

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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WHAT IS DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other **abusive behavior** as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain **power and control** over the other. Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. It is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior that is only a fraction of a systematic pattern of dominance and control.

Domestic violence can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and in severe cases, even death. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and last a lifetime. It usually involves a spouse or partner, but it can also be a child, elderly relative, or other family member. It also affects people of all socioeconomic backgrounds and education levels. It can occur in both opposite-sex and same-sex relationships, and can happen to intimate partners who are married, living together, or dating. Women with fewer resources and those experiencing physical or psychiatric disabilities or living below the poverty line are at greater risk of domestic violence and lifetime abuse. Children are also affected by domestic violence even if they do not witness it directly. Families

from all social, racial economic, educational and religious backgrounds experience domestic violence in different ways. Djaden and Thoennes (2002), report that in the United States of America, each year, women experience about 4.8 million intimate partner-related physical assaults and rapes while men are victims of about 2.9 million intimate partner related physical assaults. According to Aihe (2005), in parts of the third world generally and in West Africa, in particular, domestic violence is prevalent and reportedly justified and condoned in some cultures. Aihe cited instances from India where, 56% of Indian women surveyed by an agency justified wife-beating on grounds like –bad cook, disrespectful to in-laws, producing more girls, leaving home without informing people, among others. She also cited other reports that show that 25% of women in Dakar and Kaolack in Senegal are subjected to physical violence from their partners and that very few admit that they are beaten – while 60% of domestic violence victims turn to a family member, in three-quarter of the cases, they are told to keep quiet and endure the beatings. The report also reveal that a law passed in the Senegalese penal code punishing domestic violence with prison sentences and fines is poorly enforced due to religious and cultural resistance. In Ghana, spousal assaults top the list of domestic violence (I-RIN, 2007)

Domestic violence may include:

- Physical violence that can lead to injuries such as bruises or broken bones
- Sexual violence
- Threats of physical or sexual violence
- Emotional abuse that may lead to depression, anxiety, or social isolation

It is hard to know exactly how common domestic violence is because people often do not report it. There is no typical victim. It happens among people of all ages. Domestic violence not only affects those who are abused, but also has a substantial effect on family members, friends, co-workers, other witnesses, and the community at large. Children, who grow up witnessing domestic violence, are among those directly affected by this crime. Frequent exposure to violence in the home not only predisposes children to numerous social and physical problems, but also teaches them that violence is a normal way of life – therefore increasing their risk of becoming society's next generation of victims and abusers.

Types of Domestic Violence

Physical Abuse: Hitting, slapping, shoving, grabbing, pinching, biting, hair pulling, etc, are types of physical abuse. This type of abuse also includes denying a partner medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use upon him or her.

Sexual Abuse: Coercing or attempting to coerce and sexual contact or behaviour without consent. Sexual abuse includes, but is certainly not limited to, marital rape, attacks on sexual parts of the body, forcing sex after physical violence has occurred, or treating one in sexually demeaning manner.

Emotional abuse: Undermining an individual's sense of self-worth and/or self-esteem is abusive. This may include, but is not limited to constant criticism, diminishing one's abilities, name-calling, or damaging one's relationship with his or her children.

Economic abuse: This is defined as making or attempting to make an individual financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, with holding one's access to money, or forbidding one's attendance at school or employment.

Psychological abuse: Elements of psychological abuse include – causing fear by intimidation, threatening physical harm to self, partner, children, or partner's family or friends; destruction of pets and property; and forcing isolation from family, friends, or school and/or work.

It is important to note that domestic violence does not always manifest as physical abuse. Emotional and psychological abuses are often as extreme as physical violence. Lack of physical violence does not mean the abuser is any less dangerous to the victim, nor does it mean the victim is any less trapped by the abuse.

How it starts

It is not always easy to determine in the early stages of a relationship if one person will become abusive. Domestic violence intensifies over time. Abusers may often seem wonderful and perfect initially, but gradually become more aggressive and controlling as the relationship continues. Abuse may begin with behaviors that may easily be dismissed or downplayed such as name-calling, threats, possessiveness, or distrust. Abusers may apologize profusely for their

actions or try to convince the person they are abusing that they do these things out of love or care. However, violence and control always intensifies over time with an abuser, despite the apologies. What may start out as something that was first believed to be harmless (e.g., wanting the victim to spend all their time only with them because they love them so much) escalates into extreme control and abuse (e.g., threatening to kill or hurt the victim or others if they speak to family, friends, etc.)

