

## **Cultural Ideology and Domestic Violence Against Women In Southeastern Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The increasing spate of domestic violence against women in Nigeria has assumed an alarming proportion, and has become a source of concern considering the negative consequences of abuse on the health and psycho-social status of women. Several literatures on domestic violence against women attest to the fact that this dastardly act is embedded in cultural norms and religious dogmatism. This study was therefore conducted to investigate the dimensions in which culture accounts for abuse of women in the southeast zone of Nigeria. Data was generated from secondary sources as well as empirical studies conducted on different issues of abuse against women and girls. The liberal feminist theory was adopted in explaining the reasons behind the advocacy and elimination of violence against women. Findings showed that culture has really accounted for over 80% of violence meted against women globally, as manifestations of historically unequal distribution of power between men and women, driven by socioeconomic forces, the family institution where power relations are enforced, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of males, and legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status. To address this issue, the study recommended an integrated approach involving stakeholders at the level of the family, local community, civil society, the state and international organisations. The study concludes that culture should be reformed to serve man, and not man to serve culture, and give women space to develop their potentials and participate to achieve a balanced development.

**Key words: Culture, Ideology, Violence, Violence Against Women, Domestic Violence**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

In most developing countries, gender relations are largely determined by traditional patriarchal culture and religious ideas and upbringing. This ideology has thus been a major determinant of the role of women in these societies (Beazley and Desai, 2008). It was on that note that Varley (2008) described the family and household as “cultural constructs”. Day (2006) views patriarchy as a system in which power and authority are vested in men, while women and other powerless groups such as children, workers and slaves, are oppressed and often owned. More than domination of women by men, Day (2006) traced the power of the patriarchs to early in history when the men head of families (patriarchs) arrogated themselves absolute power over families and clans and began to defeat weaker groups. The patriarchy structure was coupled with religious legitimization of conquest to produce a new form of society – one based on male authority and rights. This has today become a worldwide system of exploiting women (sexism).

In a patriarchy system, male dominance is pronounced in every sphere of the social system. In the polity, most elected and appointed sensitive positions are held by men, they make laws and take decisions, in the economy, men have control over capital, resources, production and distribution of goods and services, in religion men hold the highest positions and dictate moral standards of societies and in the family, men take major decisions as heads of the house. Under the male dominated society, women suffer dual oppression: as women in male societies and as workers in patriarchal system. (Day, 2006) This was a system where women have been bought, sold, given to marriage for political liaisons, and laws that control their sexuality vis-a-vis reproduction geared towards producing children as workers, or to sustain men’s inheritances. Women and their children under this system remain perpetually economically dependent on the men.

McIlwaine (2008) pointed out the increasing global violence as an important development issue, and located the salient aspects of this debate on gender-and-age-based violence. This aspect usually involves violence against women and children, and which seldomly involve men and the elderly. According to the United Nations (1993), gender-based violence denotes: “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 deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life". This nature of violence invariably erodes women and children freedom of participation in societal activities, infringe on their fundamental human rights, as well as impeded efficiency and development interventions. Thus, McIlwaine (2008) noted that It was only in 1993 that United Nations made a formal declaration calling for elimination of violence against women.

Violence against women is a universal phenomenon, present in every country cutting across the boundaries of cultural, class, education, income, ethnicity and age. The recent prohibition of violence against women notwithstanding, the reality according to UNICEF (2000) is that violation of the rights of women are often sanctioned under the covering of cultural practices and norm, or through misinterpretation of religious doctrines. Furtherance to that unfortunate situation, when the violence is meted, the state and law enforcement machineries tactfully condole it by their passivity and tacit display of silence. Thus, studies on the incidents and prevalence of violence against women have revealed an alarming global dimension of this ugly practice. (UNICEF, 2000) therefore noted that this ugly incident occurs in every country with variations in patterns and trends in different countries. Sometimes specific groups of women such as minority, refugees, migrant women, those with disabilities and those in conditions of armed conflict are more vulnerable than others. It was revealed that the dearth of data notwithstanding, studies estimated that in different countries, between 20 to 50 percent of women have experienced physical violence from their intimate partners or family members. This is demonstrated in table 1 below:

**Table no 1 -Domestic violence against women in different societies**

<b>Industrialized Countries</b>	<b>Record of Domestic Violence Against Women</b>
Canada	29% of women (a nationally representative sample of 12,300 women) reported being physically assaulted by a current or former partner since the age of 16. 59% of 796 women surveyed in 1993 reported being physically abused by their partner. 20% of 314 women surveyed reported being hit or physically abused by a male partner. 20% of 1,500 women reported being physically assaulted according to a 1997 survey. 25% of women (a random sample of women from one district) had been punched or slapped by a partner or ex-partner in their lifetime. 28% of women (a nationally representative sample of women) reported at least one episode of physical violence from their partner.
Japan	
New Zealand	
Switzerland	
United Kingdom	
United States	
<b>Asia and the Pacific</b>	
Cambodia	
India	
Korea	
Thailand	
<b>Middle East</b>	35% of women (a nationally representative sample of women) reported being beaten by their husband at some point in their marriage. 32% of women reported at least one episode of physical abuse by their partner and 30% report sexual coercion by their husbands in the previous year, according to a 1997 survey of 1,826 Arab women.
Egypt	
Israel	
<b>Africa</b>	42% of 612 women surveyed in one district reported having been beaten by a partner; of those 58% reported that they were beaten often or sometimes. 41% of women reported being beaten or physically harmed by a partner; 41% of men reported beating their partner (representative sample of women and their partners in two districts). 32% of 966 women in one province reported physical abuse by a family or household member since the age of 16, according to a 1996 survey.
Kenya	
Uganda	
Zimbabwe	

