

COGNITIVE –BEHAVIOURAL STRATEGIES FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper examines the concept of domestic violence as peculiarly observed among Nigerians. As a behaviour used by one person in a relationship to control the other, the partners may be worried or not; heterosexual, gay or lesbians; living together, separated or dating. The forms, etiological factors and dangers of domestic violence were x-rayed. Since domestic violence due to our cultural beliefs, industrialization, and globalized violence seems to consistently linger in our midst, a cognitive – behaviour strategy for its management has been offered. Such a management strategy involves cognitive restructuring, relaxation, humor, adequate communication and problem solving.

Key words: Cognitive behaviour, Strategies, Management, Domestic violence

Introduction

Recently, Nigeria was adjudged one of the first three corrupt nations in the global village. Tallest among those vices that have given Nigeria an international ugly position include violence, human trafficking, fundamental violations of the human person and rights, involvement in weapons and narcotics, abduction, fraud, slavery, Sexual- exploitation, undocumented migrations and physical and mental exploitation, organ harvesting or laundering inter alia. Either that violence gives rise to them or that they stir-up violence when put into force.

1993 report entitled, “understanding and preventing Violence”, the U.S. National Research Council, defined violence as “behavior by persons against persons that intentionally threatens, attempts, or actually inflicts physical harm”. By design, the authors of this report actually concentrated on a definition that was wide-ranging, but also one that perceived violent behavior related to crime. Indeed, this definition includes both physical injury and threats but fails to accommodate self-directed violence like suicide.

Violence in another sense entails physical force exerted for the purpose of violating, damaging or abusing another person or others. It is an untamed force and abusive or unjust exercise of power and vehemence of feeling or expression.

Often most acts of violence prevalent among Nigerians are elicited by unlawful or lawful possession of weapons, drugs, peer pressure, abuse, untamed emotions, and improper expression of needs, ethnic deprivations and gender-related issues like male-chauvinism. Cutting across gender, age, socio-economic classes, political and religious inclinations, the types of violence dominant in Nigeria include lynching, fighting, stabbing, choking, aggravated assault, property destructions, unjust exercise of power, intimidation, gain control,

sexual abuse, harassment, threats, etc. Violence among Nigerians just like other nationals could be categorized into; suicide, homicide, child domestic and elder abuse, work-related, youth-gang and school vices.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence, the main focus of this paper, involves any behavior used by one person in a relationship to control the other. Strictly speaking, the involved partners may be married or not married, gay, lesbian or heterosexual, living together, separated or dating. It manifests in various forms; stopping a partner from getting or keeping a job, contracting or visiting friends or relatives, sexual exploitation, deprivation, starvation, assault, and intimidation, actual or threatened physical or emotional harm. Domestic violence also involves intimidation, alienation, starvation and ejections. This violence can be criminal and as such includes physical assault (e.g. hitting and pushing), sexual abuse (unwanted or forced sexual activity), and stalking. Although, other forms of domestic violence like emotional, psychological and financial abuses are not criminal behaviors, they can lead to criminal violence.

According to Goldsmith and Vera (2000), domestic violence may start when one partner feels the need to control and dominate the other. Sometimes, due to low self-esteem, jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or when felt inferior to the other partner in education and socio-economic background. This domination then takes the form of physical, emotional and or sexual abuse. Studies, however, suggest that violent behavior is often caused by an interaction of situational and individual factors. Hence, the abuser learns it from his peers, family, community and cultural influences. From clinical observations, some Nigerian men with weak traditional beliefs tend to think that they have the right to control women, and that women are not equal to men. This is often the bone of contention especially among men from the eastern and northern parts of Nigeria. Such domination hence assumes the dimensions of emotional, physical and/or sexual abuse. Also my clinical experience has shown females who lord it over their male counterparts and place certain restrictions on their individual rights and freedom as a result of possessing greater economic power. Such men often end up being brutal, drug abusers and aggressive.

