

ENTRENCHED EPIDEMIC: STEMMING THE TIDE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA AND AFRICA*

Abstract

Violence against Women (VAW), also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or Domestic Violence (DV) is an age socio-cultural issue deep-rooted in Nigerian and African societies. Globally, domestic violence accounts for nearly one quarter of all recorded crimes. Domestic violence affects women in Nigeria and Africa irrespective of age, class, educational level and place of residence. The Nigerian and African society is inherently patriarchal. This is due to the influence of the various religions and customs practiced. Women are seen as inferior to men, and are regarded as property. This practice and mindset has been ingrained in the subconscious mind of the average Nigerian/African man. Consequently, violence against women has become entrenched and institutionalized. This paper examines Violence against women in Nigeria and Africa (with emphasis on South Africa, Ghana and Malawi) and posits that such violence stems mainly from socio – cultural and religious factors. Other factors that engender violence against women, like lack of awareness of rights by women, illiteracy, poverty (economic pressure and frustration), child/forced marriage, substance abuse are also examined. Recommendations to curb violence against women in Nigeria and Africa as a whole are underscored. This study employs the doctrinal research methodology.

Keywords: Violence, Women, Nigeria, Africa, Socio – Cultural, Religious Factors,

1. Introduction

Violence against women is a major public health problem and a violation of women's human rights. Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced domestic violence in their lifetime.¹ Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by a male intimate partner.² Domestic Violence against the woman and the female gender is an ubiquitous plague that has continually beleaguered societies in Nigeria and Africa in general. In Nigeria and Africa generally, women are considered as tools to be used by men.³ A man will beat his wife and nothing will happen, instead they will expect her to go on her knees and beg him. It is disturbing, indeed, melancholic, that women have unfortunately and helplessly come to accept these mistreatments as the norm rather than the exception. Most of these women are raised in the belief that their identity is subsumed or attached to the man's and that they can't have dignity of their own.⁴

2. Clarification of Concepts

Violence against women (VAW), also known as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or Domestic Violence (DV), are violent acts the victims of which are primarily or exclusively women or girls. Such violence is often considered a form of hate crime, committed against women or girls specifically because they are female, and can take many forms. United Nations Declaration on The Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 defines Violence against Women as follows:

For the purposes of this Declaration, the term 'violence against women' means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.⁵

Violence against women shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following:

(a) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation; (b) Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

*By **Tomi Grace OBAGBOYE, LLB (Jos), LLM (Kogi State University, Anyigba), BL.** Email Address: motilayo_dunni@yahoo.com. Phone number: 08036126840.

¹Violence against Women by United Nations. Obtained from < [Violence%20against%20women%20UNITED%20NATIONS.html](#)> Accessed on 19/02/2020.

² *Ibid.*

³ R O Arisi, & P Oromareghake, 'Cultural Violence and the Nigerian Woman' Vol. 5 (4), Serial No. 21, July, [2011] *African Research Review*, 369-381.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 Art.1.

(c) Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, wherever it occurs.⁶

The Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) defines Violence against as follows: ‘Violence against women’ means all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war’.⁷ In the broadest sense, domestic violence can also involve violence against children, parents, or the elderly. It takes a number of forms, including physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, reproductive, and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse such as choking, beating, female genital mutilation, and acid throwing that results in disfigurement or death. Domestic murders include stoning, bride burning, honor killings, and dowry deaths.⁸

3. Epidemic of Violence against Women in Africa

Violence against Women has become a global issue that cuts across regional, social and cultural boundaries. It not only poses a direct threat to women’s health, but also has adverse consequences for the survival and wellbeing of children.⁹ The home is supposed to be a secure environment, yet in many societies in sub-Saharan Africa, many women experience violence in diverse forms – physical, emotional psychological and sexual. Much of this violence is perpetrated by women’s husbands or close partners. Globally, research has shown that between 15 and 71 per cent of ever partnered women have been physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner at some time in their lives.¹⁰