Some examples of abusive tendencies include but are not limited to:

- Telling the victim that they can never do anything right
- Showing jealousy of the victim's family and friends and time spent away
- Accusing the victim of cheating
- Keeping or discouraging the victim from seeing friends or family members
- Embarrassing or shaming the victim with put-downs
- Controlling every penny spent in the household
- Taking the victim's money or refusing to give them money for expenses
- Looking at or acting in ways that scare the person they are abusing
- Controlling who the victim sees, where they go, or what they do
- Dictating how the victim dresses, wears their hair, etc.
- Stalking the victim or monitoring their every move (in person or also via the internet and/or other devices such tracking the victim's phone)
- Preventing the victim from making their own decisions
- Telling the victim that they are a bad parent or threatening to hurt, kill, or take away their children
- Threatening to hurt or kill the victim's friends, loved ones, or pets
- Intimidating the victim with guns, knives, or other weapons
- Pressuring the victim to have sex when they don't want to or to do things sexually they are not comfortable with
- Forcing sex with others
- Refusing to use protection when having sex or sabotaging birth control
- Pressuring or forcing the victim to use drugs or alcohol

- Preventing the victim from working or attending school, harassing the victim by keeping their victim up all night so they perform badly at their job or in school
- Destroying the victim's property.

Signs of an abusive partner

Anyone can be an abuser. They come from all groups, all cultures, all religions, all economic levels, and all backgrounds. They can be your neighbor, your pastor, your friend, your child's teacher, a relative, a coworker - anyone. It is important to note that the majority of abusers are only violent with their current or past **intimate partners**. One study found that 90% of abusers do not have criminal records and abusers are generally law-abiding outside the home. There is no one typical, detectable personality of an abuser. However, they do often display common characteristics, which include:

- An abuser often denies the existence or minimizes the seriousness of the violence and its effect on the victim and other family members.
- An abuser objectifies the victim and often sees them as their property or sexual objects.
- An abuser has low self-esteem and feels powerless and ineffective in the world. He or she may appear successful, but internally, feels inadequate.
- An abuser externalizes the causes of their behavior. They blame their violence on circumstances such as stress, their partner's behavior, a "bad day," on alcohol, drugs, or other factors.
- An abuser may be pleasant and charming between periods of violence and is often seen as a "nice person" to others outside the relationship.

Red flags and warning signs of an abuser include but are not limited to:

- Extreme jealousy
- Possessiveness
- Unpredictability
- A bad temper
- Cruelty to animals
- Verbal abuse

- Extremely controlling behavior
- Antiquated beliefs about roles of women and men in relationships
- Forced sex or disregard of their partner's unwillingness to have sex
- Sabotage of birth control methods or refusal to honor agreed upon methods
- Blaming the victim for anything bad that happens
- Sabotage or obstruction of the victim's ability to work or attend school
- Controls all the finances
- Abuse of other family members, children or pets
- Accusations of the victim flirting with others or having an affair
- Control of what the victim wears and how they act
- Demeaning the victim either privately or publicly
- Embarrassment or humiliation of the victim in front of others
- Harassment of the victim at work

Unfair blame is frequently put upon the victim of abuse because of assumptions that victims choose to stay in abusive relationships. The truth is, bringing an end to abuse is not a matter of the victim choosing to leave; it is a matter of the victim being able to safely *escape* their abuser, the abuser choosing to stop the abuse, or others (e.g., law enforcement, courts) holding the abuser accountable for the abuse they inflict.

Some emotions/feelings of Victims of abuse

Victims of domestic violence experience an array of emotions and feelings from the abuse inflicted upon them by their abuser, both within and following the relationship. They may also resort to extremes in an effort to cope with the abuse. Victims of domestic violence may:

- Want the abuse to end, but not the relationship
- Feel isolated
- Feel depressed
- Feel helpless
- Be unaware of what services are available to help them
- Be embarrassed of their situation
- Fear judgment or stigmatization if they reveal the abuse

- Deny or minimize the abuse or make excuses for the abuser
- Still love their abuser
- Withdraw emotionally
- Distance themselves from family or friends
- Be impulsive or aggressive
- Feel financially dependent on their abuser
- Feel guilt related to the relationship
- Feel shame
- Have anxiety
- Have suicidal thoughts
- Abuse alcohol or drugs
- Be hopeful that their abuser will change and/or stop the abuse
- Have religious, cultural, or other beliefs that reinforce staying in the relationship
- Have no support from friends or family
- Fear cultural, community, or societal backlash that may hinder escape or support
- Feel like they have nowhere to go or no ability to get away
- Fear they will not be able to support themselves after they escape the abuser
- Have children in common with their abuser and fear for their safety if they leave
- Be distrustful of local law enforcement, courts, or other systems if the abuse is revealed
- Have had unsupportive experiences with friends, family, employers, law enforcement, courts, child protective services, etc. and believe they won't get help if they leave or fear retribution if they do (e.g. they fear losing custody of their children to the abuser)

UNDERSTANDING WHY VICTIMS STAY

When it is a viable option, it is best for victims to do what they can to escape their abusers. However, this is not the case in all situations. Abusers repeatedly go to extremes to prevent the victim from leaving. In fact, leaving an abuser is the most dangerous time for a victim of domestic violence. One study (carried out in the US) found in interviews with men who have killed their wives that either threats of separation by their partner or actual separations were most often the precipitating events that lead to the murder.

