CULTURE, RELIGION AND HELP-SEEKING FOR INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE VICTIMS IN NIGERIA (A NARRATIVE REVIEW)

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ABSTRACT: *The way of life of individuals varies according to their peculiar belief systems. Cultural and religious practices dictate how life issues are addressed, with the views of the elderly and spiritual leaders taken seriously. Experience of abuse and violence within the family and intimate relationships is on the increase globally and is often times seen as private affairs, thus further enabling the perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence. This paper examines the impact of culture, religion and patriarchy on the prevalence of Intimate Partner violence and help-seeking from family, friends and religious leaders instead of the criminal justice system. It is observed that victims of IPV do not seek help or justice from the appropriate quarters i.e. law enforcement agencies citing different reasons ranging from shame of victimization to lack of trust in the law enforcement institutions, societal and religious opinions are some of the dilemma faced by survivors.*

KEYWORDS: Culture, Patriarchy, Religion, Help-seeking, Intimate Partner Violence.

INTRODUCTION

While culture is often described as the way of life of a group of people, religion pertains to beliefs and mode of worship of a group of people. Religion and culture are so intertwined that it forms the basis of daily living and decision making for most individuals. Religious and cultural rights are recognised as the rights to which individuals are entitled, with some fanatics taking their beliefs and teachings so serious that they do not mind dying in an effort to promote or defend such (Zeybek & Arslan, 2017). Karl Marx also argued that religion is the opium of the masses, with many religions prescribing most of the behaviour and living patterns for their followers, hence the reason why for many societies, there is a near fusion between their religion and their culture so much so that it is very difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Culture is the way of life of a group of people, the total sum of their peculiarities. These peculiarities include their dressing, types of music and music instruments, norms, taboos, values, arts and religious beliefs (Idang, 2015). The unwritten but binding mode of acceptable behaviour among a set of people who occupy a defined geographical location. On the other hand, violence that results in any form of bodily or mental harm between two people involved in an intimate relationship is called intimate partner violence Ellsberg, Kiplesund, Gennari, Morton & Arango (2014). The prevalence of intimate partner violence varies in frequency and severity, some partners experience it as a one off, while others continue to have the experience throughout their lifetime or duration of the relationship.

Across the globe about 1 in every 3 women and 1 in every 10 men, are victims of intimate partner violence (WHO, 2013). This number for men could be a bit higher but most men who

are survivors of IPV do not come forward to report. Majority of men do not seek help because of difficulty in self-identifying as victims, shame and distrust of the available support systems (Machado, Hines & Matos, 2016). In Nigeria, there are not enough data on the casualties resulting from intimate partner violence. There several social media and news reports regarding intimate partner violence experiences, alluding to the increase in victimization, but many of these are not properly documented.

Intimate Partner Violence

The home, family, and relationships ideally should be a place of love, care, affection, growth, and the safest place to be at any given point. However, it is quite unfortunate that it is within the home or relationship that some of the deadliest and most inhumane violent treatments are found. Despite the lovely images of supportive families, caring for each one's needs and desires, intimate relationships are often ridden with scary levels of violence, abuse and aggression (White & Bondurant, 1996). Intimate partner violence is a growing and worrisome epidemic in our societies today, as it poses numerous problems for individuals and the society as a whole.

The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2013) defines Intimate partner Violence (IPV) as any behaviour perpetrated by one partner over the other within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual, economic, verbal or emotional harm. IPV in its most extreme form may be termed as battering and controlling violence. This represents a situation in which one partner is violent and controlling; and this is generally the male partner against the female. It is important however to note that, males are also victims of violence from their female partners (Carmo, Grams, & Magalhães, 2011). According to the 2008 typologies of IPV by Micheal Johnson, there are five ways in which IPV may be experienced or perpetrated. These typologies are; coercive controlling violence, violent resistance, situational couple violence, separation instigated violence and mutual violent control.

Coercive controlling violence represents the most common form of IPV. Violent acts are usually perpetrated by a man against his female partner, usually as a means of gaining control over her (Wangmann, 2011). Violent resistance simply refers to violence perpetrated by a partner especially the female as a form of self-defense. This may also be called feminine resistance or resistive reactive violence (Beck, Anderson, O'Hara & Benjamin, 2013). Situational couple violence is a form of IPV that occurs just once within an intimate relationship in response to a particular conflict or situation. The intent of the partners is not coercion or to gain control over the other (Emery, 2013). Separation instigated violence is a category of IPV that occurs within the context of separation. It is a sub-set of situational violence which is triggered as a reaction to distressing occurrences experienced during separation or divorce (Ali et al., 2016). Mutual violent control depicts a situation in which both partners uses violence as a mean of manipulation and gaining control of the other (Wangmann, 2011)

