

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: CHRISTIAN RESPONSE IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

Casimir Peter Uyanga

Department of Religious and Cultural Studies

Akwa Ibom State University

uyangacasimir@yahoo.com

08033834284, 08086014463

Abstract

Today in Nigeria, insecurity, terrorism, prostitution, child-witch and stigmatization and child-trafficking remains the order of the day. Recently, domestic violence becomes one of the challenges facing the world and Nigeria in particular. The family is often portrayed as the sources of comfort, security and safety, a place of which its members retreat to escape the rough and trouble of the public world of work and school. Today, the family is a source of conflict and possibly danger. Indeed, the comfort, security and safety in families are threatened by domestic violence. This paper seeks to address the issue of domestic violence in Nigeria: Christian response in the Niger Delta Region. Descriptive method through a body of literature was used to gather information. It is discovered that children and women are the most vulnerable of this problem in the Niger Delta. The paper recommends that some traditions which encourage domestic violence in the Niger Delta should be faced-out by law. Religious leaders should vehemently preach against all forms of domestic violence to their members and possibly sanction erring ones. NGOs should join hands to organize symposia, seminars, workshops to create awareness on the fundamental right of the citizens.

Keywords: *Domestic Violence, Christian Response.*

Introduction

Domestic violence is one of the challenges facing the world in general, Africa and the Niger Delta in particular. The family is often portrayed as the source of comfort, Security and safety, a place of which its members retreat to escape the rough and trouble of the public world of work and school. This assumption often obscures the reality that many members of the families faced; that is, the family is a source of conflict and possibly

danger. Indeed, the comfort, security and safety in families are threatened by domestic violence. According to Gelles and Straus (2008:18) “you are more likely to be physically assaulted, beaten and even killed in your own home at the hands of a loved one than any placed else or by anyone else in society.” One may regard the above statement as an overstatement but the writer is of the view that what is quoted above is due to the increasing rate of domestic violence globally. Domestic violence occurs in all cultures and the Niger Delta Region is not an exception.

There are various types of domestic violence, including violence against women, violence against children, sibling violence and violence against elders. It is from this background that this article seeks to discuss the issue of domestic violence in the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria; the components of domestic violence; the factors contributing to domestic violence and how the society could be used to check domestic violence in the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria.

Conceptualisation of Terms

Domestic Violence: The first known use of the term domestic violence in modern context, meaning violence in the home; was in an address to the parliament of the United Kingdom by Jack Ashley in 1973. The term previously referred primarily to civil unrest, violence from within a country as opposed to violence perpetrated by a foreign power. Traditionally, domestic violence was mostly associated with physical violence. Terms such as wife abuse, wife beating, wife battering, and battered woman were used, but have declined in popularity due to efforts to include unmarried partners, abuse other than physical, female perpetrators, and same-sex relationships. Domestic violence is now commonly defined broadly to include “all the acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that may be committed by a family member or intimate partner. Nwanze (2010:62). Domestic violence includes being beaten, slapped, choked, pushed, threatened with matchet, knife, gun or any other harmful object or being forced to have unwanted sexual activity. Thus, any ‘violence’ or “assault” that will bring emotional, physical and spiritual harm or hurt to the victim is what is meant by domestic violence.

Christian Response: According to O’Dovivan (1997:27) the church is a divine institution. It is a body of believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The term “ekklesia” used in the New Testament implies public assembly of citizens duly or summoned; which was the features of all the

cities outside Judea. This was where early Christians gathered. Thus, the New Testament injunctions, instructions, admonitions and teachings can be applied to check the incessant issues of domestic violence in the Niger Delta Region.

History and Components of Domestic Violence

Encyclopedia Britannica states that, in the early 1800s, most legal systems implicitly accepted wife-beating as a husband's right over his wife. English common laws, dating back to the 16th century, treated domestic violence as a crime against the community rather than against the individual woman by charging wife beating as a breach of the peace. Wives had the right to seek redress in the form of a peace bond from a local Justice of the peace. Procedures were informal and off the record, and no legal guidance specified the standard of proof or degree of violence which would suffice for a conviction. Following the American Revolution, changes in the legal system placed greater power in the hands of precedent-setting state courts rather than local justices. Many states transferred jurisdiction in divorce cases from their legislatures to judicial system, and the legal recourse available to battered women increasingly became divorce on grounds of cruelty and suing for assault. This placed a greater burden of proof on the woman, as she needed to demonstrate to a court that her life was on risk.

Components of Domestic Violence in the Niger Delta Region

Many forms of domestic violence may include: physical, sexual or psychological abuse (Heise, Germain, Pitangny, 2004). According to Chioma (2013) domestic violence could occur in the form of bullying, domineering attitude and the desire to control others. Supporting this view, Onah (2014) quoting Chukwuejekwu (2010), noted that domestic violence include wife beating, slapping, tooth breaking and injuring the person. So, there are a lot of what constitute domestic violence in the Niger delta Region.

In the Niger Delta Region, Domestic violence against women (the wives) manifest in the form of wife-beating. It is said to state that in this 21st century, wife beating are still going on in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Wives are being beaten on flimsy grounds such as: a woman going out to attend a function alone, being seen with the opposite sex conversing, chatting or receiving a call from the opposite sex and sometimes to church meetings and returning late in the evening only to face the wrath of the

husband simply because he does not want the wife to attend the church the wife usually goes to. Other cases are: when the husband returns and there is no food on the table, scrapping of the hairs of the deceased wife and keeping her in isolation and disallowing her from taking her bath as at when due.