Nigeria

Domestic Violence is a social menace that is common in Africa with Nigeria being no exception.¹¹ There is a deep cultural belief that it is socially acceptable to hit a woman. The CLEEN Foundation reports 1 in every 3 respondents admitting to being a victim of domestic violence. The survey also found a nationwide increase in domestic violence in the past 3 years from 21% in 2011 to 30% in 2013. A CLEEN Foundation’s 2012 National Crime and Safety Survey demonstrated that 31% of the national sample confessed to being victims of domestic violence.¹² A study in eastern Nigeria showed that 92% of the victims of IPV were women while only 8% were men.¹³ One in three Nigerian women reported having been physically abused by a male partner, according to a study, conducted in 1993. The wife of the deputy governor in northern Nigeria told reporters last year that her husband beat her incessantly, in part because she watched television movies.¹⁴ Although Nigeria is a party to many international and regional conventions the country, many of the conventions have not been tested in the Nigerian courts of law because they have not been domesticated.¹⁵ The constitution of Nigeria provides that no treaty between the Federation and any other country shall have the force of law except to the extent to which any such treaty has been enacted into law by the National Assembly.¹⁶ Nigeria ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 (CEDAW) in 1985 and also ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) on 16th Sept, 2004.¹⁷ The government also domesticated the provisions of the African Charter on Human and People’s

⁶ *Ibid.* Art. 2.

⁷ Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa 2003 Art 1(j).

⁸ Domestic Violence obtained from <[20Domestic%20violence%20-%20Wikipedia.html](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence)> Accessed on 6/02/2020.

⁹ S Kishor & K Johnson, Profiling Domestic Violence: A Multi-Country Study. 2004, Calverton: MACRO International.

¹⁰ Garcia-Moreno C, Jansen HA, Ellsberg M, Heise, & L Watts, Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence: Findings from the WHO Multi-country study on Women’s Health and Domestic Violence. *Lancet*. 2006, 368 (9543): 1260-1269.

¹¹ F C Anolue, O I Uzoma, ‘Intimate Partner Violence: Prevalence, Contributing Factors and Spectrum among Married Couples in Southeast Nigeria.’ [2017] Sept.6(9), *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology* 3748-3753.

¹² Domestic Violence in Nigeria obtained from < [www. %20%20Domestic%20violence%20in%20Nigeria%20-%20Wikipedia.html](https://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence_in_Nigeria)> Last accessed on 6/02/2020.

¹³ F C Anolue, O I Uzoma, (N.11).

¹⁴ M Temmermen, K Fonck, L Els, N Kidula, & J Ndiya Achola. ‘Increased Risk of HIV in Women Experiencing Physical Partner Violence in Nairobi, Kenya.’ [2005];9(3): *AIDS and Behavior*, 335-9

¹⁵ F O Dada, ‘The Justiceability and Enforceability of Women’s Rights in Nigeria’ [2014] 14 (5) *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, 48-56.

¹⁶ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) S. 12(1).

¹⁷ A Statement on Women’s Human Rights in Nigeria at the 62 Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) Obtained from <<https://alliancesforafrica.org/a-statement-on-womens-human-rights-in-nigeria-at-the-62-ordinary-session-of-the-african>> Last accessed on 7/03/2019.

Right.¹⁸ Nigeria is yet to domesticate the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979 (CEDAW) and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). The Gender and Equal Opportunity (GEO) Bill 2016, which is an amalgamation of the principles and provisions of CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol, is still before the Senate.