<p><b><u>Latin America and the Caribbean</u></b></p> <p>Chile</p> <p>Colombia</p> <p>Mexico</p> <p>Nicaragua</p>	<p>26% of women (representative sample of women from Santiago) reported at least one episode of violence by a partner, 11% reported at least one episode of severe violence and 15% of women reported at least one episode of less severe violence.</p> <p>19% of 6,097 women surveyed have been physically assaulted by their partner in their lifetime.</p> <p>30% of 650 women surveyed in Guadalajara reported at least one episode of physical violence by a partner; 13% reported physical violence within the previous year, according to a 1997 report.</p> <p>52% of women (representative sample of women in León) reported being physically abused by a partner at least once; 27% reported physical abuse in the previous year, according to a 1996 report.</p>
<p><b><u>Central and Eastern Europe/CIS/Baltic States</u></b></p> <p>Estonia</p> <p>Poland</p> <p>Russia (St. Petersburg)</p> <p>Tajikistan</p>	<p>29% of women aged 18-24 fear domestic violence, and the share rises with age, affecting 52% of women 65 or older, according to a 1994 survey of 2,315 women.</p> <p>60% of divorced women surveyed in 1993 by the Centre for the Examination of Public Opinion reported having been hit at least once by their ex-husbands; an additional 25% reported repeated violence.</p> <p>25% of girls (and 11% of boys) reported unwanted sexual contact, according to a survey of 174 boys and 172 girls in grade 10 (aged 14-17).</p> <p>23% of 550 women aged 18-40 reported physical abuse, according to a survey.</p>

(Adapted from “Violence Against Women,” WHO, FRH/WHO/97.8, “Women in Transition,” Regional Monitoring Report, UNICEF 1999, and a study by Domestic Violence Research Centre, Japan.)

The editorial column of UNICEF (2000) publication – Innocent Digest, on domestic violence decried the great danger faced by women and girls in their families, a place where ordinarily they should be safest. Many of them face terror and violence at their homes in the hands of someone close to them who should be trusted. The violent experience suffered by women subject them to physical and psychological trauma, as they are unable to make their own decisions, voice their opinions, or protect their children for fear of further repercussions. The ever-present threat of violence denies them of their rights and steal their lives from them.

The publication equally pointed out that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men, and the prevention of the full advancement of women” (UNICEF, 1993). Violence against women has been noted as most pervasive of human rights violations, denying women and girls equality, security, dignity, self-worth and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms (UNICEF, 2000).

Thus, instead of the family being equated with sanctuary, a place of love, safety, security and shelter, it has become for some women a place that imperils lives and perpetrates the most drastic forms of violence against women. Violence in the home is orchestrated by male partners who have been in position of trust, intimacy and power as husbands, boy-friends, fathers, fathers-in-law, step-fathers, brothers, uncles, sons and other relatives. (UNICEF, 2000) decried that violence against women is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives (see Table 1). Even at the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex-selective abortion or female infanticide in cultures where there is preference for male children to females. During childhood, male children may enjoy better nutrition and access to medical care and education than the girls. Others forms of violence against female children may include incest, female genital mutilation, early marriage, and forced prostitution or bonded labour. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives – battered, raped and even murdered at the hands of intimate partners. Other crimes of violence against women include forced pregnancy, abortion or sterilization, and harmful traditional practices such as dowry-related

violence, sati (the burning of a widow on the funeral pyre of her husband), and killings in the name of honour. Later in life also, widows and the elderly may experience abuse.

**Table no2–Shows Violence Against Women throughout Life Cycle**

<b>Phase</b>	<b>Type of Violence</b>
Pre-birth	Sex-selective abortion; effects of battering during pregnancy on birth outcomes.
Infancy	Female infanticide; physical, sexual and psychological abuse.
Girlhood	Child marriage; female genital mutilation; physical, sexual and psychological abuse; incest; child prostitution and pornography.
Adolescence and Adulthood	Dating and courtship violence (e.g. acid throwing and date rape) economically coerced sex (e.g. school girls having sex with “sugar daddies” in return for school fees); incest; sexual abuse in the workplace; rape; sexual harassment; forced prostitution and pornography; trafficking in women; partner violence; marital rape; dowry abuse and murders; partner homicide; psychological abuse; abuse of women with disabilities; forced pregnancy.
Elderly	Forced “suicide” or homicide of widows for economic reasons; sexual, physical and psychological abuse.

(Source: UNICEF 2000, Domestic violence against women and girls: Florence, Italy: Innocenti Digest)

Moser and McIlwaine (2008) pointed out that any definition of violence usually involves the use of physical force that hurts others in order to impose a wish or desire, and that the primary motif behind perpetration of violence either consciously or unconsciously is to gain and maintain power which may be political, economic or social.

Among the Dani or Ndani people of Central highlands of Western New Guinea, a tribe not known until the 1930s when it was discovered in the highlands of Western New Indonesia. One of their major traditional rituals is what they called Ikipalin. Ikipalin is a finger cutting ritual practiced mostly by women of the Dani tribe. The highpoint of this ritual was that a woman cuts off the top of her finger when a relation dies. It is a physical expression of emotional pain of losing and mourning a loved one. When this custom was practiced, it was strictly obeyed by women. This implied that the more a woman loses a relation, the higher the number of top fingers she will part with. (Lichtefeld, 2017).

However, in addition to prohibition of violence on women declared by UNICEF (1993), the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria 1999 (amended 2011) provides for human rights protection. The provision for human rights protection is enshrined in chapter IV of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, (1999), which contains the civil/political rights which are stated as the fundamental and justiciable rights (sections 33-46). These rights as specified in chapter IV of the constitution include the right to: life, dignity of human person, personal liberty, fair hearing, private and family life, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and the press, peaceful assembly and association, freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination, acquire and own immovable property anywhere in Nigeria, and such property cannot be compulsorily taken over except under certain conditions. Citizens are also given rights to enforce the above stated rights in the incident of their violation.

Despite all these interventions, women in the eastern part of the country experience continued subjection to various forms of violence from their intimate partners and family members. Against this background, this paper examined the dimensions of patriarch culture and how its unequal power relations engender such unabated violence against women, and how such practice can be curtailed to provide women with some succor, focusing on the south eastern part of Nigeria.

