Marital Violence in Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality in Rivers State: Implications for Family Counselling

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ABSTRACT
The issue of marital violence in Rivers State, especially in Ekpeye ethnic nationality is a well known issue that has been occurring in the past few years. It is now a common thing discussed among the people, both in the prints and on the media. This paper examines the causes, effects, and the possible preventive measures of marital violence, among Ekpeye ethnic nationality. Causes include: psychological problems, jealousy, social stress, social leaving, power and control, infidelity, insatiable sexual desire, and drug abuse. Types of marital violence discussed are: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, economic abuse, spiritual abuse, and emotional abuse. Effects of marital violence in Ekpeye are: physical and psychological pains, broken marriages, and homes, juvenile delinquency, and emotional hurt. Eight intensive recommendations were made for implementation.

Keywords: spousal violence, abusive behaviours, extra-marital affairs

INTRODUCTION
Marriage is the coming together of a man and woman, popularly known as husband and wife. Though it takes place between two people who may come from entirely different socio-economic, ethnic background. Just as the holy Bible rightly puts it “a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).
On the other hand, violence refers to any behaviour that exert physical strength otherwise known as force on the other partner with the intention to either hurt, destroy and even to kill (Dobson, 2004). Therefore marital violence or violence in marriage is the deliberate attempt or act by one partner in the home to inflict pains, injury on the other. Also it refers to any abusive treatment meted out by one partner to the other. This violates the law of basic human rights. (Obi and Ozumba, 2007). Similarly, according to Catalano, Rosenblath and Novaco (2003), marital violence or violence in marriage has to do with abusive behaviour of one partner on another or against another in the home. Obafemi (2012), expressed that marital violence are carried out by men on their wives, although there are few cases were the women also carry out the same violence against their husbands. This agrees with the findings of Anojorin (2012) which said that 73% of perpetrators of spousal violence in marriage are men not women. It has also been reported in Ekpeye kingdom that this violence in marriage is at an alarming stage and does not respect any particular class of people, be it rich or poor. It has just been reported of recent that about 65% of violence in marriage in Ahoada east victims seek the intervention of family members instead of the professionally trained counselors who can offer them better counseling.(Chigbo, 1997).
It will be pertinent to mention here that violence in marriage in Ekpeye is at its peak. Most cases are reported to the family chiefs and Elders in council; most pathetic is a story of a man otherwise called the husband who killed his wife because the wife was purportedly reported to have had extra-marital affairs with another man. It is in this light that the paper seeks to discuss spousal violence under the following sub headings: causes, types, effects, implications for family counseling.
Causes of Marital Violence in Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality

Funmilola (2013:103) asserts, there are many different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator’s environment, such as family structure stress and social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

1. **Psychological**: Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. Personal traits include sudden bursts of anger, poor impulse control, and poor self-esteem. Various theories suggested that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse observed or experienced as a child lead some people to be more violent in adulthood (Kalra, 1996). Dutton and Golant (1995) suggested a psychological profile of men who abuse their wives, arguing that they have borderline personalities that are developed early in life. However, these psychological theories are disputed by Steel (1974) and Strains (1980) who suggested that psychological theories are limited. They argued that social factors are important, while personality traits, mental illness or psychopathy are less factors.

2. **Jealousy**: Many cases of domestic violence against women occur due to jealousy when the spouse is either suspected of being unfaithful or is planning to leave the relationship. An evolutionary psychology explanation of such cases of domestic violence against women is that they represent to male attempts to control female reproduction and ensure sexual exclusivity for himself through violence or the threat of violence (Goetz, 2010).

3. **Social Stress**: Stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation, with increased pressures. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer and Kalmuss, 1988). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence, due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes, 2002).

4. **Social Learning**: If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate it. If there are no negative consequences and the victim also accepts the violence with submission; then the behaviour will likely continue. Often, violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner (Crowell and Sugarman, 1996).

5. **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 socio-cultural influences (Wikipedia, 2012). Most authorities seem to agree that abusive personalities result from a combination of several factors, to varying degrees.