South Africa

South Africa is a democracy deeply influenced by its historical violent past characterized by race, class and gender divide. The violence inherited from the apartheid still resonates profoundly in the present society dominated by deeply entrenched patriarchal norms and attitudes towards the role of women and which makes violence against women and children, especially in rural areas and in informal settlements, a way of life and an accepted social phenomenon.¹⁹ Additional triggers of VAW include widespread use of drug and alcohol, high unemployment rate and the continuing stereotypical portrayal of women in the media. Compounding the problem is the high incidence of HIV.²⁰ In a study done by the World Health Organization, it was found that 60,000 women and children are victims of domestic violence in South Africa.²¹ South Africa is party to a number of core international human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women ratified without reservations and its Optional Protocol.²² At the regional level, South Africa is a party to the African charter on human and people's rights, Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa. South Africa follows a dualist approach when it comes to the incorporation of international treaties into domestic law, hence requiring a domestic legislative act for such incorporation. Section 39(b) of the Constitution states that when interpreting the Bill of Rights, a court 'must consider international law' and 'may consider foreign law'.²³ In 1998, South Africa introduced the Domestic Violence Act to protect those who are being abused or might be forced into a situation that could become harmful in the future. Women in South Africa have called for the death penalty to be reinstated for perpetrators of violence against women and children and for a state of emergency to be declared.²⁴

Ghana

Ghana is not exempted from the global problem of widespread domestic violence. An in-depth study on violence against women conducted by The Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (Gender Centre) determined that one in three Ghanaian women suffer from physical violence at the hands of a past or current partner and 27% of women have experienced psychological abuse, including threats, insults, and destruction of property.²⁵ Ghanaian women face powerful obstacles to reporting violence, which stem from cultural beliefs that domestic violence is a private family matter that should be addressed outside of the criminal justice system. Despite these obstacles, women continue to report incidents of domestic violence to the newly created Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU) of the Ghanaian police force in record numbers.²⁶ Domestic violence is prevalent in Ghana, owing in part to a deep cultural belief that it is socially acceptable for men to discipline their wives physically.²⁷

The problem of domestic violence is more prevalent in rural areas and the northern regions of Ghana. One of the main reasons for the high incidence is Women in Ghana live in a highly patriarchal society where the man/father is the head of the household and takes all major household decisions. Most Ghanaian women are told that to be successful in life, they must find a husband and serve him adequately by fulfilling gender roles and continuing his lineage. Wives are told to be socially smaller than their husbands, who are their superiors, breadwinners and protectors.²⁸ One of the many social dimensions arising from this gendered culture includes an acceptance of domestic violence.

¹⁸ Cap A9 LFRN 1990.

¹⁹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on her mission to South Africa. Obtained from < <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/-/media/files/un%20women/vaw/country%20report/africa/south%20=1107>> Accessed on 26/02/2020.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Domestic Violence in South Africa. Obtained from < https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence_in_South_Africa> Accessed on 26/02/2020.

²² Ratified on 15th Dec, 1995. The Optional Protocol to CEDAW was ratified in March 2005.

²³ South Africa Constitution ch.2.

²⁴ 'South Africa in a Crisis of Violence against Women, says President'

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/sep/06/south-africa-faces-national-crisis-of-violence-against-women-says-president>> Accessed on 6/02/2020.

²⁵ N C Cantalupo, et al, 'Domestic Violence in Ghana: The Open Secret' 7 [2006].*Geo. J. Gender & L.* 531-597.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Domestic Violence in Ghana obtained from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence_in_Ghana> Accessed on 6/02/2020.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

In 2007 the Ghanaian government created the Domestic Violence Act in an attempt to reduce violence against women. The act encountered significant resistance from cultural conservatives and local religious leaders who believed that such a law would undermine traditional African values, and that Western values were being implemented into law. In 2014 the Ghanaian government set up a domestic violence board to combat the issue.²⁹ These embedded cultural norms were challenged in the past four decades by a global wave of women's rights advocacy. Several international and regional treaties, bills, covenants and conventions geared towards women's rights were adopted, including the UN's notable Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and its Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. One of Ghana's responses to this push included establishing the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) in February 2007.³⁰ However, women who seek the DOVVSU's support are often discouraged to report their claims and rarely see their spouses brought to justice. The DOVVSU fails in its mission to provide victims with adequate support services because it remains shackled to Ghana's patriarchal culture. As a dualist state, Ghana's consent to be bound by an international agreement is only deemed to have been properly secured after the same has been approved or ratified by Parliament.³¹

