

# Counselling Response to Victims of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

By  
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## Introduction:

Domestic violence is a serious phenomena confronting human society by disturbing the peaceful coexistence of the home or family. This act, according to the office of violence against women (2007), occurs to anyone regardless of race, age, sex, and religion. The term is also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, battering, family violence, and intimate partner violence. Domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviour is display by one who is into an intimate relationships like dating, marriage, family. This abusive behaviour takes various forms, such as physical assault, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, domineering intimidation, resource deprivation (Seimeniuk et al., 2010). In Nigeria, women experience domestic violence than men, this view is supported by Amnesty International (2007) who reported that two-thirds of women are subjected to sexual, physical and psychological violence performed by their husbands, partners and family members (Oluremi, 2015). This act is promoted by factors such as jealousy, social stress, and social learning as it creates fear, insecurity and discomfort among members of the family. With these ills domestic violence must be considered and dealt with as an amoral practice, which the church needs to respond to through counselling response towards victims and perpetrators

## Overview of Domestic Violence :

Domestic violence connotes actions and behaviours that occur in form of physical attack, sexual violations, which can take from bruising to killing. To some, the term

“domestic violence” involves psychological violence, which consists of repeated verbal abuse, harassment, denial from physical, financial, or personal resources. It is physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse performed by an individual against intimate partners in order to create or maintain authority and control. According to World Health Organisation (WHO), violence is "the behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that caused physical, sexual or psychological harm and includes physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviour." Domestic violence is a pattern of controlling behaviour imposed on a woman by an intimate partner without any form of regard to her rights, feelings, body, or health. According to Kunhiyop (2008: 243), domestic violence involves abuse of power in intimate relationships within a household. He further opined that domestic violence is linked to control and manipulation of the Victim by the perpetrator. It is a form of coercive and assaultive behaviours used by an individual against his or her current or former intimate partners (Unicef, 2006: 3).

Domestic violence as an act of abusive behaviour over one's partner takes different forms. These forms can also be considered as types of domestic violence among which six will be considered, they are emotional abuse, sexual violence, physical violence, social assault, economic assault, spiritual abuse.

Emotional abuse: emotional abuse is an instrument used by individuals who want to make their partners feel worthless, or scared

with the aim to control the Victim. This form of violence takes various forms of verbal and humiliation like repeated verbal attacks concerning Victim's worth. It also includes humiliating the Victim by claiming he or she is incompetent in front of friends or strangers (Ganley, 1995:19). WHO (2012: 1) viewed emotional abuse as psychological abuse, which includes insults, belittling, constant humiliation, intimidation, and threats of harm. Emotional Abuse involves harming a person's sense of self-worth by causing serious emotional disorders through abusive acts like criticism, name-calling, intimidating or exploitation to dominate, terrorizing an individual verbally or physically (Obi and Ozunba, 2007).

**Sexual violence:** Sexual violence is also categorized as physical abuse, but clinical practitioners differentiate it from physical abuse through their definition. They defined sexual violence as any unwanted sexual activity (Flury, Nyberg, and Riecher-Rössler, 2010: 4). According to Chhikara et al. (2013: 72), sexual violence is any situation in which threat or force is used to obtain involvement in unwanted sexual activity. They further viewed it as coercing an individual into sexual activity against her will even if such a person is a spouse or intimate partner. FAQO83 (2017: 1) opined that sexual abuse is forced sexual activity involving vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse.

**Physical violence:** refers to any behaviour in which the body of the perpetrator intentionally affects the body of another person (Nyberg and Riecher-Rössler, 2010: 6). This physical abuse, according to Chhikara et al. (2013), involves contact intended to cause feelings of intimidation, pain, injury, or other physical bodily harm. It includes any form of contact that results in physical injury to the Victim (71). Activities such as pushing, hitting, slapping, kicking, choking, beating, or attacking with a weapon

on an individual are considered as physical violence (FAQO83, 2017: 1).

### **Causes of Domestic Violence within a Family:**

Numerous factors are causing domestic violence within a home or relationship. These include

i. **Psychological factors:** these are considered as personality traits and mental characteristics of the culprits. Personal traits in this regard include abrupt bursts of anger, poor impulse control, and poor self-esteem. Also, psychopathology and other personality disorders and abuse witness or experienced at childhood stage lead some individuals to be more violent in adulthood (Alokan, 2013).

ii. **Jealousy:** Domestic violence within the home occur due to jealousy towards a partner who is either view as unfaithful or considered as having no more interest in the relationship. It is considered in psychology as an attempts to control the reproduction of sexual exclusivity of the female through violence or the threat of violence (Alokan, 2013). This act of jealousy is highly in a polygamous marriage where lies and misrepresentation towards gaining favour or higher level of attention from the husband is on the increase (Kunhiyop, 2008).

iii. **Social Stress:** there can be increased in one's stress when he or she is living under a family with increased pressures. Some individuals use violence as a response to stress (Bevan and Higgins, 2002). Poor families are more likely to be victims of domestic violence, due to increased stress and monetary conflicts and other aspects. Social tolerance of violence and lack of sanctioning of perpetrators also contributes to domestic violence (Bevan and Higgins, 2002).

