry or bride price to the parents of the bride to be; and performing the role of handing over of the woman to the man's family.

However, when these two parties have agreed to enter into marriage as husband and wife, it involves the allocation of rights and obligations between the both parties. As the partners strive to fulfill the obligations allotted to them, and to protect their rights, either of the partners may knowingly or unknowingly infringe on the partner's rights which if not properly handled often result to disagreements, hence conflict.

Marital conflict according to Buehler, Krishmakumar, Stone, Anthony, Permberton, Gerald and Benber (1988), is the existence of high levels of disagreement, stressful and hostile interactions between spouses. Cummings (1998) sees marital conflict as any major or minor interpersonal interaction that involved a difference in opinion, whether it is mostly negative or even positive. Cummings (1998) further elaborates that everyday marital conflict involves a range of tactical and emotional expressions both positive and negative. When these differences between the partners linger without resolution, it may often result to the use of coercion often by men on their wives, hence domestic violence.

Domestic violence according to World Health Organization (1997) is a range of sexually, psychologically and physically coercive acts used against adult and adolescent women by current or former male partner. World Health Organization (2002) reported that domestic violence leads not only to physical injury and death, but also to severe effects upon the mental health of its victims, including an erosion of self esteem, depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide at the extreme cases.

Similarly, domestic violence may assume in many forms namely: physical abuse, for example wife battering; verbal abuse like calling of the wife's name without respect or calling of the wife names by her husband in both private and in public places; sexual abuse like sexual assaults, harassment, exploitation or infidelity mostly on the part of the husband simply because of the patriarchal society "men's world"; neglect like failure to provide for family members food, clothing, shelter, medical care and protection from harm or sense of being loved and valued rather prefers to be taking care of outsiders, some of whom may be the concubines, trying to justify the patriarchal rights or prefers to be addressed as "Oka nma n' ama" (good outside home); economic abuse like stealing from or defrauding a loved one or exploiting family member for financial gain often the wife; spiritual abuse which includes preventing a spouse especially the wife from engaging in her spiritual or religious practices or using one's religious belief to dominate his wife; and emotional abuse like refusal to talk to the wife or take meal prepared by the wife.

However, the impact of persistent of domestic violence should not be under estimated, under recognized and under reported. Domestic violence is a widespread social phenomenon often rooted in cultural considerations as it is perceived in the culture of silence. Culture is therefore, people's way of life as it encompasses all aspects of human life. In African culture especially in Nigerian, domestic violence takes on culturally specific forms. The practice of patriarchal society has subjected women into second class citizens. They are seen as weaker sex by their male counterparts. The thought of payment of their wives' dowry has made African men to view their wives as one of the property which can be toyed with or manipulated as robots at their own will. Women are denied of access to property or financial resources, which invariably makes them dependants on men for supports, and as a result, they are at risk of being subjected to emotional, physical and sexual abuse, or relegated as second class citizens. There is a slogan sometimes used by some Nigerian males to relegate their female counterparts to second class citizens with an acronym "week", which simply means, "women education ends in the kitchen". To buttress this view, President Muhammadu Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, on the 14th October, 2016 reacted to his wife Aisha's comment, that she may not support him if he runs for re-election come 2019 and he said, "I don't know which party my wife belongs to, but she belongs to my kitchen and my living room and the other room". This comment by President Muhammadu Buhari prompted the German chancellor Angela Merkel, standing at his side to give him a short

glare and then laughed. The German Chancellor Angela Merkel was conspicuously perplexed over the President Muhammadu Buhari's comment because, women are not relegated in the western world where she hails from. Till today, no issue has been raised as regards to Mr. President's comment. People just laughed it over and everything died off simply because of the patriarchal system practiced by the Africans.

Udegbe (1995) observed that in the rural areas in Nigeria, the exploitation of women are perpetuated where the relationship between men and women is that of master and subordinate. Adewale (2007) maintains that, although wife beating is a worldwide phenomenon, but it is accepted in Africa as part of our culture. Women are expected to be submissive despite the violence perpetuated against them, and divorce is not encouraged due to stigma attached to it. Women are not expected to discuss their marital experiences with anyone, and few reports by the victims are regarded as family affair which should be resolved by the partners or within their families. For instance, in the eastern part of Nigeria, women in abusive marriages are not expected to discuss their marital experiences, and if anyone tries to do so, will be attacked by the kindred "Umunna" or daughters of the land "Umuada", challenging her that she should not expose her family or she may be ostracized. This makes women who are the victims of domestic violence to remain in abusive relationships at their own detriment. Feminist theory maintains that most African societies practice patriarchal system, that is male dominance and control, and central to this framework is the argument that violence against women is as a result of the unequal power relations structurally embedded in patriarchal system, thereby supporting male dominance over female.