Malawi

The 2004 survey represents the first time the Malawi Demographic and Health Survey (MDHS) collected information on domestic violence. The inclusion of the domestic violence module in the 2004 MDHS is in recognition of the presence of gender-based violence as an economic, human right, and health issue in Malawi.³² In traditional Malawian culture, wife battering is regarded as normal. Domestic violence occurs across all socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. This type of violence has been treated as a private issue until recently when the government and its stakeholders, in response to the international and regional instruments on women's rights, started to implement various initiatives aimed at creating awareness of the dangers of gender-based violence and changing the social order in which a woman is assumed to be of lesser status and her husband leads in all family aspects.³³ Having ratified a number of international and regional documents on women's rights and gender equality, Malawi has developed a National Strategy to Combat Gender-Based Violence (2000-2006). Furthermore, a draft Prevention of Domestic Violence Bill is in place awaiting Cabinet approval. This bill emphasizes Section 24 in the 1994 Constitution of Malawi which guarantees equality between women and men as well as women's right to property, and invalidates any law that discriminates against women, in particular, practices such as sexual abuse, harassment and violence.³⁴

The collection of data on domestic violence is challenging because women may not disclose issues of domestic violence as it is regarded as bringing shame to their family. In Malawi, the social and economic background of a woman has a bearing on her chances of experiencing physical violence. This experience does not vary consistently with their education; women with no education are less likely than women with some primary education to experience violence. Among educated women, education is negatively associated with the likelihood of experiencing violence. Women who have at least some secondary education are slightly less likely to have experienced domestic physical violence than less educated women.³⁵

Malawi has made some significant progress towards strengthening the legal and policy framework for women's rights over recent years. It has ratified and signed among others: the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women³⁶; the Declaration on Gender and Development; the African Charter on Women and People's Rights; and the Beijing Platform for Action.³⁷ Malawi is taking positive steps to meet its obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Key milestones achieved in protecting women from domestic include the enactment of the Gender Equality Act No 13 of 2013, essentially domesticating certain aspects of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act No 2 of 2015; and the

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Ghanaian Constitution S 75.

³² C D Chakwana, Domestic Violence in Malawi. Obtained from <
<https://dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR175/15Chapter15.pdf>> Accessed on 26/02/2020.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Ratified in 1987.

³⁷ UN Convention on The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Csos Shadow Report For Malawi 2015. Obtained from <
https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/MWI/INT_CEDAW_NGO_MWI_21948E.pdf>
Accessed on 26/02/2020.

Trafficking in Persons Act No 3 of 2015.³⁸ However, the CEDAW has not been fully domesticated in Malawi.³⁹ Malawi is a dualist State, which means that international instruments signed did not have direct implication in the country unless there was a special law ratifying it. A common feature observed is the patriarchal nature of the African society that is deeply embedded in culture. It is also important to note that, Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana and Malawi, are parties to and have ratified a number of International and Regional human rights instruments. They operate a dualist system which implies that International and Regional Instruments must be domesticated by the Parliament before they can be applicable in these States.

Gender Based Violence in some Other African Countries

Women suffer from violence in every society. In few places, however, is the abuse more entrenched, and accepted, than in sub-Saharan Africa. Many women suffer in silence as it is often protected by family secrecy, cultural norms, fear, shame, and the attendant social stigma make many of these affected women remain silent.⁴⁰ A hospital based study in Nairobi showed sexual violence as being the more common form of IPV with a prevalence of 61.5% while the proportion of physical assault was 38.5% with the majority of the perpetrators of gender based violence being married (72.3%), alcohol was implicated as a significant contributor in 10.1% of cases.⁴¹ Within West Africa, violence against women is widespread. Globally, 30% of women experience violence from intimate partners and 36.6% of African women experience lifetime intimate partner violence.⁴² Section 55(1)(d) of Nigeria's Penal Code⁴³ legally condones an assault by a husband on his wife for, 'the purpose of correcting his wife.' Spousal rape is also not criminalized in Togo, Ghana's neighbor. In Benin, 68.6% of women experience violence at the hands of men, and 69.5% of those perpetrators are spouses or partners. One in four women in Senegal are victims of domestic abuse.⁴⁴ These high statistics are the consequence of deeply gendered cultures where domestic abuse is socially accepted and frequently legal. According to a survey, the overall prevalence of any form of violence (physical, sexual or emotional) ranges from 30.5% in Nigeria to 43.4% in Zimbabwe; 45.3% in Kenya; 45.5% in Mozambique; 53.9% in Zambia and 57.6% in Cameroun.⁴⁵