## **II. DEFINITION OF RELEVANT TERMS**

### **Culture**

UNESCO (2001), defines culture as “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, that encompasses, not only art and literature, but life styles, ways of living together, value system, traditions and believes”.

### **Ideology**

Ideology is conceived as the lens through which a person views the world; within the field of sociology, ideology is broadly referred to as the sum total of a person’s values, believes, assumptions and expectations. Ideology exists within the society, within groups and between people. It shapes our thoughts, actions and interactions along with what happens in the society. Ideology is a fundamental concept in sociology; sociologist study it because of the pivotal roles it plays in shaping and organizing the society. It directly relates

to social structure, economic relation of production and political framework. It emerges from these structures and shape them. (Cole, N.L., 2019).

### **Violence**

The American Psychological Association (AP) (2020) views violence as an extreme form of aggression such as assault, rape or murder. They pointed out that violence can be caused by frustration, exposure to violent media, evidence in the home or neighbourhood, and a tendency to see other people's action as hostile one even when they are not. Certain conditions could lead to violence: alcoholism, assault, such as heat and other forms of provocation and or environmental factors such as overcrowding.

### **Domestic Violence**

The Centre for Family Justice (2020) defines Domestic Violence as a pattern of coercive, controlling behaviour that is pervasive life-threatening crime affecting people in all our communities regardless of gender, age, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, social standing and immigration status; and identify domestic violence to occur in several forms such as physical, emotional, economic, stalking, harassment and sexual abuse.

### **Violence Against Women**

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defines violence against women as "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. This definition refers to the gender-based roots of violence, recognizing that "violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men." It broadens the definition of violence by including both the physical and psychological harm done towards women, and it includes acts in both private and public life. The Declaration defines violence against women as encompassing, but not limited to, three areas: violence occurring in the family, within the general community, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the State.

## **III. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

**Feminism:** This paper adopts the Feminist Theory as the framework for advocating for prohibition of violence against women. The feminist theory encourages equality of men and women. The feminist theory is built around the following principles:

- i. Working to increase equality; insisting for a change towards gender equality;
- ii. Expanding human choice; Feminist believe that both men and women should be free to develop their human interests and talents, even when those interest is in conflict with the statusquo. For instance, if a woman wants to be a mechanic, should be given the right and opportunity to do so;
- iii. Eliminating gender stratification; Feminist abhors laws and cultural norms that limit income, educational and job opportunities for women;
- iv. Ending sexual violence & promoting sexual freedom; Feminist feel that women should have control over their sexuality and reproduction

The Liberal feminist idea is the form of feminism that corresponds with the subject matter of this study. The liberal feminist perspective originated from classic liberal idea which believes that individuals should enjoy the freedom to develop their talents and pursue their own interests. This idea sees inequality as a product of our social and cultural institutions. Liberal feminist scholars do not advocate a reorganisation of the society, but seek to expand the rights and opportunities for women. The focus is on guaranteeing equal opportunity for women through legislation. (Kimberly, 2020)

The Centre for Family Justice (2020) identified the different forms of domestic violence to include the following:

**Physical abuse:** This occurs when a victim experiences among others: scratching, biting, grabbing or spitting, shoving and pushing, slapping and punching, throwing objects to hurt and intimidate the victim, destroying possessions or treasured objects, hurting or threatening to hurt your child or pet, disrupting your sleeping

patterns to make you feel exhausted, burning, strangling, attacking or threat to attack with a weapon, any threats or actual attempt to kill. Physical abuse may or may not leave marks or cause permanent damage.

**Emotional/psychological abuse:** This form of abuse is used by a partner to control or damage your emotional well-being of his victim. It includes: name-calling, mocking, intimidation or making humiliating remarks or gestures, yelling in the victim’s face or standing in a menacing way, manipulating her children, telling the victim what she can do and not do, where to go and not to go, placing little value on what the victim says, interrupting, changing topic, not listening or responding, and twisting the victim’s words, putting her down in front of others, saying negative things about her friends and family, preventing or making it difficult for her to see friends or relatives, cheating or being overtly jealous, shifting responsibility for abusive behavior by blaming others or saying you caused it, monitoring her phone calls, texts, car or computer use. It can be verbal or non-verbal.

**Economic /Financial Abuse:** This happens when the abuser makes a victim entirely financially dependent on the abuser, with no power or say in the relationship. It manifests in the following ways: forbidden the victim to work or attend school, sabotaging employment opportunities by giving the victim black eye, or other visible injury prior to an important meeting, jeopardizing employment by stalking or harassing the victim at the workplace, denying access to a vehicle or damaging the vehicle so that the victim cannot get to work, sabotaging educational opportunities by destroying class assignment, denying access to bank accounts, hiding family assets, running up debt in the victim’s name.

**Stalking and Harassment:** This happens in a relationship where the abuser or ex demand your time even after you make it clear you do not want contact. It manifests as making unwanted visits or sending unwanted messages, following you, including installing GPS tracking software on your car or cell phones without your knowledge or consent, checking up on you constantly, embarrassing you in public and refusing to leave when asked.

**Sexual abuse.** This occurs in committed relationships and marriages. Unfortunately, many societies hardly consider forced sex as a crime of rape in an intimate relationship. The assumption is that once a woman is married, the husband or her intimate partner has unabated sexual right over her. Others are:

**Traditional cultural practices affecting the lives and health of women.** Women and girls around the world are subjected to very obnoxious and life-threatening and debasing cultural practices in the name of keeping with traditional and religious belief system. Examples are widowhood right and Female Genital Mutilation. **Sex-selective abortion, female infanticide/femicide** which means murder of women by their partners and intimidators. Research conducted in Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Kenya, Thailand and USA has shown several cases of femicide within the domestic sphere. (UNICEF, 2000)

Looking at the causes of violence against women, UNICEF Digest, (2000) pointed out that there is no one single factor to account for violence perpetrated against women. It noted that more often than not, research has focused on the inter-relatedness of various factors that should aid the understanding of the problem within different cultural contexts. Several complex and interconnected institutionalised social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them, all of them are manifestations of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Factors contributing to these unequal power relations include: socioeconomic forces, the family institution where power relations are enforced, fear of and control over female sexuality, belief in the inherent superiority of males, and legislation and cultural sanctions that have traditionally denied women and children an independent legal and social status. Lack of economic resources underpins women’s vulnerability to violence and their difficulty in detaching themselves from a violent relationship.