A victim's reasons for staying with their abusers are extremely complex and, in most cases, are based on the reality that their abuser will follow through with the threats they have used to keep them trapped: the abuser will hurt or kill them, they will hurt or kill the kids, they will win custody of the children, they will harm or kill others, they will ruin their victim financially -- the list goes on. The victim in violent relationships knows their abuser best and fully knows the extent to which they will go to make sure they have and can maintain control over the victim. The victim literally may not be able to safely escape or protect those they love. Another study of intimate partner homicides found 20% of homicide victims were not the domestic violence victims themselves, but family members, friends, neighbors, persons who intervened, law enforcement responders, or bystanders.

Additional barriers to escaping a violence relationship include but are not limited to:

- The fear that the abuser's actions will become more violent and may become lethal if the victim attempts to leave.
- Unsupportive friends and family
- Knowledge of the difficulties of single parenting and reduced financial circumstances
- The victim feeling that the relationship is a mix of good times, love and hope along with the manipulation, intimidation and fear.
- The victim's lack of knowledge of or access to safety and support
- Fear of losing custody of any children if they leave or divorce their abuser or fear the abuser will hurt, or even kill, their children
- Lack of means to support themselves and/or their children financially or lack of access to cash, bank accounts, or assets
- Lack of having somewhere to go (e.g. no friends or family to help, no money for hotel)
- Fear that homelessness may be their only option if they leave
- Religious or cultural beliefs and practices may not support divorce or may dictate outdated gender roles and keep the victim trapped in the relationship
- Belief that two parent households are better for children, despite abuse.

SOCIETAL BARRIERS TO ESCAPING A VIOLENT RELATIONSHIP

In addition to individual obstacles victims face when escaping violent relationships, society in general presents barriers. These include:

- A victim's fear of being charged with desertion, losing custody of children, or joint assets.
- Anxiety about a decline in living standards for themselves and their children
- Reinforcement of clergy and secular counselors of "saving" a couple's relationship at all costs, rather than the goal of stopping the violence.
- Lack of support to victims by police officers and law enforcement who may treat violence as a "domestic dispute," instead of a crime where one person is physically attacking another person. Often, victims of abuse are arrested and charged by law enforcement even if they are only defending themselves against the batterer.
- Dissuasion by police of the victim filing charges. Some dismiss or downplay the abuse, side with the abuser, or do not take the victims account of the abuse seriously.
- Reluctance by prosecutors to prosecute cases. Some may convince the abuser to plea to a lesser charge, thus further endangering victims. Additionally, judges rarely impose the maximum sentence upon convicted abusers. Probation or a fine is much more common.
- Despite the issuing of a restraining order, there is little to prevent a released abuser from returning and repeating abuse.
- Some religious and cultural practices that stress that divorce is forbidden.
- The socialization of some females to believe they are responsible for making their relationship work. Failure to maintain the relationship equals failure as a person.
- Isolation from friends and families, either by the jealous and possessive abuser, or because they feel "ashamed" of the abuse and try to hide signs of it from the outside world. The isolation contributes to a sense that there is nowhere to turn.
- The rationalization of the victim that their abusers behavior is caused by stress, alcohol, problems at work, unemployment, or other factors.
- Societal factors that teach women to believe their identities and feelings of self-worth are contingent upon getting and keeping a man.
- Inconsistency of abuse; during non-violent phases, the abuser may fulfill the victim's dream of romantic love. The victim may also rationalize the abuser is basically good until something bad happens and they have to "let off steam."

Do you think you are being abused?

Look over the following questions. Think about how you are being treated and how you treat your partner. Remember, when one person scares, hurts, or continually puts down the other person, it is abuse.

Does your partner...

- Embarrass or make fun of you in front of friends or family? Put down your accomplishments or goals?
- Make you feel like you are unable to make decisions? Use intimidation or threats to gain compliance?
- Tell you that you are nothing without them?
- Treat you roughly -- grab, push, pinch, shove or hit you? Threaten or abuse your pets?
- Call you several times a night or show up to make sure you are where you said you would be?
- Use drugs or alcohol as an excuse for saying hurtful things or abusing you?
- Blame you for how they feel or act?
- Pressure you sexually for things you aren't ready for?
- Make you feel like there "is no way out" of the relationship?
- Prevent you from doing things you want, like spending time with your friends or family?
- Try to keep you from leaving after a fight, or leave you somewhere after a fight to "teach you a lesson?"

Do you...

- Sometimes feel scared of how your partner will act?
- Constantly make excuses to other people for your partner's behavior?
- Believe that you can help your partner change if only you changed something about yourself?
- Try not to do anything that would cause conflict or make your partner angry?
- Feel like no matter what you do, your partner is never happy with you?
- Always do what your partner wants you to do instead of what you want?

- Stay with your partner because you are afraid of what your partner would do if you broke up?

If most of the above apply to you, then you are being abused and without help, the abuse will continue.

Do you think your partner might be abusive?

The following signs often occur before manifestation of full abuse and are clues to one person in a relationship becoming abusive of the other. Think about the following questions and apply them to your partner. If you can identify with one or more of the scenarios or answer "yes" to any of the questions below, you may be with an abusive partner.