Other factors attributed to causes of violence in marriage are:

1. **Infidelity**: Marriage no doubt is a license for sex among couples. Sometimes, it is the prospect of having sex that attracts couples to marriage. But a situation whereby a married woman engages in extra-marital affairs tends to lead to spousal violence in the home. Amadi (1983), posits that punishment to adults varies from tribe to tribe. There are some parts of the Rivers State that do not consider adultery as a serious offence, but in the case of Ekpeye, it is a very serious offence, liable to different kinds of punishment against such person, found guilty.

2. **Insatiable sexual desire**: When a man’s sexual desires are not met it may leads to violence in marriage. A man who has high libido is always demanding for sex from his wife and when this is not done the result will be unleashing aggression towards his wife.

3. **Tide fistedness**: A situation where a man or woman refuses to bring out money for the family upkeep will lead to spousal violence. Naturally, the man is expected to provide for his family in terms of basic physiological needs in Ekpeye land. His inability to meet such expected role obligation may result in rift between him and his wife.

4. **Drug Abuse**: Iruolor and Amadi (2008), states that violence in marriage and other behaviours strife’s were due to the use of hard drugs like cocaine, hero marijuana etc., this substance can stimulate violence. When a man takes such drugs and he is highly is provoked at every slightest mistake made by the partner.

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Types of Marital Violence

Generally, there are different types of marital violence or violence in marriage. According to Aihie (2009), opines that there are different forms of abuse a person may be subjected to in the home. They include:

1. **Physical abuse**: This is the use of physical force in a way that injures the victim or puts him/her at risk of being injured. It includes beating, kicking, knocking, punching, choking, confinement. Female genital mutilation is physical abuse. Physical abuse is one of the commonest forms of abuse. Obi and Ozumba (2007) found that 83% of respondents in their study reported physical abuse.

2. **Sexual abuse**: This includes all forms of sexual assaults, harassment or exploitation. It involves forcing a person to participate in sexual activity, using a child for sexual purposes including child prostitution and pornography. Marital rape also comes under this.

3. **Neglect**: This includes failure to provide for dependants who may be adults or children, denying family members food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and protection from harm or a sense of being loved and valued.

4. **Economic abuse**: This includes stealing from or defrauding a loved one, withholding money for essential things like food and medical treatment, manipulating or exploiting family member for financial gain, preventing a loved one from working or controlling his/her choice of occupation.

5. **Spiritual Abuse**: This includes preventing a person from engaging in his/her spiritual or religious practices or using one’s religious belief to manipulate, dominate or control him/her.

6. **Emotional Abuse**: This includes threatening a person or his or her possession or harming a person’s sense of self-worth by putting him/her at risk of serious behavioural, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders. Shouting at a partner which was considered to be the most common abuse (Obi and Ozumba 2007). Also included in emotional abuse are name-calling, criticism, social isolation, intimidating or exploitation to dominate, routinely making unreasonable demand, terrorizing a person verbally or physically and exposing a child to violence.

Abuse may occur once, or it may occur repeatedly often in an escalating manner. A person may be subjected to more than one form of abuse.

Effects of Marital Violence in Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality

Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and maiming their wives in the media. The statistics presented by ThisDay (2011) newspaper are daunting. About 50% of women have been battered by their husbands. Shockingly, more educated women (65%) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%). Most wives endure, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing, for good reason, that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2% of them are not prepared to report to the Nigeria Police, or other authorities. The following are major effects of spousal violence in Ekpeye.

1. **Physical and Psychological pains**: Victims of wife battery are reported to suffer from physical and psychological pain (Essen, 1999). Marital violence constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large. It occurs at home, in public places like streets, parks, familiar places like homes of friends and relatives, offices, involving highly placed persons and also in churches and mosques.

spousal violence that occurs in private within the family, including wife battery, rape, acid attack, and sexual abuse affect the physical and psychological wellbeing of women; and as such, they seem to erode the position of women, both at home and in the society at large. Spousal violence against women therefore deserves to be studied in order to provide possible solution.

