

PREVALENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN ON THEIR PERCEIVED MASCULINITY: PERSPECTIVE FROM WESTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: This paper examined how masculinity is constructed, how men view their masculinity and how it is affected in cases of domestic violence perpetrated against them by their wives in Nigeria. It focuses on male victims of domestic violence within Western Nigeria. The paper employs family conflict theory by Richard Gelles and Murray Straus (1990) as a lens of analysis. The theory presupposes that, family plays a significant function in forming a person's practices and that conflict is inherent in all human gatherings including families. This theory assumes that behavior of one family member (for example violent husband) is affected by responses and feedbacks of the other members of the family (for example wife).

Statement of the Problem: Domestic abuse is a major societal and economic burden across the world. However, the most familiar type is women abuse with men being the perpetrators. In reality though, most men are suffering in silence from violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. This is mainly due to the masculinity norms that put so much pressure on men to restrain their emotions and be seen as strong and macho especially in their homes.

Methodology: In relation to this paper, the theory assumes that women are equally likely to initiate violence and with equal motivations as men. Conflict may also arise when traditional family structures change for example more women entering labor market and being more conscious of their rights and thus retaliate to the men's abuse. The questions this paper attempts to answer are whether domestic violence exist against men in Nigeria, how masculinity is constructed in Nigeria, what defines a man in Nigeria and what are the implications of domestic violence against Men (DVAM) on their perceived masculinity in Nigeria?

Result: The findings revealed diverse experiences of the effect of domestic violence against men including stigmatization, discrimination, constant ridicule, denial of conjugal rights, and disrespect among others. These findings provide important insights to stakeholders in helping to fight incidences of domestic violence in the community.

Keywords: *Domestic violence, Men, Masculinity*

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines domestic violence against men and its implications on their perceived masculinity. It is based on a recent study carried out in Nigeria on domestic violence against men (DVAM) and its implications on their perceived masculinity. The study findings indeed confirm that DVAM is rampant in the area even though cases are hardly reported due to stigma, lack of support among other reasons. The study established that Nigeria is a patriarchal community where men are supposed to dominate over women. Wife beating is celebrated and in such homes, men are seen as Igruhi to mean a bull. Masculinity is a very important discourse and it is constructed from a tender age. Men are encouraged to be hardworking, providers and courageous. Despite all these, the study confirm that DVAM is common in the area and men who are battered are adversely affected.

Domestic Violence against Men in Nigeria

Domestic abuse is a major societal and economic burden across the world. However, the most familiar type is women abuse with men being the perpetrators. In reality though, most men are suffering in silence from violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. This is mainly due to the masculinity norms that put so much pressure on men to restrain their emotions and be seen as strong and macho especially in their homes. In the study carried out in Nigeria, the findings revealed diverse experiences of the effect of domestic violence against men. These include stigmatization, discrimination, constant ridicule, denial of conjugal rights, disrespect among others effects. The study findings indeed confirm that DVAM is rampant in Nigeria even though cases are hardly reported. Men in Nigeria do not only suffer from verbal abuse but they are also physically assaulted by their wives. This agrees with a study by Reddy, Omardien, James, Kambaran, Sifunda, Ellahebokus, Rees and Helen, (2013) who found that out of their male study respondents, 22.8% experienced physical violence. The most common types of DVAM in the area include physical, emotional and psychological assault; financial torment; denial of food; incessant quarrels; lack of respect from wives; sexual violence; and being forced to perform household chores. Sexual abuse does not only include denial of conjugal rights but it is also manifested in traditional form for example, as noted by male respondent in the study that:

A male grandchild spending a night in his grandparent's matrimonial bed is regarded as wife inheritance and once this happens, the man of the house is not allowed to spend in the same bed anymore.

There were also cases of forced sex, which men regarded as rape. However, due to fear that no one would believe that rape happens to men in a marriage context, they could not report such occurrences. This brutally warp men's masculinity as majority feel that they ought to be in control of their sexuality. Petersson and Plantin (2019) note that a male being sexually assaulted is contrary to hegemonic masculinity or conformist masculinity norms.