4. Factors Engendering Domestic Violence in Nigeria and Africa

Relationships are socially and culturally constructed. A range of socio-cultural factors such beliefs, norms, values, taboos, community, expectations and rules, law and policies, economic and physical resources, technological and ethical factors influence an individual's attitudes towards behaviour in and expectations about relationships.⁴⁶

Socio-Cultural Factors

African women face many challenges to the enjoyment of their rights. These challenges stem mainly from socio-cultural and religious factors.⁴⁷ The social context of violence against women is based largely on its patriarchal society. In Africa, once the bride price (Bride price is called *labola* in South Africa and *dowry* in Nigeria), is paid on a woman, she automatically becomes the property of the husband.⁴⁸ Domestic violence often happens in the context of forced or child marriage.⁴⁹ Violence against a wife is seen as a tool that a husband uses to chastise his wife and to improve her. The common loss of women's rights upon marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa and the implicit obedience and deference towards men is socially encouraged within their society.⁵⁰ Some types of social norms, beliefs, and practices are present in Nigeria, South Africa, Ghana, Malawi and in Africa generally. In Africa, women are expected to submit sexually to their husbands and may be blamed for violent reactions by their

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ F C Anolue, O I Uzoma, (n. 11).

⁴¹ M Temmermen, (N.14),

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Penal Code Act Cap P3(Federal Provisions Act), LFN 2004.

⁴⁴ M Temmermen, (N.14).

⁴⁵ S O Bamiwuye, C Odimegwu, Spousal Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa: Does Household Poverty-Wealth Matter? 11, 45 [2014] *Reprod Health* 11-45.

⁴⁶ O G Ayodapo, 'Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Gender-Based Violence on Agricultural Livelihood Activities of Rural Households in Ogun State, Nigeria.' Vol. 5(1) January [2013], *International Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation*, 1-14.

⁴⁷ F P Umeana, 'Female education: Gender discrimination in Northern Nigerian Secondary Schools' obtained from <<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322030925>> Last accessed on 15/10/2019.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Domestic Violence obtained from <[www. %203%20Domestic%20violence%20-%20Wikipedia.html](http://www.%203%20Domestic%20violence%20-%20Wikipedia.html)> Last accessed 06/02/2020.

⁵⁰ Domestic Violence in Nigeria obtained from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domesticviolence_in_Nigeria#Influencing_factors>

men.⁵¹ In addition, men often use and endorse violence to maintain power and control over women and some invoke a misconceived perception of masculinity to justify Violence against Women.

Religious Factors

Countries in Africa are highly religious, with Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam being the major belief systems. Religious leaders are held in high esteem with fear, respect and love. Thus, religion plays a major role in the life of the people.⁵² Religious bodies play major roles in shaping beliefs and perceptions in the country. For example, there are religious ideologies on women being inferior to men, the perception of women as ‘unclean’ and the portrayal of virtuous women as ‘submissive’, all of which endorse GBV. Also, the frown on divorce by some religious sects makes it further difficult for women to leave abusive marriages.⁵³ Religious leaders not only have an obligation to prevent and redress violence against women, they're uniquely well positioned to do it.⁵⁴

Illiteracy and Ignorance

Education is the key factor for women empowerment, prosperity, development and welfare. Kenig opined that rural women are discriminated against in terms of employment opportunities, access to social and productive resources, education, health status and family decisions among others. In terms of education, there is still preference for the education of the male child among rural Yoruba community.⁵⁵ A lack of education limits girls' choices and opportunities throughout their lives. The price of this exclusion is often poverty. Without education, girls and adult women have fewer opportunities to financially provide for themselves and their families. Poverty, also limits a woman's choice of a husband and makes her dependent on him for her survival. This also makes her condone domestic violence. A Woman that is illiterate is most likely ignorant of her rights and can be a perpetual victim of domestic violence.