Case one

Pauline in her late thirties trained in a high school through university by her spouse, holds a high political position in a local government area. She is a university graduate, beautiful, quite religious, a mother of five children and the 'Moses' of both her maiden and paternal families. Her husband is fairly ugly, unskilled and holds a first school leaving certificate. When they contacted me for psychotherapy, they were just "cat and rat" under a tensed roof and, of course, the objects of ridicule amongst their neighbors. Their stock in trades were fighting, organized beating by relations and destruction of family property.

After clinical probing and analysis, my clinical impressions showed a man with a traditional belief that made him see the spouse as inferior and ought to be under his full-control. Their mental and socio-political incompatibilities and the man's low self-esteem raised their ugly heads in relationship hence, the existent and persistent domestic violence.

Etiological Factors

There are basic conditions that produce domestic violent tendencies. One condition is that the person has been hurt in the relationship. A wife, who for no cause has been hurt, beaten, hit or threatened with violence, will have a tendency to become violent herself. Sexual abuse and emotional neglect at any point in life are indeed hurts that can elicit violent behaviours in women. Accumulation of minor hurts (stress), anxiety, disappointments, and frustration can produce violent tendencies in men. Secondly, when a partner is not allowed to release the emotions resulting from the hurts, either as a result of social/cultural inhibitions or varying situational factors, the person tends to exhibit violent behaviors. Hence, the unresolved and unexpressed emotions about his experience make him to be violent towards himself and others.

In addition, domestic violence seems to be culturally associated with certain approved male behaviours. Violent male sports, television programme and role play which boys are exposed to in our culture, speak for themselves. Also, our poor understanding of contemporary industrialization seems to have favored deviance and glorification of violence in the name of freedom, self emancipation, “be on your own” syndrome and authority.

Cognitive Behavioural Management Strategies

Cognitive Restructuring

At the root of domestic violence is anger which is totally an intentional act. It stems from exaggeration, negative behavior and thinking. Changing the way we think makes us relate well, and have a better understanding of ourselves, situation and others (Uwaoma, 2002). An appropriate thinking pattern makes us humane, transparent, easy to be understood, rationale and careful. When we think an issue is faulty, our reaction towards it invariably becomes abnormal and distorted. Let us see relationships as rewarding and worth celebrating and not as an issue to be tolerated or avoided. A good relationship is contributory and symbiotic. Be willing to walk through problems rather than walking out. Always strive to get a more balanced perspective of an issue or event before taking a decision. Change irrational behaviors and thoughts. Avoid humiliating others and self. See the magnetic hidden treasures in others. Avoid exaggerations. Be careful to use the right words on others – and paint pictures as clearly as possible. Apply logic to rough sports of daily life and never allowed anger to get the best of you. For instance, instead of saying “I am finished” when hurt in a relationship you can say; “I am really hurt, but it is never the end of life”. Always be positive about life and relationships.

Be Humorous

Anger and most conditions that elicit domestic violence go with serious emotions. Humor, is just an expressed refusal to take oneself, others and situations too seriously. It diffuses rage and tension in various ways and helps one to possess as more constructive and balanced perspective in relationships. Over the years, I have employed simple humor in my clinical practice and have seen its positive therapeutic effect on my client. Realization has made me include it in my psycho - educational packages often offered to my clients. The result has been encouraging.

Humor, when appropriately and timely applied, takes a lot of the edge off one’s fury and can always be relied on to assist unknot a tense situation (Solter, 1998). Indeed, simple and non-coercive humor helps one to get into his imaginary scenes. The more detail one

swims into his imaginary world, the greater chances of his realization of how unimportant the things he gets angry about really are and of course, how unreasonable he is at times.

However, certain therapeutic consideration ought to be observed in the application of humor to reduce or manage domestic violence. Avoid coercive, offensive, harsh and sarcastic humor and in no-circumstance should it be employed to 'laugh off' important issues.

Relaxations

Most acts of domestic violence are exhibited under tension-soaked situations. Learning to use simple relaxation such as deep breathing, muscle relaxation and positive imagery could inhibit, eliminate or reduce them. For instance, it is not out of place to discover that two persons in a relationship are hot-tempered. This could be likened to lighting a kerosene lamp and putting it on top of an open jerry-can of petrol. Each of the partners has to learn simple relaxation tools, which would assist to package them in violent resistant behavioral sacks.

