

THEORIES AND CAUSES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA*

Abstract

Gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime. This issue is not only devastating for survivors of violence and their families, but also entails significant social and economic costs. Gender-based violence refers to any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Witnessing violence, in general, has been associated with emotional, psychological trauma to mention the least. There are so many theories with respect to violence ranging from psychoanalytic theory: object relation theory and attachment theory, Social theory of family violence encompassing control theory and resource theory. Sexual abuse is one of the numerous forms of violence. The study also looks at the causes of violence in the home. The methodology adopted in this study is doctrinal involving the analytic and comparative consideration of existing legal instruments on the issue within the Nigerian legal system. The methods of data collection adopted in this work were from primary sources such as statutes, laws and judicial decisions; and secondary sources such as books, journal articles, newspaper, and internet materials. It was founded that violence in the homes are caused mostly by family upbringing and moral belief, cultural and religious belief, financial issues and alcoholism.

Keywords: gender-based violence; gender; intimate partner violence; domestic violence; theories;

1. Introduction

Gender-based violence is a worldwide problem impacting disproportionately upon women and children. Measuring and recording the prevalence of gender-based violence remains an ongoing issue which provokes methodological debate.¹ The United Nations has identified gender-based violence against women as a global health and development issue, and a host of policies, public education, and action programs aimed at reducing gender-based violence have been undertaken around the world.² Violence is often considered gendered on the basis that it is violence against women. This assumption is evident both in ‘gender-based violence’ interventions in Africa and in the argument that gender is irrelevant if violence is also perpetrated against men. Violence in the home is a universal phenomenon that is calling the consciousness of individuals, communities, nations and international groups on daily basis.³ It happens in all civilizations across the globe. The word violence has been defined as the use of physical force accompany by furry, vehemence or outrage, unlawfully exercised with the intent to harm.⁴ Again, it is defined as a use of physical force so as to damage or injure, intense natural force or energy, an abusive use of force, passion, furry, disturbance and desecration.⁵

2. Definition of Terms

From an anthropological perspective, gender-based violence is ‘an interpretation of violence through gender. When thinking about gender-based violence, there can be a tendency to highlight the interpersonal men’s violence against women in terms of domestic or sexual violence⁶ The word violence has been defined as the use of physical force accompany by furry, vehemence or outrage, unlawfully exercised with the intent to harm.⁷ Domestic violence has been described as violence against members of a household usually spouses or other

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¹ N Lombard, ‘Introduction to Gender and Violence’ *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Violence* (2018) P 12 < <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781>> assessed on 12 September 2023

² N F Russo and A Pirlott, ‘Gender-Based Violence, Concepts, Methods and Findings’ Department of Psychology, Arizona State University, Arizona USA (2009) < <https://xyonline.net/sites/xyonline.net/files/2018-04/Ru>> assessed on 11 September, 2023.

³ N Cantalupo, L V Martin, K Pak and S Shin, ‘Domestic Violence in Ghana: The Open Secret’ *Georgetown Journal of Gender and Law* (2006) 7 1< <https://scholarship.law.georgetown.edu/facpub/433/> accesses 24 October, 2022

⁴ B A Garner, *Black’s Law Dictionary* (8th edn, Upperman Drive: West Publishing Company, 2004) p 1601

⁵ *New International Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, Encyclopedic Edition (2010) edn :Typhonon media corporation, 2010) p 1402

⁶ F Mengzhu, ‘What will it take to end Gender-Based Violence? Winner of the 2015 Women’s Studies Journal Graduate Prize for a Feminist Essay (2015) < <https://www.wsanz.org.nz/journal/docs/WS>> assessed on 12 September, 2023.

⁷ B A Garner, *Black’s Law Dictionary* (8th edn, Upperman Drive: West Publishing Company, 2004) p 1601

violent act committed by one member of a household against another.⁸ Domestic violence as defined here includes other types of intimate or family violence: child abuse/neglect, child to-parent violence, sibling violence, and the abuse of the elderly. Intimate Partner violence is an ongoing pattern of behavior in which the batterer uses violence as one of the means to exact control over an intimate partner⁹ Domestic Violence as a behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or Psychological harm included but not limited to physical aggression, sexual coercion psychological abuse and controlling behavior.

3. Theoretical Framework on Gender-Based Violence

A number of different psychological theories address the causes of Domestic violence. The most popular theories all acknowledge the abuse of power and control by the abusers, although the role of power and control varies by theoretical orientation.¹⁰ In this sub chapter, we are looking at the two main theoretical categories of Gender-based violence to wit: Psychoanalytic theory and Social theory.