This is in agreement with a study by Dobash and Dobash (2004) who noted that people are violent and hostile and that women are not exempted. These findings also corroborate with what was observed in the United Kingdom by Rees (2019) indicating that men experience violence and some of them include physical violence, stalking and sexual violence.

The findings further agree with an empirical survey in Haryana, India by Malik and Nadda (2019) whose findings revealed that men also experience violence particularly emotional and also physical. Nigeria community feels that modernization and emergence of feminism has really

changed the beliefs and practices in gender relationships. Women's shifting places in society, and what is seen as men's slipping hold on patriarchal power relations are some of the factors that contribute to the vagueness in shaping masculine identity in Nigeria community.

Construction of Masculinity

Globally, relationships between females and males have been entrenched in patriarchal family structures and reinforced by institutions such as religion, political institutions and schools, to an extent that they seem natural, morally acceptable and sacred. From childhood, boys and girls are socialized into cis-gender roles. (To fit into gender identities that match the sex assigned to them at birth). Men are often put under pressure to achieve and continually prove their male identity (masculinity). Gender socialization has a great influence on how children turn up as adults and it influences behaviors to a great extent. Masculinity entails the behaviors, social roles and relations of men within a given society. These vary from time to time and from culture to culture. Most writers refer to it as masculinities to acknowledge the fact that there is more than one way to be a man. According to Kimmel (2002), hegemonic masculinity is the form that is more dominant than other masculinities. It is the form that has fashioned stern boundaries of what it entails to be a real man. Hegemonic construction of masculinity according to Connell (2002,) portray men as resilient, strong and invulnerable and promotes risk-taking behaviors that are harmful to the individuals and those with whom they interact.

According to Wall and Kristjanson, (2005), construction of masculinity starts from childhood and defines ideal masculinity as stoic, tough, self-sufficient, heterosexual and emotionally strong. The thematic analysis of the statements given by the respondents in regard to (DVAM) in Nigeria reveal that construction of masculinity starts from a tender age and continues through to adulthood. Information gathered from the respondents and key informants suggest that between the age of 3-6 years, boys are still too young to grasp the concept of masculinity. During the interviews, the respondents noted that construction of masculinity starts between the ages of 7-12 years. Boys are taught their roles, which are different from girls'. Learning gender roles is critical in this community.

Moreover, issues of sexuality were important among boys in the age of 7 to 12 years in Nigeria community. Boys are *taught about sex and encouraged to associate with the same sex*. Between the ages of 13-19 years, the issue of sexuality is also emphasized for boys as reflected in the remarks that were captured during interviews such as:

"They are taught how to relate with opposite sex".

Moreover, boys in early adulthood at the age of 20 years and above need to understand how to engage in income generating activities so as to feed their families. The findings therefore exhibit a picture of boys being taught how to behave like men and be strong to exhibit typical masculinity.

There are clear gender roles set out by the community from the age of 7 years onwards. Boys are not allowed to carry out roles, which the community perceive as feminine, for example cooking. These findings complement observations by Wimer and Levant (2011), whose reflections on harmful masculinity pointed out how patriarchal tendencies encouraged men to be dominant and aggressive. However, despite this dominance, men still experience domestic violence in Nigeria. This experience contradicts a study by Onyango (2008) on *Masculinity Discursive Construction of Rape in the Nigerian Press* who observed that among the people of Western Nigeria, a man was

known as *esurusi* (the bull) which had a symbol of virility and thus could not be challenged or be battered by a woman.

What defines a Man in Nigeria

According to Barker and Heilman (2018), Masculinity status is not automatic for every adult male in society but has to be earned through meeting some specific standards set by the society. In Nigeria community, men need to possess some qualities to be regarded as ideal men. These are reflected from the comments such as: *hardworking, provider, strong and energetic, respectable, powerful/protector/ courageous, loving/family man*, among others. These allude to the fact that hegemonic form of masculinity is celebrated in Nigeria Community and therefore one would not expect DVAM to be rampant in this community. According to Kimmel (2002), hegemonic masculinity is the form that is more dominant than other masculinities. This observation conforms to the findings by Connell (2002) who observed that hegemonic masculinity portray men as resilient, strong and invulnerable. It promotes risk-taking behaviors that are harmful to individuals and those they interact with. The term “marginalized masculinity_” according to Connell is used to bring out the type of masculinity that is seen as inferior by the hegemonic category. He argues that men who fall under marginalized masculinity profit less from the hegemonic model because of characters beside their gender. He further notes that hegemonic masculinities tend to conquer a reigning place in a society or cluster whereas other masculinities occupy a complicit or secondary locus. This is the kind of masculinity that men in Nigeria celebrate. Because of these beliefs, men who are abused by their wives choose to remain silent to avoid stigma and separation from the larger community. This agrees with a study by Eckstein (2010) on *Masculinity of Men Communicating Abuse Victimization*, who observed that all male his study mentioned feeling loss or waning sense of identity from the abuse and to try redeem their masculinity, they chose not to blame the female perpetrators but instead blamed themselves and the society.