**Table no 3:** Factors That Perpetuate Domestic Violence

Cultural	Gender-specific socialization Cultural definitions of appropriate sex roles Expectations of roles within relationships Belief in the inherent superiority of males Values that give men proprietary rights over women and girls Notion of the family as the private sphere and under male control Customs of marriage (bride price/dowry) Acceptability of violence as a means to resolve conflict
Economic	Women’s economic dependence on men Limited access to cash and credit Discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal

	lands, and maintenance after divorce or widowhood Limited access to employment in formal and informal sectors Limited access to education and training for women
Legal	Lesser legal status of women either by written law and/or by practice Laws regarding divorce, child custody, maintenance and inheritance Legal definitions of rape and domestic abuse Low levels of legal literacy among women Insensitive treatment of women and girls by police and judiciary
Political	Under-representation of women in power, politics, the media and in the legal and medical professions Domestic violence not taken seriously Notions of family being private and beyond control of the state Risk of challenge to status quo/religious laws Limited organization of women as a political force Limited participation of women in organized political system

(Source: UNICEF 2000, Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls: Florence, Italy: Innocenti Digest)

#### IV. FINDINGS

##### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

Onoh, Umearo, Ezeonu, Onyebuchi, Lawani and Agwu (2013) conducted a study to determine the prevalence, pattern and consequences of Intimate Partner Violence during pregnancy at Abakaliki, Southeast Nigeria. A semi structural questionnaire was designed for a cross-sectional survey of women attending antenatal clinic between April and June 2011 at Federal Medical Centre, Abakaliki. The research team collected a total of 321 duly filled questionnaires. This data was analysed using what they called Epi info software 2008 in Atlanta USA. Result showed that 44.6% ie 143 out of 321 women reported having been abused in the index pregnancy by their husbands. The cause of the violence was also identified as follows: 20.1% for unidentifiable causes, 19.4% caused by domestic issues, 12.5% caused by keeping late nights, 11.8% by financial problem. Verbal abuse of the women, discovered as the most common form of abuse constituted 60.1%. ie 86 out of 143. Consequent upon the abuse, 7.7% was hospitalized, while 21% sustained emotional and physical injuries. The research concluded that there are still different forms of abuse being meted against women, and warned that violence against women from intimate partners poses a high risk on the reproductive health of women especially during pregnancy.

Similarly, Ezegwuietal (2004) carried out a research to estimate the prevalence of domestic violence against pregnant women in Enugu, Nigeria, and to identify the risk factors promoting such violence. In the study, a self-reporting domestic abuse questionnaire was distributed to 409 women attending antenatal clinic at the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital between May and August 2000. Result showed that 152 representing (37.2%) had a previous history of abuse, 53 women, representing (13%) had experienced violence in the preceding two months, 45 being (11%) experienced violence in the index pregnancy, 1 representing 2.7% had experienced sexual abuse in the preceding one year, while (3.4%) confessed being afraid of their husbands. The risk factors of violence were arranged in descending order and presented as follows: financial problems accounted for (17.7%), having female children accounted for (11.1), unplanned pregnancy (8.8%) unemployment (4.4) while (4.4%) resulted from previous caesarean section. It was concluded from the research that occurrence of domestic violence is more on pregnant women. The study therefore recommended for introduction of routine screening of domestic violence on pregnant women.

Examining domestic violence in Imo state, Duru, Aguocha, Iwu and Oluoha (2018) all of Imo state University, carried out an empirical study to assess the prevalence, patterns and determinants of domestic violence against women in households in some communities in Imo state. Their research team carried out a cross-sectional descriptive study among 600 women from different households in Imo state. A multistage sampling technique was adopted in selecting the study participants, a pretested and semi-structured questionnaire administered by the interviewer was used for data collection. Data collected was analyzed using a computer software (EPI INFOR version 7.1.3, CDC, USA). Result obtained from the study showed that (72.8%) of the women had experienced domestic violence in their lifetime while (42.6%) currently experience domestic violence, (49.2%) had experienced physical abuse while (31.2%) had suffered sexual abuse. Factors associated with abuse were found to include: age of women, religious inclination, occupational status of women, marital status, occupational status of partners, place of residence, monthly income of women, family size etc. The study concluded that the prevailing rate of domestic violence against women is high, and recommended that

all levels of government and concerned agencies should synergise to address this horrifying experience in order to make the life of women meaningful.

The case was so bad in Imo state that Alozie (2019) noted with regrets that Imo state has been tipped as “hostile and unsafe” state for women and children by Alliances for Africa, AFA, alongside members of the state committee on Violence Against Women and Children, and 12 other organisations. This position was taken following a survey on violence against women in the state, the extent of which was revealed by the representative of State Ministry of gender affairs and social development during a two-day capacity building workshop for stakeholders. The team opted for community awareness outreach in the 27 local government areas of Imo state as a strategy to end violence against women and children in the state.

In Anambra state, a study was conducted by Ndie, Osuagwu and Agwu (2018), to identify the nature of domestic violence and coping strategies adopted by women of child bearing age in Anambra state of Nigeria. The study A cross-sectional survey using a multi-stage sampling technique to select 400 women. Data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The study revealed that (22.55%) of the women had experienced sexual harassment while (13.24%) had suffered physical assault. (4.07%) had sought help from religious leaders, (3.98%) of the women had used drinking and drugs to reduce their pain, (3.96%) chose to confide in friends and family members, (3.92%) report to agencies and authorities, (3.83%) victims just hoped that one day the situation will improve while (3.76%) prefer not letting anyone know about the violence. The study concluded that victims should report cases duly, and that government should initiate policies to address the menace. It was also recommended that medical authorities should check out for symptoms of abuse, as well as ask questions on abuse as part of their patient’s medical history. Victims should be treated and referred to counsellors and psychotherapists; it was also recommended that penalties given to the offending husband should be publicised to deter others from future ill-treatment against women.