Several factors have been attributed to the perpetration and victimization of intimate partner violence. Factors associated with perpetration includes but is not to, cultural and religious beliefs, weak laws and improperly articulate rights of women in terms of policies by government (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). Financial frustration especially for men, who are not able to live up to societal expectations as "breadwinners", drug and alcohol intoxication, for instance, women whose partners were frequent alcohol consumers were at a higher risk of

suffering physical and sexual violence (Owoaje & OlaOlorun, 2012). Jealousy and suspicions of infidelity due to an attempt to control and ensure sexual exclusivity of one's partner (Fareo, 2015). Factors that have been associated with the experience of partner violence includes but is not limited to low self-esteem, no or low level of Education, as some studies revealed that victims especially women who are not well educated receives little respect from their husbands (Oyediren & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005). However, men who are also not well educated may be subjected to verbal abuse. The consequences resulting from IPV experiences can be short or long term. It ranges from mental, physical, social or health consequences (Heise & Garcia 2002; Burney 2005; WHO, 2012).

How Does Culture Encourage the Perpetration or Experience of Intimate Partner Violence?

As with most African societies, Nigeria has a strong patriarchal societal structure. All the major ethnic groups in Nigeria- Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa- have strong patriarchal societal structures that encourage men to believe they are entitled to power and control over their partners (Ishola, 2016). Patriarchy is a form of social organization in which men dominate or rule over women. It is a belief pattern that views one sex (female) as inferior and thus deserves inferior treatment. This patriarchal societal structure encourages men to believe they are entitled to power and control over their partners. Ahmad, Riaz, Barata and Stewart (2004) affirms that the ideology of patriarchy encourages and justifies male domination of women. They also noted that women in patriarchal settings have come to condone and stick to patriarchal norms and values, some have come to accept spousal abuse and do not necessarily label such acts as violence.

Violence between intimate partners who are married or unmarried is fast becoming the leading source of violence victimization for persons age 15 to 49 (WHO, 2013). Relationships are entered into with high hopes, loving emotions, constant outings, presentation of gifts and generally making sure the other partner is as fine and as comfortable as possible. Sadly, however these relationships are now riddled with violence and all manners of abuse which in some cases cut short the life of its victims. Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) describes physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and psychological aggression which may include coercive acts by a current or former intimate partner (CDC, 2017). IPV are patterns of assaultive and coercive behaviours that may include inflicted physical injury, psychological abuse, sexual assault, progressive social isolation, stalking, deprivation, intimidation and threats. These behaviours are perpetrated by an individual who is, was or wants to be involved in an intimate or dating relationship with an adult or adolescent with an aim of establishing control by one partner over the other.

In African societies fathers and male family members are culturally seen as semi gods whose words must be obeyed and whose authority should not be questioned(Parkin & Nyamwaya, 2018). This had led to sons being given preference over daughters, for instance, in many communities in Nigeria, the male child is seen as central to continuing the family name (Hsu, 2017). He is also more favoured to inherit the family's lands and property as well as being more involved in the decision-making process of the society than his female counterpart. As Ahmad et al (2004) argued, women from patriarchal societies may themselves accept and adhere to patriarchal norms and values which makes it difficult for them to seek and receive help. It is however important to state that Men are also victims of Intimate violence but because culture over generations has painted a picture of men as strong and superior, men who suffer

from intimate partner violence usually do not speak up or report in order to avoid the shame of being beaten up or violated by a woman.

The Role of Some Religious Beliefs in the Perpetration or Experience of Intimate Partner Violence

Closely related to culture is religion. Some people often hide under the guise of culture and religion to justify acts of intimate partner violence. One can hear people making statements like "it is our culture", "the African culture allows it", "the Bible says a woman should be submissive, and if she is not, she should be beaten", "a foolish woman breaks her home" and so on (Ishola, 2016). Religion is an immaterial aspect of culture, immaterial because it is intangible but exists to shape human behaviour and social relationships that exist to shape human behaviour and social relationship that exist among members of the society. Religious values serve as a great force in the symbolic and subjective sphere, and the assumed inferiority of women is sometimes enabled by religion in the form of symbolic violence which is further enforced through social representations. Tomato 2004 cited in Krob & Steffen (2015).

The bible in Ephesians 5:22-24((NKJV), "*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Saviour of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything*". Wives are admonished to be submissive to their husbands. Some women in their interpretation of the above bible verse continue to endure harsh and violent treatments from their husbands as a form of submission. According to Fortune and Enger, (2005) due to either the silence or instructions, the church often communicate to battered women that they should continue to stay in abusive relationships, try to be better wives, learn to forgive and forget, this they claim send a subtle message to perpetrators of intimate partner violence that their efforts to control their wives or girlfriends are justified because they experience first-hand the admonition for women to be submissive.