Psychoanalytic Theory of Gender-Based violence

In this sub heading, three Psychoanalytic theories are discussed: object relations theory and attachment theory.

Object Relation Theory

Object relations theory suggests that humans are motivated from their earliest childhood by the need for significant relationships with others.¹¹ Others are referred to as ‘objects’ within objects relations theory. In essence, object relations theory proposes that individual’s developmental representations of themselves, other individuals, and the relationships between themselves and others beginning in infancy and childhood; these mental representations carry over and influence interpersonal relationships throughout life. Many prominent object relations theorists suggest that the child’s early experiences in his or her relationship with the primary caregiver set the stage for the development of stable, enduring, internalized mental representations of oneself, others, and the emotional experiences that are attached to the relationship between the oneself and others.¹² The first years of life are extremely important for individuals to ensure the development of adequate emotional health in later life. Individuals who lacked sufficient nurturing during infancy and childhood may find it difficult to maintain healthy self-esteem, regulate their emotional responses, and manage anxiety in later life. Unmet dependency needs in childhood persist into adulthood, often accompanied by a sense of rage that one’s needs were not met. As a result, the search to fulfill dependency needs as an adult becomes both desperate and demanding which could lead to relationships in which one is either an abuser or a victim. For example, evidence suggests that at least some men who commit intimate partner violence did not receive adequate nurturing in the first years of development. Dutton et al¹³ found that becoming an adult perpetrator of intimate partner violence was significantly correlated with violence in the family of origin, as well as with parental rejection. In contrast, it has been argued that individuals who become victims of violence in adolescent and/or adult relationships, and who continue to maintain those relationships despite the violence, do so because of internal defenses that are employed during early development in an abusive, neglectful, or inconsistent relationship with the primary caregiver.

Attachment Theory

Unlike the emphasis placed on the individual’s mental representation of a relationship in the object relations theory, attachment theory emphasizes reciprocity between individuals within a relationship. Attachment is defined as a reciprocal, enduring emotional tie between an infant and a caregiver, with both parties actively contributing to the quality of the relationship.¹⁴ According to the early attachment theorists, an infant develops a ‘working model’ of what can be expected from his or her primary caregiver. If the caregiver continues to respond in expected ways, the infant’s model holds up; however, if the caregiver’s responses become consistently unpredictable, the infant is forced to revise his or her model, and the security of the attachment changes.¹⁵ The basic concept underlying the theory of attachment is that adults have the power to both protect and provide a sense of security for their children. At times when the child feels threatened, exhausted, or ill, he

⁸ Ibid

⁹ C Mitchell and D Anglin, *Defining Intimate Partner Violence: Controversies and Implications*, (2009, Oxford University Press < <https://books.google.com.ng/books?hl=en&lr=&id=wV> > assessed 12 September, 2023

¹⁰ M Hyde-Nolan and T Juliao, ‘Theoretical Basis for Family Violence’ Jones and Bartlet Learning (2018) <https://samples.jbpub.com/9780763780340/80340_ch02_final.pdf accessed 6 February, 2023

¹¹ W Fairbairn, *An Object Relations Theory of the Personality* (London, United Kingdom: Tavistock; 1952).

¹² O Kernberg, *Object Relations Theory and Clinical Psychoanalysis* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson:1984)

¹³ D Dutton and L Ryan, ‘Antecedents of abusive personality and abusive behavior in wife assaulters’ (J Fam Violence 1996) P113–132.

¹⁴ D E Papalia and others, *Human Development* (11th edn, Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill 2010).

¹⁵ J Bowlby, ‘Maternal care and mental health’ (Bull World Health Organ, 1951).

or she will turn to the caregiver for security and protection.¹⁶ Once the attachment bond is formed, it ensures that the secure base of the relationship is in place. One of the key features of such a secure base is the relationship between security and exploration. A child with secure attachment can explore the environment, but when the child feels threatened, attachment behaviors are activated, and the child will seek out the secure caregiver.¹⁷ Children build a representation of their own worthiness based on their experiences and perceptions of the caregiver's ability, availability, and willingness to provide care and protection.¹⁸ Over time the child is able to use the symbolic representations of important attachment figures to feel secure without the presence of the caregiver. However, not all attachments are positive. Attachment theory explains that child abuse results in insecure and anxious attachment, which can be avoidant, ambivalent, or disorganized. Anxious attachment can be viewed as a marker for later social and emotional problems and is most likely to occur in situations of maltreatment. Unfortunately, distorted patterns of relating to others lay the foundation for the child's model of the world, influence how the child responds, and may prevent the child from developing a positive internal model of self.

Social Theories of Family Violence

The social theories of family violence focus on processes that are created via interactions with others in one-to-one relationships or in larger groups. Two social theories are discussed: control theory and resource theory.