Implications of domestic violence against men on their perceived masculinity

Social implications of domestic violence against Men

Ideally, men in Nigeria are socialized to exhibit hyper masculinity and are expected to dominate over women. This narrative however seems to be changing as noted in the study findings that men are also victims of domestic violence in Nigeria community. This agrees with family conflict theory by Richard Gelles and Murray Straus (1990) which assumes that conflict may arise when traditional family structures change for example more women entering labor market and being more conscious of their rights and thus retaliate to the men’s abuse. Despite modernization and changing gender dynamics, Nigeria community still takes collective responsibility when it comes to gender socialization. Men are expected to be in control and if this does not happen and their wives batter them, there are sanctions the community impose on them. This according to the study findings include the following: *the society despises a man who has been overpowered by a woman. He will not have a voice before his peers, abused man is there to be seen and not to be heard, he is seen as having been bewitched by a woman, warned if no change ignored and stigmatized among others.*

This is a clear indication that respect is very important for men in Nigeria Sub County and not being respected makes one feel less of a man. The results are in consistency with observations in an empirical study by Eckstein (2010), who established that men who failed to live up to set masculinity standards experienced separation, limitation of resources and belittling from the community. It also agrees with a study by Dolan (2003) (As sited by Barker & Ricardo, 2005 pg

42) who reported of lost manhood by men in conflict areas even though this study mainly looked at sexual violence against men.

Furthermore, men in this community are perceived to be strong and they are the ones that are supposed to discipline their wives and not them being beaten. This was noted through comments made by various respondents during separate interviews such as:

“Male victims are dismissed because it is assumed that they are strong”.

(“I beat him as I scream. That way, people think that I am the one being beaten thus they do not come as it is normal for a wife to be beaten by the husband”

This implies that wife beating in Nigeria is seen as normal and no one would want to interfere when such occurs.

On the same note, a male respondent lamented that:

If I fight back, she will turn the story around that I am the one who attacked her and the community will believe her” (Male responded in Nigeria).

This finding concurs with what was observed by Morgan and Wells (2016) that male victims not being supported is mainly due to masculinity expectations and stigma male victims face in the society. These statements are indications that it is unacceptable for a husband to be battered by the wife and if this occurs, the man is blamed for being weak and because of this, such men would rather keep their battered status a secret than face the shame.

It is therefore noteworthy that men in Nigeria community are socialized to dominate and be heard to be regarded as men. When this privilege is taken away from them through DVAM, they would rather suffer in silence than seek help and face the wrath of the community. This may further warp their masculinity as noted by Thobejane and Luthada (2019) that, such men may be labelled as double victims of abuse as they are both victims of domestic aggression and also of female wrongdoers. They also risk being a laughingstock of the community and risk losing respect and dignity when they seek help.

1.5 Psychological implications of domestic violence against men on their perceived masculinity

In African society, a man being abused by a woman is a brutal warp to, and departure from the ideals of masculinity that men have been socialized to, with respect to identity and social status in the community. Being in control of a family is an important aspect of masculinity in African culture. Unfortunately, male abuse, which is so hidden from view, robs men of this opportunity. Nigeria is a patriarchal community where men are supposed to dominate over women. Wife beating is celebrated. Masculinity is a very important discourse and it is constructed from a tender age. Men are encouraged to be hardworking, providers and courageous among other attributes. Despite all these, this study confirmed that DVAM is common in the area and men who are battered are adversely affected. They are stigmatized, laughed at, seen as women, not involved in decision making, lacked confidence, shied off from interacting with others and lost respect. These