Child/ Forced Marriage

Child marriage, or early marriage, is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. Forced marriages are marriages in which one and/or both parties have not personally expressed their full and free consent to the union.⁵⁶ Child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) is a human rights violation and a harmful practice. CEFM threatens the lives and futures of girls and women around the world, robbing them of their agency to make decisions about their lives, disrupting their education, making them more vulnerable to violence, discrimination and abuse, and preventing their full participation in economic, political and social spheres. Child marriage is also often accompanied by early and frequent pregnancy and childbirth, resulting in higher than average maternal morbidity and mortality rates. CEFM often result in women and girls attempting to flee their communities or to commit suicide to avoid or escape the marriage.⁵⁷ In sub-Saharan Africa, a staggering 40 percent of girls marry before age 18, and African countries account for 15 of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage.⁵⁸ For example, 77 percent of girls in Niger, and over 60 percent of girls in Central African Republic and Chad, marry before they turn 18. Without progress to prevent child marriage, the number of girls married as children will double by 2050, and Africa will surpass South Asia as the region with the highest number of child brides in the world.⁵⁹ Child marriages remain entrenched in rural pockets throughout sub-Saharan Africa, from Ghana to Kenya to Zambia, according to UNICEF. Many rural African communities, steeped in centuries of belief that girls occupy society's lower rungs, are inured to disapproval by the outside world.⁶⁰ ‘There is a lot of talk, but the value of the girl child is still low,’ said Seodi White, Malawi's coordinator for the Women in Law in Southern

⁵¹ S B Fakunmoju, S Rasool, ‘Exposure to Violence and Beliefs About Violence Against Women Among Adolescents in Nigeria and South Africa’ obtained from < <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/2158244018817591>> Accessed on 12/02/2020.

⁵² Religion, women and gender-based violence in Nigeria obtained from < <https://www.voicesofyouth.org/blog/religion-women-and-gender-based-violence-nigeria>> Accessed on 12/02/2020.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ R Radtke, A Khan, ‘Religion Is Blamed For Violence Against Women’ Obtained from < <https://www.newsweek.com/religion-blamed-violence-against-women-we-are-christian-muslim-leaders-fight-1224771> > Accessed on 12/02/2020.

⁵⁵ O G Ayodapo, (N.46).

⁵⁶ ‘Child, Early And Forced Marriage, Including In Humanitarian Settings’ Obtained from < 20S%20OHCHR%20_%20Child,%20early%20and%20forced%20marriage,%20including%20in%20humanitarian%20settings.html > Accessed on 13/02/2020

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ UNICEF, Ending Child Marriage: Progress and Prospects, 2014, obtained from < http://data.unicef.org/corecode/uploads/document6/uploaded_pdfs/corecode...> Accessed on 12/02/2020.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ S Lafraniere, ‘Forced to Marry Before Puberty, African Girls Pay Lasting Price’ Obtained from < <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/27/world/africa/forced-to-marry-before-puberty-african-girls-pay-lasting-price.html>> Accessed on 12/02/2020.