Cultural theory emphasizes that tradition, customs and norms with the African culture as influential in perpetuating domestic violence and other forms of violence are seen as normal and legitimate in African societies of which Nigeria is not exempted. Cases of domestic violence against women by their husbands are very alarming. The statistics reported by This Day Newspaper on 20th September, 2011 is very outrageous. About 50% of wives have been battered by their husbands and more surprisingly educated women (65%) experienced this ugly situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%). For example, George (2015) reported a

55 year old man by name, Joseph Okogbu, was alleged to have hacked his wife, Anna Okogbu to death over some domestic issues on 27th March, 2014 in Ogun State, Nigeria.

Also, as recorded by George (2015), Martin stabbed his lover Chinonso to death ahead of Valentines' day in an argument on 10th February, 2014 in Onitsha, Anambra State Nigeria. George (2015) also reported of a female National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member was raped to death and dumped beside a river in Maiduguri, Borno State Nigeria by unknown men.

Similarly, Obi and Ozumba (2007) in their study on the factors associated with domestic violence in south-east Nigeria, found that 70% of the respondents reported abuse in their families with 92% of the victims being female partners and the remaining 8% being males. Agbo and Choji (2014), in their study carried out in Abuja, Nigeria found a mother of one narrated her experiences in the hands of her husband who constantly was hitting and beating her whenever he was drunk, and that resulted to losing two pregnancies. Akolisa (2002) reported that culture in Nigeria holds that once a dowry is paid on a woman, she automatically becomes the property of the husband. Eze and Gage (1998) reported that at societal level, the discrimination against women is traceable to male authority and decision making in the home, rigid gender roles, definition of masculinity that are linked to dominance or male honour, economic inequality between men and women, and the use of physical force for conflict resolution.

Also, Adewale (2007) reported that a woman might remain in an abusive relationship purely for economic reasons, and she may be unskilled and unemployed as in the case of full time housewife, fear of hunger, and fear of raising children by herself alone, her esteem and confidence might have been crippled due to many years of battering. In Ghana, OfeiAboaye (1994) observed that it is common to find Ghanaian women taking the blame after they have been beaten to near fatal point by their husbands. Also in line of the above, Amoakoheme (2004) pointed out that some cultural practices and traditional gender roles in Ghana render women unable to defend their right even when they are physically and sexually abused.

In Zimbabwe, Njovana and Watt (1996) reported that domestic violence is common in the Zimbabwean women as well as rapid social change, extended family structures, contribute to the

notion that male heads of households can do anything they wish with their wives and children. Men are expected to desire and need sex regularly, but women are punished if they are appeared to enjoy sex too much or if they are thought to be unfaithful. Women are expected to be fertile and to bear sons (Njovana& Watt, 1996).

In Tanzania, Lagina (1994) reported that victims of domestic violence do not express their experiences publicly due to cultural beliefs and values. Lagina (1994) also reported that legal and socio-cultural system work against human rights and women as human beings. In South Arica, Tsikata (1993), reported that as a child, the female is taught to be passive, emotionally dependent, whereas the male child is taught to show less emotion and to be active and demonstrate independence. Based on the observations above, it became pertinent to explore the possible cultural factors that precipitate domestic violence and come up with possible solutions to forestall domestic violence in Africa and possibly the world over.

Statement of the problem

Domestic violence leads not only to physical injury and death, but also to severe effects upon the mental health of its victims, including an erosion of self esteem, depression, anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide at the extreme cases. In African culture especially in Igbo culture of eastern Nigeria, domestic violence takes on culturally specific forms. In an attempt to forestall domestic violence prevalent in our society, this study provided answer to the following question:

Will African cultural factors influence domestic violence?

Purpose of the study

The concept of African cultural factors which may influence domestic violence are as follow: gender inequality, non involvement of women in family decisions, making sexual advances by men alone, denial of women access to property and resources, patriarchal system, different training giving to male and female, and relegation of women to the kitchen.

Therefore, this study aimed at the following:

To determine if African cultural factors will influence domestic violence.

Hypothesis

There will be significant influence of African cultural factors on domestic violence.