From another perspective, Amobi (2005) engaged in a qualitative study to find out the perception of rural Igbo women of Nigeria of intimate partner violence. He generated his data through in-depth interviews and focus groups discussions. This study was conducted on women of childbearing age in Ozubulu, Anambra state of Nigeria. It was found out from the research that women generally condole intimate partner violence, perceiving it as cultural and religious norms. According to the women, beating, reprimands and forced sex even though affecting their physical, mental and reproductive health are normal in marriages. From their responses, they didn’t buy into the idea of reporting or divorce as option, instead they prefer reporting to family members as they felt that exiting the marriage will not gain the support of family members. They also express fears on the uncertainties of re-marrying or coping with the social stigmatisation that follows, it as well as concern for their children. It was discovered that socio-cultural norms favour partner violence in Anambra state and by extension other parts of Igboland. The study recommended for advocacy and rigorous effort among educational, health and civil and religious sectors to curb this ugly tradition, and develop a sustainable structure for women empowerment and support so that victims can react appropriately to violence.

In Abia state, Opera (2020) reported a case of a young man who killed his mother over the woman’s complain condemning an incest going on between the young man (who is her son) and her blood female relation. The culprit was identified as Agaezichi Ogonna. The incident took place at Akpaa Mbato community in Obingwa council area of Abia state. It was gathered that the woman’s condemnation of the act didn’t go down well with her son who then bounced on her with several blows until she died.

However, the most dehumanizing, terrifying, degrading and excruciating violence experienced by women in all parts of Nigeria with variations in culture and religion is the widowhood ritual. In all parts of Nigeria, women are subjected to series of humiliating and debasing cultural practices as ways of honouring the dead husband. Such obnoxious practices worsen the socio-psychological devastation that confront a woman that is bereaved of her husband. Her case is worsened by the fact that most of these practices have overtime attained the force of traditional customary laws which makes such experiences compulsory for the women. Some of these violent practices experienced by widows in the southeastern Nigeria include the following:

As soon as a man dies, the widow is the first suspect as having a hand in his death. Based on that, Oloko (1997) noted that an Igbo man hardly dies for nothing, and usually the wife is seen as the first suspect. Where she is accused of having a hand in his death, most times she may have to exonerate herself by being forced to drink the water with which the corpse of her dead husband was washed, she may also be required to eat kolanut presented by the elders or the chief priest, or may be locked up with her husband’s corpse for days depending on the extent of the accusation. In some traditions, if a woman is suspected to have a hand in her husband’s death, she is not allowed to see the man’s corpse.

Most times the bereaved woman is forced to scream in a very and loud cry at her husband’s death every early morning and night, she is expected to cry in such a manner that her cracked subdued voice will be heard in the entire neighbourhood. Thus, women suffer double tragedy of losing their husbands sometimes at tender age, and undergoing these evil cultural rights to vindicate themselves from suspicion (Arinze-Umobi, 2008).

Before the man is buried, the woman is not expected to come out or go outside the premises until after the man’s burial. In some traditions, the woman is compelled to eat food only prepared by a widow and she eats

with her left hand, and whatever is prepared for her, she eats without any choice, while the woman bath only very early in the morning led by other women. In some cultural settings, it is a taboo for the widow to sleep in the afternoon, and sometimes she may be required to sit on the floor all day.

The burial of the man ushers in a more devastating level of the mourning. As soon as the man is buried, all hairs on her head and body must be shaved as a matter of compulsion. Arinze-Umobi and Anyogu (2011) noted that in some parts of Igbo land the bereaved woman is required to sleep with the High Priest of a deity as another ritual to separate and cleanse herself from the spirit of the dead husband. She is compulsorily isolated for about twenty-eight days and thereafter mourns for a number of months or up to one year in most cases before she can put on any other cloth apart from the morning dress which is usually either black or white coloured dress depending on their religious doctrine.

These practices are culturally entrenched and accepted among the Igbos of the South East in Nigeria. To Anyogu (2008), the supposed relevance of these culturally entrenched practices are to show respect for the dead, to facilitate the movement of the husband's spirit to the spirit world and thereby protect the living from the dead. It is clear from the above that widowhood rituals are purely gender-based, because widowers are not expected to go through these rituals. More irritating is the fact that the enforcement of these obnoxious widowhood practices are insisted on and enforced on the widows by other women. Prominent among them is the Umuada group that play major role in the enforcement of these harmful and horrible practices and rituals. The Umuadas are the daughters of the deceased immediate and extended families married to other communities. Funny enough, they ensure that these abhorable practices are enforced to the last against the widows.

In Nigeria, the right of Inheritance, custody or sharing of a deceased property is by a written 'will' or by customary and traditional rites where no will was written. With the existence of a will, all cultural considerations in respect of customary and traditional rights are ignored (Arinze-Umobi and Anyogu, 2011). For the widow, the type of marriage contracted also determines what portion of the husband's property as entitlements due a woman at the demise of her husband. Under the Nigerian legal system three forms of marriages are celebrated namely; traditional/customary marriage, religious and statutory marriages respectfully (Ekpeyong, Young and Fred, 2017). If a marriage is contracted under the Marriage Act intestate, the widow is entitled to one-third (1/3) of the deceased husband's property, while two-third (2/3) are shared equally among the children. Where there are no children to the marriage, the widow takes half the estate. (Marriage Act 2004, Administration of Estate Law of Anambra State 1991).

Sometimes cases of domestic violence are either not reported or victims are reluctant to notify the appropriate authorities. On that note, Olakunle (2013) conducted a study to examine the magnitude of domestic violence in Nigeria, and the education level of respondents, culture, Religion, and tradition vis-à-vis unreported cases of domestic violence in two heterogeneous communities in Nigeria. The study was conducted on the assumption that the level of domestic violence would reduce if women receive social support to report cases of domestic violence to the police. The study drew from quantitative data. The research drew respondents from women in Victoria Island, Lagos and Akure in Ondo state. Out of the 462 surveys analysed, 284 were from Victoria Island while 178 were drawn from Akure. The result showed that culture, attitude of police and lack of social support contributed to the unwillingness of women to report cases of domestic violence. The study therefore concluded that police officers should be given orientation on proper handling of cases of domestic violence.