Control Theory

Control theory is based on the concept that many family conflicts result from an individual's need to obtain and maintain power and control within a relationship(s). The motivation underlying the abuser's behavior is the power and control that she or he is able to exert over other members of the family.¹⁹ The more powerful members of families (e.g., fathers, parents, husbands) often use the threat or use of force or the threat or use of violence to obtain compliance from less powerful family members (e.g., children, wives).²⁰ Threats, force, and violent behaviors are intended to prohibit the less powerful members of the family from engaging in behavior that the controlling individual does not want, while establishing a demand for 'desirable' behaviors to occur.²¹ In addition, the abuser may feel the need to gain control over how other family members think and feel. Abusers, in an effort to maintain control over other members of the family, may use many forms of intimidation, such as coercion, isolation, economic abuse, and denial of personal blame. The victim(s) typically learn how to respond to the various forms of intimidation, although the struggle to challenge the abuse/abuser may become too overwhelming or dangerous for the victim(s). As a result, the victim(s) may begin to modify his/her/their own behavior, slowly giving up control in order to survive and avoid continued abuse. Isolating the victim from any social contacts may be the most harmful form Social Theories of Family Violence of intimidation the abuser uses because the possibility of escape for the victim(s) is greatly reduced in the absence of social support.²²

Resource Theory

Resource theory suggests a relationship between wealth and violence.²³ This theory proposes that force and violence are resources that can be used to resolve conflicts, although in modern society these resources are often used as a last resort. For example, men with high income and social standing have access to a wide variety of resources with which to control their wives' behavior (in addition to violence), whereas men with limited or no wealth and resources may resort to physical force or violence more quickly.²⁴

4. Forms of Violence Against Women

Physical Aggression or Assault

Physical violence or aggression is the intentional use of physical force (such as shoving, choking, shaking, slapping punching, burning or use of weapons, restraints or one's size or strength against another person) with

¹⁶ J Holmes, *Attachment theory and abuse: A developmental perspective* (eds., USA: Jessica Kingsley, 2000)

¹⁷ *ibid*

³¹ J Bowlby, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (Harmondsworth, United Kingdom: Penguin; 1973) Attachment and Loss; vol 2.

¹⁹ D J Bostock and others, 'Family violence. American Academy of Family Physicians Home Study Self-Assessment Program' (Serial No. 274 2002)

²⁰ W J Boode, 'Force and violence in the family' *J Marriage Fam.* 1971 p. 624.

²¹ *ibid*

²² *ibid*

²³ W J Goode 'Force and violence in the family' (*J Marriage Fam.* 1971) p 624.

²⁴ K L Anderson, 'Gender, status, and Domestic Violence: an integration of Feminist and Family Violence Approaches' *J Marriage Fam.* 1997, p. 669.

the potential for causing death, disability, injury or physical harm.²⁵ Physical violence involves wife battery, Female Genital Mutilation, widowhood rituals e. t. c. Acts constituting physical violence includes hitting, slapping, kicking, pushing, biting, shoving, throwing objects or threat thereof, intimidation, stalking, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment and sexual harassment.²⁶ Female Genital Mutilation is defined by world Health Organization as partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or other injury on the female genital organs for cultural or other non-therapeutic reasons²⁷.

Sexual Violence

Sexual Violence is a form of violence which includes forcing a person to participate in an unwanted, unsafe or degrading sexual activity. Although, married couples have consensual sex, marital rape happens between married couples when there is lack of consent.²⁸ Sexual violence therefore encompasses rape, wife rape, defilement, unwanted sexual advances or harassment including demanding sex for favors, sexual abuse of mentally, physical disabled people, forced marriage or cohabitation, denial of right to use contraception or to adopt other measures to protect against sexually transmitted diseases, forced abortion, forced prostitution and trafficking of persons for the purpose of sexual exploitation and violent acts against the sexual integrity of women including female genital mutilation and obligatory inspection for virginity,²⁹ incest and other forms of sexual abuses. Research has shown how penis and rape is being used as a weapon and effective way by men to intimidate their women and girl. Arinze-Umobi³⁰