No doubt, most Nigerian homes, industrial settings, workshops, offices, parks etc are filled with tension. Efforts should be geared towards being in control of such tension-soaked environments through relaxation. Taking a deep breath which starts from the diaphragm is a good dimension. Slowly repeating a known song, number, phrase or word, while gradually breathing in is yet another tool. Visualizing a relaxing experience either from the memory or imagination could easily relax every tensed muscle. Simple exercise has been found to calm down the nerves and set human beings in their best relaxed moods. When relaxation techniques are made a routine form of daily living, a healthier personality is achieved and more domestic violence are reduced.

Fine Communications

Though we live in an information age, most of our human relationships lack required information indicating a very poor communication. A good pattern of communication always involved a "speaker" and "listener" often not in a monologuistic frame. It is just a give and take relationship involving a healthy feed back structure. But how often do we listen in our relationships? We rather always talk, give commands, shout and harass each other with words, sometimes ambiguous ones, often end up as communication noise.

We jump to conclusion and irrationally act on such. We rush into climax and eventually rush out, always in a haste. Haste which breeds waste, then exposes us to acts of domestic violence. How often do we speak before thinking or speak without considering situations and others around us? Hence the prevalent acts of domestic violence in our relationships.

Endeavour to use a free-flow and tension-free communication. Create healthy communication hints, outlets and channels devoid of intimidation and victimization. Slow down to think before talking. Listen carefully to the other person and be empathetic in communication. Analyze words and situation before responding to them. Never fight back with words or be defensive in communication. Rather, be expressive considerate, and constructive. Be calm or never rush out words and emotions. Do not say the first thing that comes into our head especially when you feel hurt in relationship. That might exhibit violent behavior Always communicate in a manner that would elicit more connection and closeness with your significant others.

Problem Solving

There is no relationship without a problem. The act of relationship on its own creates human problems. The manner in which these problems are handled determines the flour-pattern of domestic violence among those involved.

Anger, no doubt could cause domestic violence. Really, the source of anger or frustration could be genuine, real, and as such inescapable. Think about anger elicited by loss of a job or relative, natural disaster etc. Such an anger is not misplaced and does not qualify for a poor management of emotions. Anger, sometimes, is a healthy, frank and natural response to a known life phenomenon though depending on the extent of its expression and, moreover, the how and when of its manifestations.

Not all problems seen in relationships have an immediate and easy to locate solution. Some are headed, multi-dimensional, lacking a clear cut comprehension and fixed solutions. A sudden realization of this fact sometimes adds to the pains, heat, snarrows and frustrations we daily face in relationships. In his unique submission Solter (1998) is of the view that the best attitude to such a situation is not to focus on finding the solution but rather on how to handle and face the problem. A good approach to this position is to come up with workable plan. It could be recommending, adjusting to and/or tolerating the problem. Then try to implement the set out plan and routinely check its progress. Be patient and courageous as you wade through the storm of problem solving.

Environmental Improvement and Change

The physical and social environment where relationships exist are very crucial in determining the quality of such relationships and the gains and losses of the operators. At times, our work, office or home environment can stress and hence make us irritated and furious. Really some forms of domestic violence are environmentally induced. When you discover that your environment and responsibilities have become traps for domestic violence, take a vacation or give yourself a break. This enables you to reorganize, cool down and come up with better adjustments. Amidst all busy schedules and stressful conditions carve out "personal time", a moment to be enjoyed. When your environment refuses all forms of improvements, you can do yourself the favour of changing it. You can take a vacation outside your home and office, You can go on picnics. You can change vocations entirely. You can change your routine schedules or daily times of operations.

Conclusion

As long as human relationships persist, frictions, frustration, anger and misunderstanding are bound to exist. Individual differences stand tall amidst the conflicting factors for these. Domestic violence which could easily emanate from these situations could be reduced, controlled or avoided through effective communication, relaxation, humor, problem solving and cognitive restructuring.

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