## **V. CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

UNICEF (2000) has identified the following issues as consequences of perpetrating violence against women in homes:

### **Denial of fundamental rights**

UNICEF (2000) noted that the most critical consequence of violence against women and girls is the denial of their fundamental human rights. The affirmation of the principles of fundamental rights and freedoms of every human being by the International human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted in 1948, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, underscores the relevance of human rights to human existence. Both CEDAW and the CRC are guided by a broad concept of human rights that goes beyond civil and political rights to the core issues of economic survival, health, and education that affect the quality of daily life for most women and children. The two Conventions call for the right to protection from gender-based abuse and neglect. The strength of these treaties is based on an international agreement, and the assumption that all practices that harm women and girls, no matter how deeply they are embedded in culture, must be eradicated. Under international law, governments that have ratified them are legally obliged by these treaties to not only protect women from crimes of violence, but also to investigate violations as they occur and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

### **Human development goals undermined**

Moreover, there is a growing recognition that countries cannot reach their full potential as long as women are denied the opportunity to participate fully in the development of their society. Data on the social, economic and health costs of violence leave no doubt that violence against women undermines progress towards human and economic development. Women's participation has become key in all social development programmes, be they environmental, for poverty alleviation, or for good governance. By hampering the full involvement and participation of women, countries are eroding the human capital of half their populations. True indicators of a country's commitment to gender equality lie in its actions to eliminate violence against women in all its forms and in all areas of life.

### **Health consequences**

Domestic violence against women leads to far-reaching physical and psychological consequences, some with fatal outcomes. While physical injury represents only a part of the negative health impacts on women, it is among the more visible forms of violence. The United States Department of Justice has reported that 37 per cent of all women who sought medical care in hospital emergency rooms for violence-related injuries were injured by a current or former spouse or partner. Women stand the risk of disfigurement resulting from injuries incurred from assaults ranging from bruises and fractures to chronic disabilities such as partial or total loss of hearing or vision, burns, etc. The medical complications resulting from Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) can range from hemorrhage and sterility, to severe psychological trauma. A lot of women suffer violence during pregnancy. Studies in many countries have shown high levels of violence during pregnancy resulting in risk to the health of both the mother and the unborn fetus. These ranges of violence inflicted on women by their current or ex-partner can ultimately lead to death.

Sexual assaults and rape can lead to unwanted pregnancies, and the dangerous complications that follow from resorting to illegal abortions. Girls who have been sexually abused in their childhood are more likely to engage in risky behaviour such as early sexual intercourse, and are at greater risk of unwanted and early pregnancies. Women in violent situations are less able to use contraception or negotiate safer sex, and therefore run a high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. Compelling a woman to drink water with which her dead husband was bathed as a way to vindicate herself from accusation of killing her husband is inhuman, and could give her serious infections that can even take her life; not to mention the psychological trauma such unforgettable and dehumanizing treatment subjects her to. Coercing a woman to sleep with the chief priest of a deity for purification and separation from the spirit of her dead husband contravenes her fundamental right of association, in addition to exposing her to sexually transmitted diseases. The impact of violence on women's mental health leads to severe and fatal consequences. Harassed women have a high incidence of stress and stress-related illnesses such as post-traumatic stress syndrome, panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, elevated blood pressure, alcoholism, drug abuse, and low self-esteem. For some women, fatally depressed and demeaned by their abuser, there seems to be no escape from a violent relationship except suicide. (UNICEF, 2000)

### **Impact on children**

Children who have witnessed domestic violence or have themselves been victims, display health and behaviour problems, including problems with their weight, their eating and their sleep. They may have difficulty adjusting to social interaction at school and in their neighbourhood as they begin to find it difficult to develop close and positive friendships. They may try to run away or even display suicidal tendencies (UNICEF, 2000). Besides that, violence becomes part of them, they begin to see fierceness as a way of life having been brought up with an orientation of daily exposure to violent lifestyle.

## **VI. STRATEGIES FOR COMBATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:**

Domestic violence is a complex problem and there is no one strategy that will work in all situations. As noted above, violence may take place within very different societal contexts, and the degree to which it is sanctioned by a community will naturally influence the kind of strategy needed. Considering the interconnections between the factors responsible for domestic violence – gender dynamics of power, culture and economics – strategies and interventions should be designed within a comprehensive and integrated framework. UNICEF (2000) suggested a multi-layered strategy that addresses the structural causes of violence against women, while providing immediate services to victim-survivors that are sustainable and also have the potential to eliminate this scourge. In the integrated plan to strategies and interventions, there are a number of stakeholders that should have priority consideration. These stakeholders would operate at different levels. The levels according to UNICEF (2000) include:

### **The Family**

#### **Women**

At the level of the family, owing to their vulnerability to violence, women have emerged as the most significant agents of change in the struggle against gender-based violence. While women organisations have played a critical role, the collective strength and courage of individual women has been notable in fighting many forms of violence. Poor and often illiterate, these women have managed to mobilize hundreds of other women, raised resources, designed strategies and forced policy-makers to revise laws and policies. A systematic effort has to be made to listen to the voices of grassroots women and survivors of domestic violence, and to incorporate solutions they have to offer. Their perspectives will provide valuable lessons in making programmes and services effective and targeted to their needs. The role of women in the fight against gender-based violence will be enhanced by empowerment through education, employment opportunities, legal literacy, and right to inheritance. Human rights education and information regarding domestic violence should be provided to them because this is a matter of their absolute rights. Integrated supportive services, legal intervention and redress should be made available in situations of domestic violence.