- Did your partner grow up in a violent family?
- Does your partner tend to use force of violence to "solve" their problems?
- Does your partner have a quick temper? Do they over-react to little problems and frustration? Are they cruel to animals? Do they punch walls or throw things when they are upset?
- Do they abuse alcohol or other drugs?
- Do they have strong traditional ideas about "roles" in relationships? For example, do they think all women should stay at home, take care of their husbands, and follow their wishes and orders?
- Are they jealous of your other relationships -- anyone you may know? Do they keep tabs on you? Do they want to know where you are at all times? Do they want you with them all of the time?
- Do they have access to guns, knives or other lethal weapons? Do they talk of using them against people or threaten to use them to get even?
- Do they expect you to follow their orders or advice? Do they become angry if you do not fulfill their wishes or if you cannot anticipate what they want?
- Do they go through extreme highs and lows almost as though they are two different people? Are they extremely kind one time, and extremely cruel another?

- When your partner gets angry, do you fear them? Do you find that not making them angry has become a major part of your life? Do you do what they want you to do, rather than what you want to do?
- Do they treat you roughly? Do they physically force you to do what you do not want to do?

Threats and physical abuse are prevalent in relationship violence, and often occur in an escalating cycle.

Children in homes with domestic violence

Most children in these homes know about the violence. Parents may think children do not know about the violence, but most of the time they do. They can feel helpless, scared and upset. They may also feel like the violence is their fault. Violence in the home is dangerous for children. Children live with scary noises, yelling and hitting. They are afraid for their parents and themselves. Children feel bad that they cannot stop the abuse. If they try to stop the fight, they can be hurt. They can also be hurt by things that are thrown or weapons that are used. Children are harmed just by seeing and hearing the violence.

Children in violent homes may not get the care they need. A parent who is being abused may be in too much pain to take good care of their child. Children who live in violent homes can have many problems. They can have trouble sleeping. They can have trouble in school and getting along with others. They often feel sad and scared all the time. They may grow up feeling bad about themselves. These problems do not go away on their own. They can be there even as the child gets older. If not properly handled, some of these children grow up to become abusers, or over withdrawn, and in most cases have personality issues.

Violence Wheel

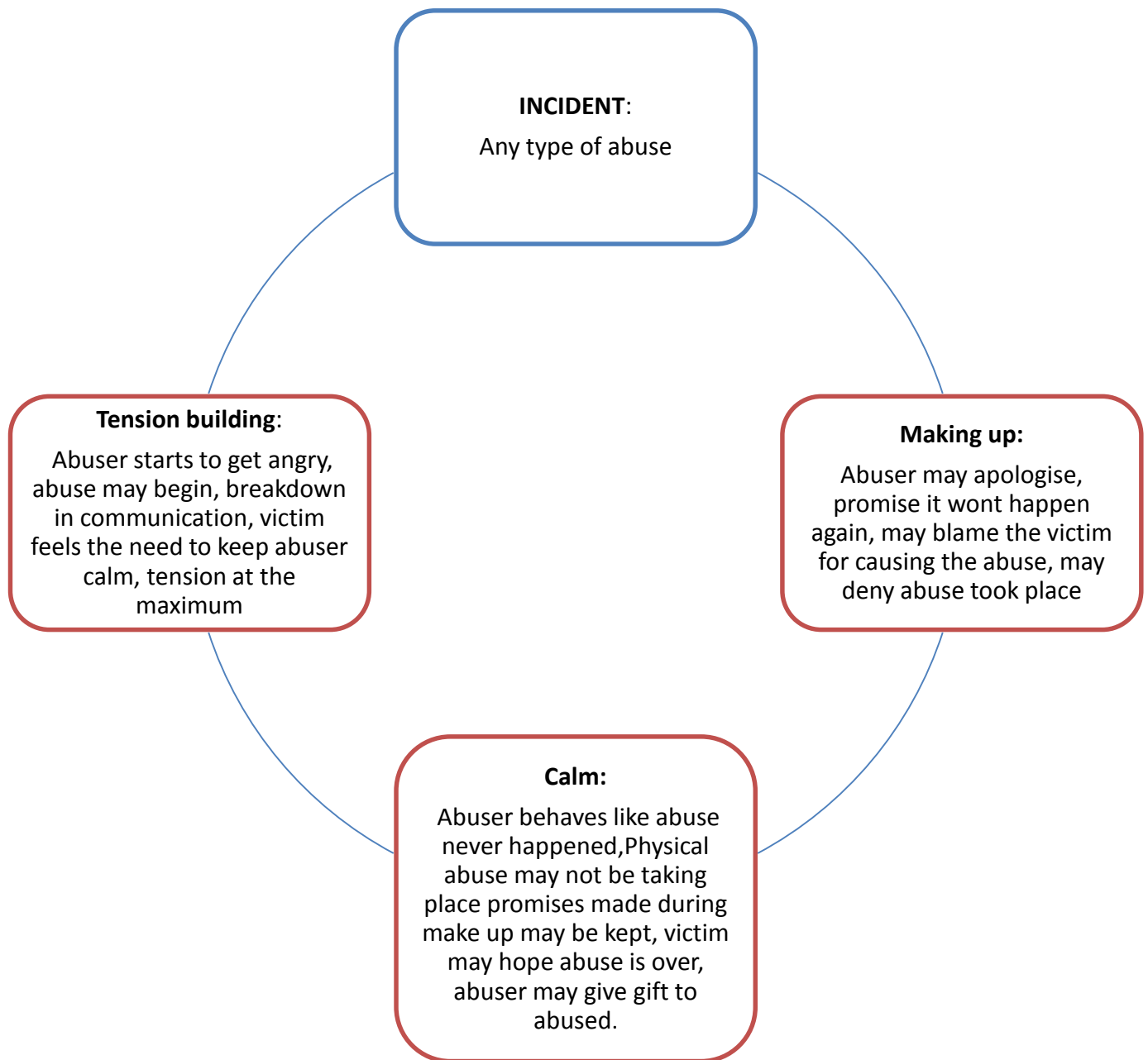
The chart below is a way of looking at the behaviors abusers use to get and keep control in their relationships. ***Abuse is never a one-time event***



DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION PROJECT

202 East Superior Street
Duluth, Minnesota 55802
218-722-2781
www.duluth-model.org

Cycle of Violence



The cycle can happen hundreds of times in an abusive relationship. Each stage lasts a different amount of time in a relationship. The total cycle can take anywhere from a few hours to a year or more to complete. It is important to remember that not all domestic violence relationships fit the cycle. Often, as time goes on, the 'making-up' and 'calm' stages disappear.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

Domestic violence is a common problem in Nigeria as in many parts of Africa. There is a deep cultural belief in some parts of Africa and Nigeria that it is socially acceptable to hit a woman to discipline her. An NGO that deals with and helps victims of domestic violence, the CLEEN Foundation reports that 1 in every 3 respondents in a survey they conducted admitted to being a victim of domestic violence. The survey also found a nationwide increase in domestic violence in the past 3 years from 21% in 2011 to 30% in 2013. Domestic violence in Nigeria takes the many forms already described including physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological. Traditionally, domestic violence is committed against females. Common forms of violence against women in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating, and corporal punishment.

We will take a look at the two most common types of abuse in Nigeria

Physical Violence

Women in Nigeria often face physical violence at the hands of their family members. The most common forms of physical violence include rape, murder, slapping, and kicking. Some of the reasons given by the women for being physically abused include their husbands being drunk, financial issues, and the rejection of a partner's sexual advances. Relationship inequality is also a strong indicator of physical violence. **High levels of wife beating occur when the woman is making more money than her husband or partner is.** This has been attributed to the lack of control the male partner feels within the relationship.

Women also often link the perpetration of physical violence with husbands who are very controlling. **Women who justify wife beating are more likely to be victims of physical violence.**

Another form of physical violence which has received a lot of recent attention in Nigeria is acid baths. Acid baths are actions of violence where the perpetrator throws acid onto his or her victim's body, resulting in disfigurement and possible loss of eyesight. Acid baths are a large issue for women that need to be addressed. There was the case of a former beauty queen who rejected her boyfriend's attempts to rekindle their relationship. In retaliation, he threw acid in her face with the words "let me see how any man will love you now". There is hardly any week that passes without the news being awash with victims of acid bath attack. It happens to both men and women, but appears to be more targeted at women.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence in Nigeria largely goes unreported because of the burden of proof necessary for conviction as well as the social stigma it brings. Nigerian police before now have not been seen to arrest for sexual assault resulting in less reporting of the act. It was only recently when advocacy was on the increase that women now muster enough courage to report sexual abuse. About 25% of women reported forced sex at the hands of either their current partner or a former partner. The 2008 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) showed that over 30.5% of married women have experienced at least one or more forms of physical, emotional or sexual violence in their marriage. This has persisted due to our culture that the man owns the woman and can therefore do as he pleases with her body.

What are the factors influencing domestic abuse in Nigeria

The social context of violence in Nigeria is based largely on its patriarchal society. Violence against a wife is seen as a tool that a husband uses to chastise his wife and to improve her. The common loss of women's rights upon marriage in Sub-Saharan Africa and the implicit obedience and deference towards men is socially encouraged within their society.

The Yoruba women refer to their husbands as "olowo ori mi" meaning he who owns me. In the traditional Igbo society it is "nnam ukwu" or "oga m". In effect, marriage gives up a woman's right to herself and places her ownership on her husband. In practices where a bride price is paid, it is common for the husband to believe that by paying the bride price, he now owns his wife. The act of marriage is seen to give the husband full ownership of the woman. She surrenders her right to her body to him.

Other factors linked with domestic violence are lower socioeconomic classes, substance abuse, couples age disparity, and unemployment. Another cause of domestic violence is infertility. In a study conducted among infertile women visiting a fertility clinic in South East Nigeria, many of the women reported some form of domestic violence - whether physical, mental, or emotional.