Moreover, our national dailies are filled with series of violent cases meted on women and girls which ended in them losing their lives. For example, Daily Sun August 19, 2014 reported how a groom set his bride on fire for sleeping with an ex-lover. On page 7 of that same newspaper, at Delta State, a girl was brutally butchered by her boyfriend with whom he had in relationship with for several years for little misunderstanding. Cases of women and girls being stabbed or butchered or killed exist in the Niger Delta Region. Therefore, without exception a woman's greatest risk of violence is from someone she knows .Domestic violence is a violation of a woman's right to physical integrity, liberty and all too often, to her right to life itself (Okoli,2014).

Domestic violence against children in the Niger Delta Region can manifest in different trends through incest which is forbidden and regarded as a taboo (Udo, 2003) yet it is going on in the Region today. Corroborating this, Ukpong (2007) says, violators of taboo including incest are there. Thus, domestic violence against children includes rape, incest, child-trafficking, child stigmatization and early marriage. Another aspect of domestic violence against children is the issue of child-witch crisis in the Niger Delta Region. Labeling and stigmatization of children as witches and wizards is a house-hold talk in the Niger Delta Region. The spate is escalating and alarming on daily basis. It is sad that when children of the civilized countries are well catered for and educated in science and technology, people in the Niger Delta Region are busy branding and abusing the children as witches and wizard (Eyo;2011).

Contributing Factors to Domestic Violence

One of the most important factors in Domestic violence is a belief that child abuse, whether physical or verbal is acceptable. Other factors include, substance abuse, unemployment, mental health problem, lack of coping skills, isolation, and excessive dependence on the abuse. An overruling motive for committing acts of domestic violence is to establish and maintain relationships based on power and control over victims. Men who perpetrate violence have specific characteristics they are narcissistic, they

willfully lack empathy and they choose to treat their needs as more important than others. Perpetrators psychologically manipulate their victims to believe their abuse and violence is caused by the victims inadequacy (as a wife, a lover, or as a human being) rather than the perpetrators selfish desire for power and control over them.

Christian Response to Domestic Violence in the Niger Delta Region

There are controversies regarding the influence of Christianity on domestic violence. Among Christians, men and women who attend church more frequently are less likely to commit domestic violence against their partners. The effect of Church attendance is not caused by increased levels of social support and community integration, which are not significantly related to the perpetration of domestic violence. In addition, even when variations in psychological problems (namely depressive symptoms, low self – esteem, and alcoholism) are accounted for, the salutary effect of church attendance remains. People who are theologically conservative are no more likely to commit domestic violence; However, higher conservative men are significantly more likely to commit domestic violence when their partners are much more liberal than them.

Proffering Solutions to Domestic Violence in the Niger Delta Region

The Christians church can stand aloof and appear indifferent as to the import and significant of marital or domestics violence in the Niger Delta Region in the contemporary society. God gave the duty to the church to resist agents of family destruction and to try to make the power of the Gospel real in all Christian homes. Therefore, Christian church working in her capacity as home – builders, is expected to serve as a pressure group to be the defender of the defender and the voice of the voiceless. Teach the members especially the men to love their wives and children and provide the necessary security to their family members. This way, there will be “expectant and corresponding gain” (Nathaniel and Akung, 2022) with regards to the responses of Christians on domestic violence in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a world- wide phenomenon. It is expressed against women mostly, children, maids, siblings and the elderly in the family setting. Therefore, because of the ideological mode of patriarchy in the Niger Delta, men have unfair advantage over women. This can manifest in

the economic, political, social and cultural terms. Distorted power relations give rise to violence as a manifestation of the social structure that perpetuates personal and systematic injustice. Thus, this work looked into the issue of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Christian Response in the Niger Delta Region.

Recommendations

- Women should report to the right authorities when any violent acts have been carried out against them.
- Women organizations in Niger Delta Region should work assiduously together with Government, towards eradication of violence against women and children.
- Religious bodies should ensure that they teach their members to eschew violence and follow the New Testament biblical principles and truth to resolve problematic issues at home.
- Religious bodies and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should promote meetings and seminars with the aims of creating and raising the awareness among all persons in respect of issues of eliminating domestics in Niger Delta Region.
- Government should educate men to re-order their perceptions of the women and children, and their roles at home and respect the true meaning of womanhood as status that is complimentary rather than inferior to manhood.

References

- Straus, M. (2018) *Intimate Violence: The causes and consequences*
New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Nathaniel, S. O. & Akung, E. J. (2022). Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism: Black Speculative Writings in Search of Meaning Criteria. *Research Journal in Advanced Humanities*, 3(3), 1-14. Received from <http://royalliteglobal.com/advanced-humanities/article/view/870>
- Nwanze, I. (2010) *Beliefs in Traditional Society*. Port Harcourt: Renaissance.
- Okon, A. (2005) *Akwa Ibom Cultural Heritage*. Uyo: Abbny Publishers.
- O'Donovan . (1997) *Biblical Christianity I Africa Perspective*. India: Oasis.
- Okoli, A. (2014) *Socio-Religious Practices and Fundamental Human Rights in Nigeria*. *Nigeria Delta Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 2. NO.3

- Schaefer; R. (2006) Sociology: A Brief Introduction. Toronto: Mc Graw-Hill.
- Okoye, P. (2005) Window : A Natural or cultural Tragedy Enugu: Nucik Publishers.
- Eyo, L. (2003) Africa Women and Natural Development. New York: Prayer publishers.
- Shelby, L. (2003) African Women Development. New York: Prayer publishers.
- Eyo, V. (2011) Child-Witch Phenomenon in Akwa Ibom State: The Sociological Implication: Uyo.
- Ukpong, E. (2007) A Enquiry into Ibibio culture: Uyo: Dorand Publishers.