#### **Men**

There are a growing number of male professionals designing and facilitating training events on gender inequality, including the issue of violence. Some are working with other men to review male behaviour and to develop new models of masculinity. There are examples of male leadership on gender violence in most parts of the world and the involvement of men is critical in changing behaviour. Men should receive one consistent message from all sectors and levels of society – that those who perpetrate violence will be held accountable. The criminal justice system must act to reinforce this message by taking action against perpetrators, as well as providing rehabilitation options for those who offend. Services need to be developed that provide the possibility to change violent behaviour. These services, offered at the local level, also need to address associated issues of drug and alcohol problems. Men need to challenge other men to stop abusing women, and to change the norms that encourage this violence. This requires support for men to act as healthy role models to younger men, and the raising of boys in a non-violent climate to respect women.

#### **Adolescent girls and boys.**

Adolescent girls need all the protection and support that should be available to adult women. They need clear messages about their rights from society and the educational system. Educational programmes that equip girls with self-esteem and negotiation skills, and enhance participation of girls in leadership roles should become part of the school curriculum. Adolescent boys need positive role models and clear messages from the men in their families and society in general that violence against women is not acceptable and that they will be held accountable. Like adult men, adolescent boys need access to services to help them deal with any violent behaviour they may have. Support services need to address associated behaviour patterns such as drug and alcohol problems, or the risky sexual behaviour in which adolescent girls and boys may indulge as a result of being victimized themselves.

#### **Children.**

Children need to be identified as victims of domestic violence, and their safety has to be ensured. This requires ensuring the safety of their mothers and making childcare facilities available to women in shelters. Appropriate programmes should be developed by the community and the state to assist children to recover from the violence and abuse they have suffered and/or witnessed.

#### **Local Community: -**

In traditional societies, families have relied upon community-based support mechanisms to resolve issues of conflict. The local community therefore needs to be mobilized to oppose domestic violence in its midst. Actions taken by local people may include greater surveillance of domestic violence situations, offering support for victim-survivors, and challenging men to stop the violence. Complacency needs to be replaced with active intervention and education. Community information and education programmes regarding the nature and unacceptability of domestic violence should be developed. Such programmes should address cultural forms of behaviour that uphold male aggression, beating, punishment and abuse of women as acceptable. Traditional cultural practices, such as FGM, that violate women's integrity need to be re-examined and challenged. Culture is not static, and newer forms of cultural norms need to be developed that respect women and promote their dignity and safety. Community elders and religious leaders have the responsibility to demonstrate leadership in this area. For example, religious leaders should be encouraged to reexamine doctrines and cultural practices that lead to the subordination of women and violation of their rights. Local council bodies (e.g., the 'panchayat' system in India) should play a strong role in creating a culture of non-violence, in setting up sanctions,

negotiating appropriate local cultural responses to preventing violence, and monitoring respect for, and implementation of, the sanctions that are in place.

### **Civil Society**

#### **Women organisation:**

For nearly a quarter of a century, women's organizations have provided leadership in boosting the visibility of violence against women; giving victim-survivors a voice through tribunals and personal testimonies; providing innovative forms of support to victims of violence; and forcing governments and the international community to recognize their own failure to protect women. For instance, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a traditional practice prejudicial to the health of children, governments now have to take measures to abolish FGM in accordance with their obligations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24.3). While legislation to address FGM is important, cooperation at the community level is essential to the process of FGM eradication. The most successful campaigns of recent years have had their roots very firmly in the villages and communities where FGM is traditionally practised. One of the most striking examples of change has taken place in Senegal, where the movement to end FGM began with the women of one village – Malicounda Bambara. As a result of their courage, 148 communities have now publicly renounced the practice and national legislation is in place banning FGM. In 1995, the women of Malicounda discussed the previously hidden subject of FGM during debates on human rights and public health issues organized by the NGO Tostan (Breakthrough). Once the discussion begun, friends, husbands, village leaders, the local midwife and the "cutters", were drawn into the debate and the entire village acknowledging, for the first time, the scale of the problem. (UNICEF, 2000). Thus, by mid-1997, the practice had been abolished in Malicounda and former cutters were being given encouragement and support to find alternative sources of income. Spurred on by this success, the women spread the word to other villages, with continued support from Tostan, UNICEF and the Government. These efforts culminated in the Diabougou Declaration of February 1998, when the representatives of 13 communities publicly and formally renounced FGM. And in April 2000, the women, and children of 26 islands in the Sine-Saloum river gathered on the island of Niodior to celebrate the end of FGM.

**Men's organisations:** Men can also provide leadership in the local community through their association to oppose violence against women, working in collaboration with women's organizations that have expertise in this area. Service organizations can use their resources and networks, and men's national and local sporting organizations have a particular place in raising men's awareness of this issue.

#### **Professional association:**

Doctors, Lawyers, Psychologists, Nurses, Social workers, Welfare workers and other professionals are key players in opposing violence against women. Their members may come into contact with situations of domestic violence on a regular basis, but may not recognise the signs because of their own biases, background or lack of training. It is critical that such organizations build domestic violence and human rights curricula into their professional training, and that professionals in the field receive regular training on these areas. Such associations need to develop protocols for identifying and referring cases of domestic violence to appropriate bodies, and screening measures for detection and early intervention. These protocols must be developed in collaboration with experts in the domestic violence field.

#### **Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs)**

like women's organizations, have worked in partnership with government agencies and international organizations to provide a diversity of services, and education and awareness programmes. Their capacity to continue to deliver a range of services should be strengthened, particularly in collaboration with state agencies. NGOs have a fundamental role to play in bringing pressure on governments to ratify, or withdraw their reservations to, the international human rights instruments such as the UDHR, CEDAW and the CRC. NGOs have played a critical role in monitoring implementation of non-treaty instruments such as the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. NGO leadership has to continue in its role of lobbying and advocating for legislation that protects the rights of women, girls and children.

#### **The Private sector:**

The private sector has a vested interest in addressing this problem since the costs of domestic violence to society, and industry in particular, are phenomenal in terms of low productivity, absenteeism, and staff turnover. The private sector would benefit by identifying and supporting staff suffering from, or perpetrating, domestic violence. It should build gender and domestic violence awareness into corporate training, and develop organizational cultures free of abuse, including sexual harassment, in the workplace. The private sector should also be encouraged to finance preventive and support services in the local community.