Africa Research Trust. 'Society still clings to the education of the boy, and sees the girl as a trading tool. In the northern Malawi, girls as early as 10 are being traded off for the family to gain. After that, the women become owned and powerless in their husbands' villages.'⁶¹

Child marriage exposes girls and young women to violence, including marital rape, sexual and domestic violence, and emotional abuse.⁶²

Poverty/Economic Pressure and Frustration

Poverty is the mother of crime. It can be defined as the lack of some fixed level of material goods, necessary for survival and minimal well-being.⁶³ Poverty is linked to both the perpetration of Violence against Women and the risk of being a victim of it. Bourgois,⁶⁴ opined that lack of resources puts immense pressure on men. Many men in Africa grapple with little or no available employment. They are unlikely to attain models or expectations of masculine success. Various forms of violence against women are normalized, as men turn their aggression against women they can no longer control or support economically.⁶⁵ Women represent a staggering 70 per cent of those living in poverty, and their basic needs had yet to be adequately addressed by local, national and international policies.⁶⁶ In Tanzania, women are the main workers and producers in agriculture, but the distribution of the little wealth generated was still not equal between men and women. This makes the women dependent on men for their and their children's economic survival, which increases their exposure to violence.⁶⁷

Drunkness and Substance Abuse

Strong links have been found between alcohol use and the occurrence of intimate partner violence in many countries. Evidence suggests that alcohol increases the occurrence and severity of domestic violence.⁶⁸ Alcohol consumption can be considered as a direct cause of intimate partner violence because frequent heavy drinking can create an unhappy, stressful partnership that increases the risk of conflict and violence. Alcohol use directly affects cognitive and physical function, reducing self-control and leaving individuals less capable of negotiating a non-violent resolution to conflicts within relationships. Excessive drinking by one partner can exacerbate financial difficulties, childcare problems, or infidelity. This can create marital tension and conflict, increasing the risk of violence occurring between partners.⁶⁹ Experiencing violence within a relationship can lead to alcohol consumption as a method of coping or self-medicating. Children who witnesses violence or threats of violence between parents are more likely to display harmful drinking patterns later in life. In South Africa, 65% of women surveyed who experienced spousal abuse reported that their partner always or sometimes used alcohol before the assault. Other countries where strong links between perpetrator drinking and intimate partner violence have been found include Uganda and Zimbabwe.⁷⁰

On a general note, Men are more likely to perpetrate violence if they have low education, a history of child maltreatment, exposure to domestic violence against their mothers, harmful use of alcohol, and a sense of entitlement over women. Women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence if they have low education, exposure to mothers being abused by a partner, abuse during childhood, and attitudes accepting violence, and women's subordinate status. Situations of conflict, post conflict and displacement may exacerbate existing violence, such as by intimate partners, as well as and non-partner sexual violence, and may also lead to new forms of violence against women.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregone, it has been established that violence against women is an entrenched epidemic in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, with attendant devastating consequences. It is essential that all relevant stakeholders—including community and religious leaders; school teachers and administrators; health care workers; police, prosecutors,

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² A Smaak, and N Varia, Ending Child Marriage in Africa, obtained from <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/12/09/ending-child-marriage-africa>> Accessed on 12/02/2020.

⁶³ A B Dambazau, *Law and Criminality in Nigeria*, (Ibadan: University Press Plc, 2008), 39-79.

⁶⁴ P Bourgois, 'In search of Masculinity: Violence, Respect and Sexuality among Puerto Rican Crack Dealers in East Harlem' [1996] (36) (3) *British Journal of Criminology* 412-427.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Women's Social, Economic Inequality Leads to Trafficking, Domestic Violence, Exploitation. Obtained from <<https://www.un.org/press/en/2003/wom1390.doc.htm>> Accessed on 28/02/2020.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ 'Intimate Partner Violence and Alcohol.' Obtained from <www.who.int/factsheets/fs104/en/> Accessed on 6/02/2020.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

and the judiciary; government officials; media; parents, and of course, girls and boys—understand and commit to their role in ending violence against women. Below are some recommendations to curb gender based violence in Nigeria and other African countries.

Legal Reforms

There should be effective Implementation of existing laws that criminalize domestic violence and establishment of more encompassing laws to protect women from gender based violence in Nigeria and other African countries. Also, African countries should be made to domesticate International and Regional Instruments that criminalize gender based violence and fulfill their obligations under these instruments. For instance, the CEDAW and Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, have not been fully domesticated in most African States. In addition, there should be adequate punishment of Perpetrators of Violence against Women. The Government and its institutions must show adequate will and enthusiasm in the fight to end gender based violence. Putting new laws on the books is not enough. Law enforcement and court mechanisms also have to be made friendly and accessible to women.