Emotional/Psychological Abuse

Emotional/psychological abuse is one of the considerable abused which usually followed by other form of domestic violence, including verbal, physical, and sexual. Domestic violence is not a new phenomenon in a married woman's life. However, emotional abuse is given less attention than other forms of abuse, such as physical abuse. Emotional/Psychological or non-verbal abuse, can be defined as intentional use of power, including the threat of physical force, against another person or group that can result in harm to physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development. Yelling, name-calling, blaming, shaming, isolation, intimidation, and controlling behavior also fall under emotional abuse. Additionally, abusers who use emotional or psychological abuse often throw in threats of physical abuse. The UNICEF report (2000) highlights that 'emotional torture and living under terror is often more unbearable than physical brutality, with mental stress leading to a high incidence of suicide and suicidal attempts'. Studies indicate that women who are emotionally/psychologically abused may get mental health consequences such as depression, fear, anxiety, low self-esteem, sexual dysfunction, stress disorder with dissociation, eating disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, classic post-traumatic, flashbacks, self-harm, and even the development of multiple personality disorders and the outcome may be suicide or homicide.³¹

Economic Abuse/Financial Abuse

Economic abuse has been defined as a deliberate pattern of control in which individuals interfere with their partner's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources. Academics have sought to categorize the different forms that economic abuse can take. For instance, some authors suggest that economic abuse involves behaviors that control, exploit, or sabotage an individual's economic resources including employment. Economic abuse and financial abuse are frequently used interchangeably most time. Alternatively, abuse may be described as affecting the economic or financial security of victims of domestic violence, or causing economic or financial insecurity. The distinction made here between economic and financial abuse is that financial abuse is part of economic abuse and involves similar behaviors; however, financial abuse focuses specifically on individual money and finances and not economic resources (e.g., transportation, a place to live, employment, and education)³²

²⁵ ibid

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ WHO, UNICEF and UNFP, 'Female Genital Mutilation: A Joint WHO/UNICEF/UNFPA Statement, (1997) World Health Organization, Geneva, pp. 1-2 cited in UNICEF, 'Female Genital Mutilation/cutting: A Statistical Exploration, (2005), p.1

²⁸ I P Enemo, *Basic Principle of Family Law* (Enugu: Spectrum Books Limited, 2003) p3

²⁹World Report on Violence and Health, (2014) <<https://www.who.int/violence-injury-prevention/globalcampaign/en/chap6.pdf>> accessed 10 May 2023

³⁰ '(n 12)'

³¹A J Khan and others, 'Lifetime Prevalence of Emotional/Psychological abuse among Female Healthcare Providers' *Sociology Mind* (2014) 4 (2) <Lifetime prevalence of emotional/psychological abuse among qualified female healthcare providers. (aku.edu), accessed 26 June, 2023

³² Economic Abuse as an Invisible form of Domestic Violence: A Multi-Country Review' *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* (2018) 1<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jan-Breckenridge/publication/324063627_Economic_Abuse_as_an_Invisible_Form_of_Domestic_Violence_A_Multicountry_R

5. Causes of Gender-Based Violence

Family Upbringing and Moral Value

An individual's upbringing and moral values play a major role in the way that a person treats others, especially the family members. Often, abusive parents grew up in homes where their parents were emotionally uninvolved, physically absent, abusive, involved in substance abuse or caught up in the world of success³³. This issue may be one of the least reasons for domestic violence but it seems to be very foundational to the various causes of domestic violence. A man who grew up in a family where the father does not respect the mother or grew up to believe that one can beat the wife because that was what the father always did to the mother will equally do the same to his own wife; he will become a wife beater. It is sad and so unfortunate that some husbands beat their wives openly in the presence of their children. Some men even bring their sex partners and concubines to their matrimonial homes and the wife dare not say a word, and sadly their children are watching all of these. Such children will grow up and do worse than the father unless God takes control of their lives.³⁴ It is an Igbo adage that when a goat eats, the child keeps watching the mouth.

Cultural Belief

Culturally, fathers are seen as semi god; his words must be obeyed and no one dare question his authority. His words are always the mother's command. In fact, it is not synonymous with one family; it is the general trend in African society. 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 that lead to the justification of domestic violence³⁵ however, the Hausa are more supportive of domestic violence and view it as an inherent right of a husband. It is basically because most women look up to their husbands for everything. A typical orientation is that women should only be concerned about women matters. This has given the man great room to treat the woman as a piece of furniture and to exercise control at all levels of her life. And as Africans, men cannot swallow the pills when it becomes obvious that the woman is no longer submissive as a slave, the man goes berserk resulting in abuse-beating.

Religious Belief

Apart from the culture, there is a religious aspect to this whole issue. Some religions one way or the other relegate women to the background. In these organizations, women are the ones who have to cover themselves when going out, they are the ones who should not participate in discussions when the men are talking even if it is just a visitor to their husbands. They are taught that women should be silent during religious functions no matter their objections; their view should not be heard. The challenge is that the more men keep hearing these sermons, they are hardened and anytime their wives violate these 'commands' they will be ready for trouble. Most men interpret the bible wrongly in order to abuse their partner physically and emotionally. Being submissive does not entail being a slave, it means that there should be hierarchy in a home to avoid problem.