2. **Broken marriages and Homes**: Recorded evidence has shown that in Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality, Violence in marriage has several negative effects on the family or on the homes. Prominent among them is the effect on the child or children because they suffer most.

Victims of domestic violence are often in a position of dependence (financial, emotional, physical and otherwise) on the person abusing them, for instance, a husband and a wife, children and parents,
dependent relatives, aged parents and domestic servants. Children are often principal victims of spousal violence.

Nwankwo (2005; and Berger, 2008) have shown that young children are exposed to this marital violence and other forms of attacks may result to adult anger and distress. They are always very aggressive to their peers, always seeing the intention of others as very hostile, suffers psychosomatic disorders, have difficulties with their school works, having poor academic performance etc. Witnessing abuse and living in an environment where someone else, usually a care giver is a victim of abuse, can be psychologically devastating for a child. Straus (1994) reported that children who are hit by parents have higher rates of depression than those whose parents disciplined in other ways and are more likely to think about suicides. Some researchers have also found that children whose mothers were abused by their partners have intelligence quotients (IQs) lower than usual (BBC, New Education, 2003).

3. **Juvenile Delinquency:** Violent punishments such as corporal punishment have been found to lead to delinquency in adolescent and subsequently violent crimes. Anikweze (1998) identified violence as a threat to adolescents’ well-being. The adolescent may become socialized in violent behaviour. He or she may become confused and angry. The anger may become directed towards either parents or other children. They may become aggressive, becoming troublesome at home and at school. They may also become withdrawn, isolating themselves from others and may underachieve, academically. Victims of domestic violence (whether children or adults) may suffer physical injuries such as minor cuts, scratches and bruises. Others may be more serious and cause lasting disabilities such as broken bones, internal bleeding and head trauma, among others (Dobson, 1984; CDC, 2006).

4. **Emotional Hurts:** Some injuries are not physical but emotional. Victims often have low self-esteem, finding it difficult to trust others. The anger and stress experienced by victims may lead to depression and other emotional disorders sometimes leading to suicide (CDC, 2006). Victims may also exhibit harmful health behaviour like excessive smoking, alcohol abuse, use of drugs and engaging in risky sexual activity. An abused child, for instance, may grow up not to trust other people, may go into relationships with an aggressive mode or may become withdrawn, afraid to go into intimate relationship. This usually results in involvement in risky sexual behaviour.

Immoral Vices and decadence: Unachukwu and Wbenebe (1997) opined that adolescence are faced with problems of different kinds- problem of truancy, drug abuse etc., they also stated that adolescence girl that have been exposed to marital violence homes from their early childhood suffers from depression. Njoku (2012) revealed that adolescent who witnesses marital violence is usually disobedient. Also, base on statistical records, it has been proven that majority of the societal violence that have ravage the Ekpeye nationality recently were caused by juveniles, whose families were victims of marital violence.

Growing up in an abusive environment is what makes a person find the sight of a suspect being beaten or burnt to death, entertaining and enjoyable. It is what makes the youth happy and excited about being thugs for wicked politicians. spousal violence gives rise to a violent society because ‘charity begins at home’.

In a study conducted in Nigeria on torture and the female gender, Ezeilo and Ohia (2006) sampled 2000 respondents, comprising 1052 females and 948 males. Focus group discussions and questionnaire were used as instruments for collecting data.

The findings indicated that the consequences of spousal violence include disrespect, psycho-instability and mental instability, dehumanization, physical pains and harm, embarrassment, deformation, diseases and sickness, death, depression and emotional harm, severe pains and injury, shame and disgrace, stress, divorce, poverty, unwanted pregnancy and abortion.