Establishment of Shelters for Victims of Gender Based Violence.

Shelters and Safe Houses should be established and made accessible to victims of gender based violence both in urban and rural areas. They should be able to provide Counselling, rehabilitation, medical attention and Legal Services for such victims. In addition, there should be specialized training of personnel who would work in these Shelters.

Massive Public Enlightenment Campaigns and Awareness against Violence against women

The Government, NGO's, all stake holders and concerned individuals should carry out massive enlightenment campaigns against domestic violence. They should effect a change in the negative cultural mindset and perception about women and the female gender in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Cultural and social norms are highly influential in shaping individual behaviour, including the use of violence. Norms can protect against violence, but they can also support and encourage the use of it. Interventions that challenge cultural and social norms supportive of violence can help reduce and prevent violent behaviour. Television and radio, social media, and other creative means of passing out the message can be engaged in this campaign. In Tanzania, the NGO, Kivulini uses open-air meetings, local drama groups, traditional drumming, singing and dancing to engage people in discussion about domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and reproductive health. In Guinea, public education efforts bring together local NGOs and imams to explain that Islam does not condone the abuse of women.

Women Education and Empowerment

The Government and it's institutions in African nations should ensure the education and empowerment of girls and women. Universal basic education and girl child education in line with the SDG's should be effectively carried out. The place of girl-child education, education and empowerment of women cannot be over-emphasized. It has been argued that education does not automatically translate in a lower incidence of domestic violence, (in Malawi, for example). However, education and financial empowerment of women positions them to make informed decisions and gives them more options when confronted with issues of violence against women. Educated women are more aware of their rights and freedoms guaranteed by the law and are able to better protect themselves from domestic violence. According to a survey, highly-educated women are 31% less likely to be tolerant of domestic violence than women with no education, and women with secondary education are 16% less likely to be tolerant. An uneducated and financially dependent woman is more likely to condone domestic violence because she doesn't have anyone to support her and her children if she fights against violence. Many women in Africa are trapped in violent domestic situations because they are totally dependent on the perpetrators of domestic violence for their livelihood. And many men in capitalize on this fact and continue to perpetuate violence against women unchecked. This is another form of modern day slavery. This should stop. All hands must be on deck to ensure basic education and empowerment of girls and women in Africa. The WHO found that women with at least a secondary education were more able to negotiate greater autonomy and control of resources within marriage, have a wider range of choices in partners and are more able to choose whether and when to marry. Such capacities have often been associated with lower levels of violence in the home.

Enlightenment about the Rights of Women

Women and girls in all strata of society, both the literate and unlettered and every member of society should be enlightened about their rights especially the right to freedom from gender based violence. Regular awareness campaigns and programs should be carried out to educate the female folk about their right as guaranteed by the constitution and other laws. The punishment for violation of the rights should also be stated.

Women's Activism should be encouraged

Women are not just victims. They have been working actively for change. In Senegal, after the 1996 rape of a nine-year-old by a community and political leader, the NGO, APROFES (Association pour la promotion de la femme Sénégalaise) initiated protests, leafleting campaigns and local theatre performances to publicize the case. That thwarted efforts by the man and his supporters to force the girl's family to withdraw charges. APROFES also provided legal counsel at the subsequent trial. The court proceeding, attended by thousands, yielded a 10-year prison sentence for the perpetrator, the first conviction for such a crime in Senegal. Women have also been active internationally and in various African countries to gain better mechanisms to protect women. This has included successfully pushing for adoption of international treaties and instruments, such as the CEDAW. There are various NGO's across Africa established by women to protect and advocate for the rights of women. All these efforts are commendable and women should be continued to stand up for one another and speak up against Violence against Women.