Perceptions of domestic violence

The perceptions of domestic violence vary based on region, religion, and class. For example, the Tiv view wife beating as a "sign of love" that should be encouraged as evidenced with the statement "If you are not yet beaten by your husband then you do not know the joy of marriage and that means you are not yet married". All the major ethnic groups in Nigeria - Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa - have strong patriarchal societal structures that lead to the justification of domestic violence. However, the Hausas are more supportive of domestic violence and view it as an inherent right of a husband.

A study conducted among men and women attributed the greater reasons for domestic violence to women neglecting the children or going out without telling the husband; and less for refusal of sex or a mere argument. Many of the reasons that are viewed as acceptable for domestic violence are largely subjective to a husband's interpretation. For example, common

acceptable beatings among men are lack of respect for husband, stubbornness, imposition of will on husband, and failure of wifely duties.

In the National Demographic Health Survey (NHDS) carried out in 2008, it was revealed that wife beating in Nigeria was more acceptable by women in rural areas, among married more than unmarried women, uneducated women, and poor women. The reason most of these women gave to justify beating was going out without telling their husbands. The men also accepted that as a justifiable reason for beating their wives.

Reaction of Nigerian women to domestic violence

Women experiencing domestic violence have varying responses and differences in who they report their abuse to. In a study done in Ilorin, Nigeria, a large number of women reported their abuse to family and friends while not many decided to go to the police to file a report. The rationale behind not going to the police is various such as the fear of being blamed, acceptance of violence as proper reaction, and the lack of police action.

One major issue facing the domestic violence issues in Nigeria are the tendency for low reported rates. A study looking at domestic violence in southwest Nigeria found that only 18.6% reported experienced or acted violence between themselves and their spouse. However, the same study also shows that 60% of the respondents claimed to have witnessed violence between other couples. These statistics show that there is a tendency for under reporting which can occur for various reasons.

One main reason for the high levels of under-reporting of domestic violence is that it is seen as taboo to involve the police in family matters. Nigerians view the separation of the family and the police as important, and the police force ascribes to this notion as well. Police are hesitant and reluctant to intervene even with lodged complaints unless the abuse goes over the customary amount usually seen in the region.

Box 1: A true life experience from Mrs A

I was once a victim of domestic violence from a tender age and I could not get help from anywhere...not from family...not friends...not from the religious organization where I worshiped...not from the Police!

Family and friends would not want to interfere so that they are not seen as trying to meddle in "somebody's marriage". As a matter of fact there is a popular believe in our society that "You don't intervene in the fight between husband and wife because when they settle you will become the enemy". 90% of Nigerians hold fast to this saying and as a result they have unwittingly aided and abetted domestic violence and perhaps, the death of many!

The leaders and elders of where I worshiped then didn't see it as a big deal either. They would often quote the scriptures of submissiveness. When I could no longer bear it and took a walk, I was disciplined...punitive measures were meted out on me in sympathy and solidarity to their

fellow man. The man suddenly became the victim!

I went to the police on different occasions for help with my scars and bruises still looking fresh and without any pity they will tell me I should go home, that the police station is not for domestic issues. When I'm hesitant to leave and I continue to plead that they should please do something about my situation...they would retort, "no wonder them dey beat you...you are stubborn. I say go and you still dey here!" That is a policeman that should protect me from harm as a citizen of this nation!

Experience of pregnant women

Pregnant women experience high levels of domestic violence in Nigeria. Some of them are subjected to violence not only from their spouses, but also from their in-laws. One study found that the most common type of domestic violence was to be physically assaulted and then, also be victims of forced sexual intercourse.

A study in the nation's capital, Abuja, carried out over a course of 3 months in 2005 showed physical, sexual, and psychological abuse among pregnant women. One third of the female respondents reported experiencing domestic violence. They found psychological abuse to be the highest type of abuse followed by physical and then sexual. Many women who experienced psychological abuse also experienced physical abuse. In terms of the physical abuse, about 20% of the women required medical treatment due to the abuse and the most frequent medical complication reported was premature labor, and sometime abortion. A big issue across many African countries, not just Nigeria, is the poor reproductive health systems women are provided with. Most of the women in need are women who have been exposed to sexual violence and rape, yet the country isn't able to provide them with the aid they need.

Overall, the trends of domestic violence against pregnant women permeate across different ethnic groups and Nigerian states. The trends are consistent with other parts of Africa and the attitudes towards violence against pregnant women are in conjunction with the aforementioned trend viewing domestic violence as permissible under certain circumstances.

Experience of HIV positive women

In Nigeria, there is a correlation between being HIV positive and domestic violence. Women who are diagnosed with HIV are at high risk for intimate partner violence. With HIV, there is also a tendency to remain in abusive relationships. In a study of 652 HIV positive pregnant women in Lagos, 429 women reported being the victims of violence. Of those reporting violence, 74% of the respondents said the abuse occurred after the disclosure of their HIV status. The abuse includes verbal, threat of physical violence, and sexual deprivation. Psychological abuse was the most commonly reported version of received violence.