Likewise, the Quran, in quran 2:223 *"Your wives are as a tilth unto you; so approach your tilth when or how ye will.* Wives are to be sexually available to their husbands in all ways at all times". Revolting or resisting such harsh treatments is seen as disrespectful or even ungodly. Religion also teaches and infers that women are weaker vessels and play second fiddle in the marriage partnership, since the woman is taught to be subservient to the man; she accepts violence as part of her obedient obligation to her husband. Christian women in abusive relationships for instance find it harder to divorce their abusive partners as compared to non-Christian women because the Christian woman see marriage as "made sacred by God". Leaving such a relationship causes guilty feeling within the woman. Also, Christians tend to encourage their brethren who suffer violence to wait, pray, endure and continue to be a helpmate to the abusive partner (Simister & Kowalewska 2016).

The Dilemma in Seeking Formal and Informal Support

Attitudes toward law enforcement is a paramount factor in the survival of victims of IPV. These attitudes according to Stewart, Langan and Hannem (2013), are formed from unhelpful or negative past experiences with the police which later poses as a barrier to victims removing themselves from abusive relationships and further contribute to their reluctance to seek formal help from professionals. Allen & Bradley, (2018) reports gender stereotypes directly and indirectly influences law Enforcement and third-party observers of violence, this shapes their

assessments of injuries sustained by victims of IPV and ability or willingness to criminalise violence. Even when the decision to criminalise a violent act has been made, lack of proactively responding to the concerns of IPV victims leads to an increase in recidivism and loss of faith in the justice system (Deans, Mancini, Shearer & McKenzie, 2018).

Furthermore, those who survive intimate partner violence are often silenced by the fear of social castigations, a fear that is reinforced by the belief that survivors, especially women are shamed when they report IPV, rather than the violence itself (McCleary-Sills, Namy, Nyoni, Rweyemamu, Salvatory & Steven, 2016). Although both sexes find it difficult to disclose their experience of IPV, women are more likely to seek for help from either formal or informal sources of support such as women shelters, the justice system, friends, families and religious leadership, while men are most likely to keep quiet about their experience of violence (Morgan, Buller, Evans, Trevillion, Williamson and Malpass, 2016). This was further corroborated by Choi, Wong, Lo, Chan, Wong, Lau & KAm (2018) who also revealed that the victim's sex and frequency of violent episodes was a predictor of violence reportage and acceptance of help-giving services.

Victims of IPV who have tried to seek help, reported being stigmatized by both friends, families, religious leaders and law enforcement agents whom they hitherto saw as a source of help and support. Victims often feel the need to redeem themselves as worthy of empathy in order to access ongoing support (Meyer, 2016). This expectation from victims further proves the social stigma associated with being a victim of intimate partner violence and has led many victims to continue their relationship with such violent partners (Cravens, Whiting, & Aamar, 2015).

Although IPV experience is not limited to women alone, women who experience such violence are openly encouraged to report it to the appropriate authorities, it has however, been argued that men who are victims of intimate partner violence often encounter pressure against reporting, when they go ahead with seeking redress, they face social stigma regarding their perceived lack of machismo and other denigrations of their masculinity (Omilusi, 2017). Additionally, intimate partner violence (IPV) against men is generally less recognized by society than IPV against women, which can act as a further block to men reporting their situation. Evidence from research showed that men often understated their experience of violence, but in actual facts when violence is measured by acts, women are as violent as men but if measured by injuries men are more violent (Stets & Straus, 2017). According to (Machado, Hines, & Matos, 2016) majority of men did not seek help because of difficulties in self-identifying as victims, feelings of shame and distrust of law enforcement and the justice system. The only formal help some victims actually sought was from health professionals.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Initially violence within domestic or intimate relationships were treated as private family affairs, but with the increase in prevalence and subsequent reportage, intimate partner violence has become recognised as both a social and public health problem which necessitates the involvement of law enforcement and various health practitioners.

Even though most victims of intimate partner violence first report violent episodes to loved ones, elders and religious leaders, these individuals are not well equipped to give the needed

support that survivors require, which most often includes, counselling and justice. There is a need to recognise and address such cultural practices that may hinder help-seeking by victims of intimate partner violence.

There is also the need to educate the general public on the importance of encouraging victims to seek formal help. Many friends, families or religious leaders are not certified to give the professional help or guidance some victims need. The use of professional Counselling and therapy for survivors of IPV should be encouraged. They will help in the reduction of depression, self-blame, reprisal attacks and suicide attempts. Community and religious leaders should be sensitized on the need for law enforcement intervention in some cases of intimate partner violence, especially when it involves physical and sexual violence. This will help in achieving deterrence, when perpetrators are punished instead of cajoled or prayed for to stop their abusive behaviour

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