iv. **Social Learning:** exposure to violent behaviour makes an individual more vulnerable to imitating it, and where there are no negative penalties, and the victim

accepts the act as a way of life, then the behaviour may continue (Bevan and Higgins, 2002). Kunhiyop (2008) viewed this social learning as learned behaviour under which he opined that a child of an abusive family or home is likely to be abusive himself as the environment he grew up in is visible in his marriage and maintenance of vicious circle.

v. Power and Control: perpetrators of domestic violence do so in order to establish and maintain control over their partners or the household in general. This act of dominance has been attributed to low self-esteem, the stress of poverty, hostility, unresolved childhood conflicts, and resentment toward women (misogyny) (Oluremi, 2015).

vi. Substance abuse: the intoxication derived from the abuse of substance makes an individual intolerable of any argument or disagreement from their spouse or wards as they are vulnerable to misinterpreting any action as insulting, and they respond in violence (Kunhiyop, 2008).

#### **Effects Of Domestic Violence:**

i. Effect on the Wards: wards exposed to domestic violence while growing will suffer in their development and psychological welfare (Alokan, 2013). The children may experience emotional and behavioural problems like increased aggression, anxiety, and changes in socializing with friends, family, and others (Oluremi, 2015).

ii. Physical effect: domestic violence inflict bruises, injuries, internal bleeding in the victims (Oluremi, 2015). Some pregnant victims experience a greater risk of miscarriage, pre-term labour, and injury to or death of the fetus.

iii. Psychological Effect: domestic violence increases in victims high level of stress, fear and anxiety, and depression. The common psychological consequence of domestic violence is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

(PSTD), characterized by flashbacks, disturbing images, nightmares, and avoidance of triggers that are associated with the violence (Oluremi, 2015). Generally, victims of domestic violence live in fear and intimidation, and the continuous insecurity in which they live can also lead to difficulty in sleep. Separation is another effect of domestic violence, which may affect the wards as there will be a limit or no parental care towards them.

#### **Counselling Response To Victims Of Domestic Violence:**

Domestic violence causes serious harm to mutual intimacy within the home. Hence, Counselling victims is targeted towards providing emotional healing, genuine resolution, a change of lifestyle, better interpersonal relationship, and better intimacy between the perpetrator and victim. In providing this counselling towards victims of domestic violence, it essential to note that the counsellor need to be careful of transference and countertransference in the counseling process in order not to lose the essence of the counseling relationship. The counselling strategies or response that would be examined are:

Guiding the Victim towards Actual Healing Domestic violence, in most cases leads to insecurity within the family as the event may warrant people intruding into the affairs of such family. The aim of the counselling relationship should centre on providing healing for the harm the violence had caused within the home. To achieve this healing, the counsellor is expected to express empathy, warmth, and readiness to assist victims over the crisis. The counsellor should listen to the victim as she or he is narrating the story. In intervening, which comes after listening to both parties and deducing the real problem, the counsellor should choose the right words to help the victim get over the wounds adequately.

Guide Victim towards Genuine Resolution  
Resolution also connotes reconciliation, which means reconciling men to men. This act of reconciling is the primary task of a post marital counsellor. The counsellor has the responsibility to settle discord between couples in order to experience an upright relationship by being reunited to enjoying smoothness in living as one family. The counsellor should provide care, compassion, and support to victims of domestic violence, so as to enhance harmonious relationship against the discord within the family.

Guide Victim towards Character Alteration  
The counsellor is also having the task of guiding the victims and perpetrators of domestic violence towards checkmating their way of life that enhances violence within the home and the need for adjustment for peace to exist. In providing this guidance, the counsellor needs wisdom in enlightening victims on the steps to take. Also, the counsellor should call the victims to the need to build some attitude or practices that are important and essential in sustaining better and meaningful relationships within the family. The counsellor should direct victims towards observing discipline that will enhance their behaviour, perception, and interpersonal relationship in the family.

Nurture Victim towards better Union  
Domestic violence is an evidence of breakdown in relationship within the home. Violence in the home can destroy and deteriorate the security of the home to an absorbent state. Insecurity within has effect on the family's confidence in the relationship becomes an illusion. At this point of insecurity fear, suspicion and feeling of incompatibility sets in within the Victim. The counsellor is with the responsibility to educate Victim because through this character and behaviour can be changed. In nurturing the victim and

perpetrator, the counsellor can utilize bibliotherapeutic method

Conclusion :

Domestic violence is a severe problem confronting every culture, tribe, religion, and nation. The marriage that should be a place of mutual intimacy has been turned to a war field as partners are battered on a daily basis. It is believed that factors such as jealousy, social stress, and social learning promote domestic violence. This ill practice is also having great effect on the Victim and wards of the family as it creates fear, insecurity, and discomfort among members of the family. With the effect it is having on the peaceful coexistence of the family, there is need for counselling intervention that will aim at restoring mutual intimacy between victim and perpetrator. To achieve this, the counsellor needs to guide, nurture, and educate victims towards healing and the perpetrators towards character alteration.

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