Predictors of violence were women's age, marital status, disclosure and partner's educational status. The highest levels of abuse among HIV positive people were found in the age group 25–33 years old. Among the husbands, the highest levels came from those with an educational

attainment of secondary school. More of than not, these women were in a polygamous marriage.

Women who are victims of domestic violence are also at a higher risk of contracting HIV through various mechanisms. It becomes more difficult for them to adopt safe sex practices especially in the case of sexual abuse and forced sexual acts. The trauma of the domestic violence also ends up impacting later sexual behaviors.

Some organizations and agencies working to stop violence or protect victims

Nigeria has some nonprofit organizations and nongovernmental organizations that attempt to provide support for victims of domestic violence.

The Women and Child Watch Initiative is a nonprofit providing support to women and children who are victims of domestic trials such as violence and forced marriages. They also organize training programs for female lawyers to defend women's rights in domestic violence in court. The "Unite to End Violence against Women" campaign was initiated alongside the declaration of "16 days of activism against violence against women". This campaign was especially important in Nigeria when calling attention to the issue of brutality against women. In 1985, Nigeria validated the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, otherwise known as the CEDAW. The organization works with the sole purpose of abolishing discrimination against women. Back home in Enugu and the whole of the South East region, we are familiar with TAMARSAC – the NGO driven by Prof Joy Ezeilo that gives succor to rape victims.

Some recent reported cases of domestic violence in Nigeria newspapers

Musawaon (2016) reported that recently, the news making rounds in the print and social media is the sad story of Ronke, a banker, who was allegedly beaten to death by her husband. Ronke a mother of two was found dead in her Lagos home on Friday last week, while her husband was said to have fled the scene of the crime. The Lagos State Police Command launched a manhunt for her husband, Mr. Lekan Shonde, and turned himself in, end of story. This is just one of the many cases of domestic violence that is suddenly on an upsurge in the country. Every week, at least a domestic abuse case often becomes a headliner in the print and electronic media: "Husband beats wife to stupor", "wife stabs husband to death", "father rapes daughter", "woman kills maid", "neighbor stabs neighbor", security man rapes 4 year old daughter of master" etc.

The spate of domestic violence reported (as thousands would go unreported) since the beginning of the year has been alarming! There has been a prevalence of child and spousal abuse and violence resulting in some being badly maimed while others are out rightly fatal. Every day we wake up to terrifying headlines that leaves you not only gob smacked but completely distraught and agitated. Headlines such as these...to mention a few screams at you every day:

- Six months pregnant woman brutally battered by husband
- Man stabbed to death by his wife just after their wedding
- Husband Baths His Wife with Acid
- Barren Woman Attack and Bath Her Husband with Acid
- Woman Killed & Dumped Her 4-Year-Old Daughter Inside Well
- Woman Battered & Inflicted with a Deep Cut by Her Husband in Lagos

These are a few actual News Headlines culled from various sources of true-life cases in 2016 alone!

From all indications, domestic violence in Nigeria is on the increase as the statistics are alarmingly daunting. Sadly, domestic violence, especially violence against women has been part of the fabric of many societies and cultures worldwide. It is so commonplace that it is often going unnoticed. It has also failed to garner the level of concern it deserves in light of the devastating effects on children and the family as a whole. 25% of women in Nigeria have to go through an ordeal of domestic violence and every fourth Nigerian woman suffers domestic violence in her lifetime. The worst forms of them are battering, trafficking, rape and homicide, various reports have claimed. With regards to the deceased Ronke, residents in the area where she lived confirmed that she had been enduring an abusive marriage. Reports have it that she was serially abused and assaulted by her husband until the last attack led to her death. “He would tie her, beat her and take her mobile phones away. She should have left him long ago” one of the residents was reported to have said.

The year 2011 was the first majorly publicized case of a husband stabbing his wife to death. On 24 June 2011, Titilayo came home early from her Bank job to make her husband a big birthday dinner. By midnight, Titilayo was dead, brutally murdered by Arowolo – her husband. Autopsy report revealed she was stabbed 76 times. The culprit did not escape the long arm of the law. He was sentenced to death in 2014. One would have thought that would serve as a deterrent for many; for the abuser to desist and for the abused to take necessary precaution. On the contrary, it has only gotten worse as we have seen several more cases of such crimes committed with wholehearted ignominy!

Makinde (2016) stated that domestic violence is on the rise in Nigeria. It is for this reason that Amnesty International in its report; ‘Nigeria: Unheard voices – violence against women in the family’, blames the Nigerian government for the unprecedented number of domestic violence cases, adding that government was not doing anything to stem the tide of violence and was even condoning it in some cases. Country Reports of Amnesty International (2013) states that some federal laws allow gender-based violence, such as permitting husbands to “use physical means to chastise their wives, as long as it does not result in ‘grievous harm,’ which is defined as loss of sight, hearing, speech, facial disfigurement or life-threatening injuries” . Under Section 55 of the Penal Code (applicable in northern Nigeria), men may engage in wife battery as long as it does not result in “excessive bodily injury” (6 Jan. 2013). And who determines what is excessive???