Financial Issue

Traditionally, the man is considered the bread winner of the home. He is expected to make money available for the family upkeep. However, these days it has become expedient for the woman to take on some kind of job either to fulfill her professional goal or to supplement the family food budget. Where this is not forthcoming is the beginning of a danger signal, especially if the woman can ill afford to make a substantial contribution. The danger becomes even more acute if the woman believes the man makes more money but fails to give sufficient amount to feed the family. The woman nags and complains in the presence of the children. She makes the children feel that their father has failed in his duty and therefore, is useless. Quarrels usually ensue; even fighting, swearing and cursing become the order of the day. Obviously, a poor emotional environment is created. The couple may now be co-habiting and not really be living as a happy family. Love is lost and respect is lost for one another. At this point, anything is possible. On the other hand, Economic power of a woman can contribute to domestic violence against me. Being a successful or higher earning career woman is many women's dream but it wildly believes that it is often the single woman's albatross when it comes to marriage or relationship. The social expectation in our society has conditioned men as the higher earner, therefore, the bread-winner in the home. The way education and greater exposure are opening the flood gates of higher

view/links/5ac5897c0f7e9b1067d4ce9e/Economic-Abuse-as-an-Invisible-Form-of-Domestic-Violence-A-Multicountry-Review.pdf> accessed 13th May, 2023.

³³ M Rosenberger, *Issues in Focus: Gaining a Clear Biblical Perspective on the Complex Issues of Our Time* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books 1969)

³⁴S A Ishola, 'Domestic Violence: The Nigeria Experience', (2016) 13, <<http://africansdahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Domestic-Violence-The-Nigerian-Experience-by-Ishola.pdf>>accessed 22 May, 2023

³⁵O Olagbegi and others, 'Nigeria Women Situation' <http://www.wildafao.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=84&Itemid=66&lang=en.>ccessed 22 May, 2023

earning for women today and creating situations where women earn more than their male counterparts has changed the family pattern and setting whereby he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Women empowerment has been discovered to be killing romance, peace and love in the home front³⁶ abandoned the wives in the hospital on hearing that she delivers a baby girl.

Drugs and Alcoholism

Some of the deviant behaviors resulting in domestic violence are said to be traceable to drugs and alcoholism. When a person, it could be a man or woman is now into drug, he or she becomes a danger to those around him or her. Those who abuse alcohol, narcotics, morphine, heroin or stimulants such as cocaine, marijuana among others are capable of causing harm to other people under the influence of such substances. In Nigeria, many people easily get hooked to some of these drugs as a result of peer influence, particularly through constant association with bad people³⁷. A drug addict most time is an abuser likewise a drunkard. There are some instances where a man will come home and start to abuse his wife and children and on close examination it will be revealed that he is drunk to stupor.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Gender-based violence has eaten deep into the fabric of the society in no small measure. This study has identified major theories and causes of gender-based violence in Nigeria. It discovers that there are numerous forms of gender based violence which are not restricted to sexual abuse, economic abuse, emotional abuse to mention but a few. There should, therefore, be an increase in public education and awareness which are required regarding the behaviors, causes, and effects of gender-based violence. All hand should be on the desk to ensure that people from remote environments are aware of the evil inherent in such violence and how one can escape from its despicable effect. Government and its agencies should endeavor to provide more shelter in the state to ensure that victims of gender-based violence are well taking care of. This will go a long way in encouraging the victims of abuse not to live with their abusers should be specifically identified as a crime. NGOs, a nearby domestic abuse shelter, and police community outreach officers can all help spread this understanding. The traditional views of the populace regarding violence should be altered with the help of traditional leaders, community development professionals, and religious figures. The culture of silence that allows the abusers to roam free should be broken, and victims of domestic violence should be encouraged to speak out in public. Additionally, they should have detailed information on escape routes, where to look for assistance, and self-defense techniques. The media and numerous health-related organizations can help raise this awareness. Additionally, more pro bono cases should be taken on by attorneys to help women who actually need legal counsel and representation. This campaign may potentially be funded by public donations and international organizations.

³⁶ Are men intimidated by higher-earning women?' 'The home front, daily Trust of 30th March, 2012) 39 cited in O Abifarin and H A Hammed, 'An Appraisal of the Legal Framework for Control and Prevention of Domestic Violence Against Men in Africa' (2013) Nnewi Diocesan Archival Series (NDAS) 110

³⁷ U Awolowo, 'Facing the Problem we are Avoiding'. (2013) The Nigerian Tribune.