observations agree with a study by Munirkazmi & Mohyuddin (2012) who established that intimate partner violence against men by women does not only lead to physical harm but also to mental health problems. Petersson and Plantin (2019) in their study on *Breaking with Norms of Masculinity: Men Making Sense of Their Experience of Sexual Assault* in Sweden affirm that savagery is a weapon utilized by the assailant to set up and control connection of intensity, testing the subjectivity of the person in question. They additionally noticed that as the force, control of the attacker builds, the universe of the casualty including his/herself worthy decreases, and the reverse is true.

Battered men also feel powerless and out of control. A respondent in a private interview commented that:

“A man is expected to be in control of the family so if he is controlled by his wife he does not feel complete”.

Men being in power and control in Nigeria mean a lot for them. Being controlled by their wives greatly affect them and make them feel powerless as this goes against masculinity expectations in the community. Connell (2005) notes that relationships among men or cluster of men are hierarchical and that hegemonic masculinity characteristic such as strong, dominant, assertive, emotionally restrained and in control define ideal men in the western context. Violence is part of masculinity and means of maintaining dominance. This is brutally injured in cases of violence especially by women.

Further, another respondent in an interview revealed that battered men are seen as weak and not well brought up. He said that:

“They see me as a weak (sic), not in control and not well brought up”.

This shows that in Nigeria, men are brought up in a tense patriarchal setting with stiff competition between male of different masculinity traits and they are expected to strive to achieve standards of masculinity set by the community. However, DVAM deny men of this opportunity and alienate them from other men who feel in control of their homes and by extension in the community. This agrees with observations in an earlier study in South Africa by Thobejane and Luthada (2019), who observed that men experiencing domestic violence by their women might end up being laughingstocks of the community and risk losing respect and dignity when they seek help.

This finding however contradicts a study by Barker and Ricardo (2005) who established that young men who do not achieve sense of socially respected masculinity are likely to engage in violence. Men who are not respected would then be expected to be violent but in Nigeria community lack of respect for men is seen as a form of violence against them and most of them tend to prefer silence as opposed to revenge.

On the analysis of the interviews, some themes emerged that suggested that men are affected more psychologically than physically. This is seen in remarks such as:

“I get angry, resentful towards my friend and my wife”

Another male respondent wondered:

“I wonder why this masculine body cannot protect me against a weaker sex.

These findings resonate with findings in Rawalpindi, Pakistan by Munirkazmi and Mohyuddin (2012) whose study revealed that intimate partner violence against men by women does not only lead to physical harm but also psychological harm. From these findings, it is evident that, men in Nigeria Sub County are more affected by psychological than physical violence. This point to the fact that men hardly share their abused status for the fear of how the society would see them and this tortures them psychologically.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper concludes that DVAM is common in the area and men who are battered are adversely affected. They are stigmatized, laughed at, seen as women, not involved in decision-making, lack confidence, shy off from interacting with others and lose respect. It is therefore clear that DVAM bruised men’s masculinity and it affected them more psychologically. The study also concludes that DVAM adversely warp men’s masculinity when it is known. This makes majority of men suffer in silence to protect their masculinity. The study concludes that men in Nigeria fear household chores due to socialization where from young age, boys are discouraged from engaging in reproductive work as the community believe that the is space for women and as such an ideal man should keep off. Therefore, men would rather not separate from their abusive wives or have them jailed than remain single fathers and be forced to carry out household chores. Drawing from these conclusions, it is important to change how we see battered men in society to create safe space for them to come out and seek help whenever they are abused without warping their masculinity.

There is need to shift from harmful masculinity constructs to positive masculinity right from childhood so as to help boys grow up into adulthood knowing the importance of expressing their feelings without fear of losing their identity in the society.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that the couples should embrace dialogue in the efforts to resolve issues in marriage and as such avoid cases of domestic violence. The community needs to provide various support mechanisms in order to ensure that couples coexist in harmonious marriage relationships. This can be in form of coming up with support groups in order to help victims of DVAM. The community needs to be less judgmental and more understanding when dealing with issues of DVAM so as not to warp the victims’ masculinity.

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