**Implication for Family Counselling**

Counselling Implications to remedy the marital violence situation in Nigeria, all stakeholders must be involved - the communities, religious groups, institutions, government at all levels. Seminars and workshops, where trained counsellors would assist in propagating the anti-domestic violence campaign, should be organized. There is the need to create awareness at these forums, to underscore the fact that violence in the home serves as a breeding ground for violence in the society. The need to
regard domestic violence from a psychological rather than a socio-cultural perspective should be emphasized. People should be made to understand that adults can change the social norms that justify domestic violence by (1) being role models and working together to end violence in the home (2) modeling non-violent relationship (3) disseminating information which condemns domestic violence 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 domestic violence of any form. Prize-giving day programmes could include short talks on the issue of domestic violence, emphasizing its evil consequences and the need for families to avoid it for a better society. The school counsellor could organize group counselling sessions for the different age groups and classes, on the advantages of a violence free society.

The boys, in particular should be counselled on how to grow up into ‘healthy’ men. There are influences within the home, outside the home, from friends, the internet, music and movies – messages that show that a man must be tough and in control in a relationship. The children should be taught how to be assertive without being aggressive. They should be taught how to express anger and frustration without violence. In counselling individual students with anger problem, the various anger management techniques should be taught.

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 within 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 domestic violence.

Gyuse (2003); also recommended these stages for counsellor to follow.

1. **Safety for the victim and children:** Separation sometimes may be necessary as a safety device, separation of women and most time the children. Also reporting to the law enforcement agent.
2. **Accountability for the abuser:** An abuser may not be allowed to explain away his action as this may lead to another occasion of abuse. An abuser must be made to apologies and face punishment.
3. **Restoration:** The couples should be properly taught how to love and grow in a relationship. They should be restored back to love one another in their marriage relationship.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the above, it is imperative to recommend as follows:

1. Comprehensive and extensive premarital counselling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationship. Young couples getting ready for marriage in Ekpeye Ethnic Nationality should be trained by family counsellors or a professionally trained counsellor on marriage counseling, so as to avoid marital violence.
2. There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative effects of spousal violence especially wife battery.
3. Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against marital violence in their places of worship. Churches in the neighbourhood should organize marriage seminars where the resource person, like marriage counsellor will have interactions on how to avoid marital violence, and to have a violent free society. With the home as a major point of emphasis.
4. Medical professionals are in position to help abused women; after physical treatment, they should refer them to counsellors and psychotherapists.
5. There is need for counselling centres to be established with adequate provisions. The State government should establish counseling centers in all the local Government areas of the state, and employ professionally trained counsellors to be in charge. This will help tackle both minor and extreme cases of marital violence in the area.
6. Government and non-governmental organizations should make efforts to establish these agencies that deal with violence against women in the rural areas. This will enable women in
the rural area to have access to these agencies and benefit from their services just as women in the urban area.

7. Spouses who are perpetrators of physical violence against another should have a change of attitude. They should understand that beating women or abusing men for not leaving up to their expectations and performing their roles well as wives and husbands is not the only way to correct them. Dialogue may be used as a corrective measure.

8. Victims of marital violence should avoid this culture of silence and not reporting their cases to appropriate agencies. They should be eager to visit these agencies in order to alleviate their problem and not to resign to their fate.

CONCLUSION
This paper has actually dug dip into the phenomenon of marital violence in this area of study. Anyway, it may not have exhausted all that has to do with marital violence, but it has gone a long way to discuss this issue.

At this juncture, it is necessary to see the influence of culture as a constraint that presents itself in the pursuit of the goals of eliminating all forms of violence against women. Even though culture is not static, but dynamic, it has a role to play in violence against women. The influence of culture has really affected women’s responses to violence against them, even when they feel aggrieved at having been dehumanized, they choose to live with the situations, rather than reporting to the appropriate authorities for interventions.

Violence against women is usually under reported even though it is a criminal act. For instance, disputes within the family and different forms of physical abuse are not seen as criminal acts by the perpetrators, the victims themselves or by the legal system. (Heise, Raikes, Watts and Zwi, 1994). Some women are battered regularly by their husbands but they hardly report these cases because in many cases, they are further humiliated by security agents under the pretence that it is a minor offence of two people fighting, or that it is a “family matter”.

Hence, all and sundry should do their best to preach peace and avoid marital violence at home. It is also very thoughtful to opine that there should be a practical step as recommended above.

REFERENCES


The Holy Bible; King James Version