**Trade unions:**

The various trade union organisations should support these actions by the private sector, using their resources to promote non-violence towards women among their members and encouraging members to seek appropriate support and assistance. THE MEDIA plays a pivotal role in both influencing and changing social norms and behaviour. Repeated exposure to violence in the media has been associated with increased incidence of aggression, especially in children. In the area of domestic violence, media campaigns can help to reverse social attitudes that tolerate violence against women by questioning patterns of violent behaviour accepted by families and societies. Collaboration with the media needs to focus on creating new messages and new responses to reduce domestic violence. Hence a conscious effort to make media professionals aware of the issues, can be relevant in addressing violence against women. Alternative media channels such as theatre groups, puppeteers, community radio stations, musicians and performers of all sorts have a role to play in raising public awareness of the issue, and creating role models for men and young people in the community.

**Religious leaders and scholars**

Religious leaders need to re-examine interpretations of religious texts and doctrines from the perspective of promoting equality and dignity for women. Many men who abuse women justify such behaviour on a religious basis, and many cultural practices that abuse and violate women are justified in the name of religion. Religious leaders at all levels have a responsibility to ensure that religious interpretations are not used to oppress women.

**Academia and research organisations:**

This group should address the chronic lack of statistics on domestic violence that acts as a barrier to policy change on this issue. The lack of adequate data and documentation about violence against women, and domestic violence in particular, reinforces governments' silence. In the absence of concrete data, governments have been able to deny the fact of, and their responsibility to address, such violence. In the area of research, there are several priorities. Reliable data on the magnitude, consequences, and the economic and health costs of gender-based violence will help to place the issue on the policymakers' radar screen. Researchers need to identify best practices in prevention and treatment, and evaluate them for effectiveness and replicability. Greater collaboration is required between research and academic institutes, women's organizations, NGOs, and service providers when conducting qualitative research to deepen understanding of the causes of domestic violence, and its physical and psychological impact on women.

**The State:** Violence against women demands new levels of coordination and integration between a variety of government sectors including the criminal justice system, health, education, and employment.

**Legal reforms:**

It is the responsibility of governments who have ratified international conventions and human rights instruments to harmonize their national laws to reflect the letter of these instruments. One step towards upholding the right of women to equal protection under the law is to enact domestic violence legislation that specifically prohibits violence against women. Under this legislation, a woman should have protection from threats and acts of violence, safety and security for herself, her dependents and property, and assistance in continuing her life without further disturbance. In conformity with their obligation under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 24.3), governments should also denounce and reform all laws, practices and policies that allow harmful cultural practices such as female genital mutilation. Once such legislation is passed, implementation and enforcement become a priority. Enforcement requires the cooperation and sensitization of the police and the judicial system.

**The judiciary:**

The judiciary can strongly reinforce the message that violence is a serious criminal matter for which the abuser will be held accountable. The judge sets the tone in the courtroom and makes the most critical decisions affecting the lives of the victim, perpetrator, and children, and must therefore be sensitive to the dynamics of domestic violence in order to pass equitable judgements. It is therefore critical to sensitise judiciary to issues of gender, and law schools should include related courses in their programmes. The legal system should focus on the protection and safety of victim-survivors. It is important that protective measures are provided so that victim-survivors are not left without adequate protection, and are not re-victimized.

**International organizations**

International organizations such as the United Nations, its bodies and specialized agencies, the World Bank, and the InterAmerican Development Bank have placed the issue of violence against women on their agendas. Their programmes articulate the links between human rights, health, and women's participation in

political and economic arenas within the larger context of violence against women as a development issue. These organizations can play critical role by using their expertise and credibility to garner support for eliminating violence against women. By advocating with national governments, and by supporting programmes run by both government and non-governmental organizations, these organizations are already working at many levels to prevent and reduce domestic violence in different regions of the world. The following examples outline some initiatives led by these inter-governmental organizations: UNICEF works with different partners to address domestic violence in many countries. Examples include: facilitating creation of Bolivia's National Plan for the Prevention of and Eradication of Violence Against Women (1994) and the adoption of Law 1674 against Family or Domestic Violence (1995); work with the National Jordanian Television to develop TV spots on violence against women; and support for the development of an active movement against gender-based violence in Afghanistan and other countries in South Asia. The United Nations regional campaigns, coordinated by UNIFEM, to eliminate violence against women have spurred new partnerships between a number of UN agencies (including UNICEF), governments, national and regional NGOs, and community-based groups and media organizations since 1998. UNFPA supports research on the prevalence of domestic violence and has helped to create women's health centres in areas where such violence is common. It also works in partnership with governments, NGOs and local communities to support programmes to eliminate FGM. (UNICEF,2000)

## VII. CONCLUSION

It has been established that violence against women is a global phenomenon and a life time experience with variations in patterns and degrees according to cultural norms and values of each society. It is however pertinent to state that culture is made for man and not man for culture. Thus, the essence of culture is to create orderliness, stability in the society and to preserve human life. As the society is dynamic, those aspects of culture and tradition that no longer serve the needs of man in the contemporary times, especially as it concerns human security, safety and preservation, should be modified to remain relevant in the ever-changing lifestyle of people in different societies. The expediency of modification is underscored by current global concern and great emphasis on human rights protection and preservation, most especially on elimination of domestic violence against women and girls.

Thus, not until some or all the interventionist measures explained above are adopted to preserve the lives of women and support them develop their potentials, the society will continue to miss those aspects of progress that could come from women initiatives, and thus, the development cake of societies remains half-baked. It is important to realise that when women are deprived of peace, stability eludes homes and attaining a peaceful society becomes an illusion. The saying that "when you train a man you train one person. When you train a woman, you train a nation" (Connery, 2016) should ring bell in our ears, and serve as a guiding principle that determines and defines the rating of women and the relationship between men and women in modern social existence.

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