Method

Participants

A total of one hundred and sixty-one (161) married people comprising 56 males and 105 females sampled using purposive and accidental sampling techniques from the population of married residents of Enugu metropolis of Enugu state, south-eastern Nigeria. They were between the ages of 24-65 years, with a mean age of 39.81 and standard deviation of 3.41, and were all Christians with 103 of them have minimum of Higher National Diploma.

Instrument

One instrument was used in this study. It is a 9-item questionnaire designed by the researchers from the literature reviewed to measure possible African cultural factors that may promote domestic violence. The factors are: payment of dowry; gender inequality; non involvement of women in family decisions; making sexual advances by men alone; denial of women access to property and resources; patriarchal system; not allowing women to discuss their marital experiences; different training giving to male and female; and relegation of women to the kitchen.

Procedure

The administration of the questionnaire took the form of individual testing after the establishment of adequate rapport. A total of 180 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the target population (married people) within a period of 3 weeks. A total of 168 were filled and returned. A total of 7 copies of the questionnaire were discarded because of improper filling. A total of 161 copies that were properly filled were analyzed

Design/statistics

Cross-cultural survey design was adopted for this study, while Chi Square was applied as the statistical tool to analyze the scores obtained from the participants.

Results

Summary table of Chi Square on influence of culture on domestic violence

S/N	ITEM	CHI SQUARE (X ²)	CRITICAL VALUE	LEVEL SIGNIFICANCE P	OF
1	Does payment of dowry promote domestic violence?	2.24	3.84	>.05	
2	Is domestic violence as a result of gender inequality?	13.72	6.64	<.01	
3	Does non involvement of women in family decisions encourage domestic violence?	60.88	6.64	<.01	
4	Is making sexual advances by men alone enhance domestic violence?	4.52	3.84	<.05	
5	Does denial of women access to property and resources promote domestic violence?	71.12	6.64	<.01	
6	Does patriarchal system (men's world) encourage domestic violence?	82.14	6.64	<.01	
7	Is not allowing women to discuss their marital experiences encouraging domestic violence?	2.74	3.84	>.05	
8	Is different training giving to male and female encouraging domestic violence?	20.20	6.64	<.01	
9	Does relegation of women to the kitchen promote domestic violence?	17.44	6.64	<.01	

From the table above, it was observed that there are strong significant influences of people's views of gender inequality ($X^2=13.72$, $P<.01$), non involvement of women in family decisions ($X^2=60.88$, $P<.01$), making sexual advances by men alone ($X^2=4.52$, $P<.05$), denial of women access to property and resources ($X^2=71.12$, $P<.01$), patriarchal system ($X^2=82.14$, $P<.01$), different training giving to male and female ($X^2=20.20$, $P<.01$), and relegation of women to the kitchen ($X^2=17.44$, $P<.01$) on domestic violence. It was also observed that there are no significant influences of people's views of payment of dowry ($X^2=2.24$, $P>.05$) and not allowing women to discuss their marital experiences ($X^2=2.74$, $P>.05$) on domestic violence. The patriarchal system had the highest coefficient ($X^2=82.14$, $P<.01$) and as such proven to be the strongest cultural factor that promotes domestic violence, while making sexual advances by men alone ($X^2=4.52$, $P<.05$) yielded least contributor of domestic violence.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the hypothesis tested showed that all the cultural factors significantly influence domestic violence, except payment of dowry and not allowing women to discuss their marital experiences. The patriarchal system practiced by most Africans had the highest coefficient, and is the strongest unique factor influencing domestic violence.

Implication of the findings

The implication of the findings of this study is that, the perceptions hold by African men that they rule over women, denial of women access to property, gender inequality, relegation of women to the kitchen, non involvement of women in family decisions, making sexual advances by men alone and different training giving to male and female all promote domestic violence, and if nothing is done to forestall it, wife battering and other domestic violence will continue to eat deep into many families, of which some of the victims may lose their lives at extreme cases.

Recommendations

The researchers hereby recommended that women should be empowered through training by government and non-governmental organization in order to equip them towards contributing to their family needs, which gives them self worth and confidence in marriage rather than being fully dependent on their husbands. Schools, churches, mosques as agents of socialization should organize seminars for public enlightenment on the need for peaceful and violence free society which begins from home. Researchers also recommended that before people go into marriage, there is proper need to engage them into extensive couple counseling gearing towards managing their marital differences.

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