What Laws are available to deal with domestic violence in Nigeria

While domestic violence is a violation of fundamental human rights, which the Nigerian Constitution is against, there are still provisions that make it legal to engage in domestic violence against women. The provision of the Penal Code applicable in the Northern part of Nigeria specifically encourages violence against women. Underneath its provisions, the beating of a wife for the purpose of correction is legal by use of (Section 55 (1) (d) of the Penal Code).

Nigeria ratified the convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1985 but international treaties can only go into effect when Parliament has put in a corresponding domestic law thereby limiting the international treaty to disuse.

Rape is criminalized and under the law, the sentence can range from 10 years to life. There are also monetary fines attached to rape.

With increased violence especially rape, many states are now coming up with sensitizations and advocacy to reduce the instances especially rape. For instance in 2013, in an attempt to battle the issue of police discretion and inactivity, Lagos held a two-day sensitization workshop on Domestic Violence law as it applied in the state.

In May 2013, Nigeria's National Assembly passed a bill to reduce gender-based violence. The Violence against Persons Bill gave harsher punishments for sexual violence and also provided support and measures such as restraining order to prevent the continuation of abuse.

When cases do make it to court, they are usually stagnant. In 2010, there was the celebrated case of the traditional king of Akure who physical and bloodily assaulted one of his wives resulting in her death. At the urging of the public, the police made a statement that they would press charges. The case was dismissed in 2012 and the traditional ruler walked home free. There was also the case of another traditional ruler who abused/raped a youth corper. When the case got to court, the Nigerian Press including women were among those calling the girl names:

The Nigeria Criminal Code Act of 1990 indicates that:

353. Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults any male person is guilty of a felony, and is liable to imprisonment for three years. The offender cannot be arrested without warrant.

354. Any person who unlawfully and indecently assaults a woman or girl is guilty of a misdemeanor, and is liable to imprisonment for two years.

The Nigerian National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) leadership admitted that domestic violence laws, in the states that have them, are "still quite poorly implemented"

Even the US Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices confirms that domestic violence "remained widespread and was often considered socially acceptable" in Nigeria...Nearly three in ten Nigerian women have ... experienced physical violence since age 15. Furthermore, according to the same source, one in four married women experienced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse by their husband or partner".

Reports like this cannot be contested owing to the fact that abuse and violence against women in our society is deeply embedded in culture and tradition because of our patriarchal structure which stipulates that the husband is the HEAD and “owns” the woman and he could do with her whatsoever he deems fit. The woman on the other hand is supposed to be submissive to the man and accepts whatever is meted out to her in the marriage...**Abuse inclusive!**

The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) **{VAPP}** Act, 2015 was signed into law on the 25th of May after over ten years in the legislative process. It is an amalgamation of different bills which sought to abolish all obsolete laws relating to matters such as rape, assault, etc.

Which way forward?

Now that Domestic Violence has taken the survival of the fittest...eat or be eaten posture ...where do we go from here? Will the authorities now take this as seriously as it is done in the Western World or will they just sit and watch its citizens die every day of abuse in the home? What can we as individuals do to stop this trend...I mean, it's someone else today...it could be your daughter or sister tomorrow. Are you a victim? What help is available to you? What is our role or duty toward stopping violence?

Raise awareness

Domestic Violence is not isolated to households and families. It affects us all. Help by standing up and speaking out for victims and demand zero tolerance for those that are abused by spreading the word about **Take a Stand against domestic violence.**

Use social media

Many of us are on Face book. What type of message do we pass across every day?

SAY NO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE could be one of them.

Social Media is a powerful tool to start a grassroots campaign. Raise awareness in your local community, but also reach out across all media channels and raise awareness about domestic violence and why you are Taking A Stand to stop it. Share the message and Take A Stand against domestic violence so that the voice of victims is heard loud and clear.

Some other ways you can help:

- Talk to women about saying NO to abuse
- Join your local village meetings/church/Umuada/nwunye di etc and use every opportunity to tell the women that it is not ok for their husbands to beat them.
- Are you suspecting that someone is being abuse, do not say that it doesn't concern you and keep quiet, probe further, show that you care and the truth will come out

- Be supportive of abused women, never ever say or act as if they brought it on themselves
- Teach and educate women to say NO to being abused.

GET HELP

If you are being abused by your partner, know that there is nothing you have done or are doing to cause the abuse – in other words do not feel guilty. It is solely the choice of the abuser to abuse. It may seem impossible to escape your abuser, change your circumstances, or find the help you need, but **it is possible**. However, you know your abuser best, so think carefully through your situation and circumstances and do what is the best for you.

It is important to note that: domestic violence does not always end when the victim escapes the abuser, tries to terminate the relationship, and/or seeks help. Often, it intensifies because the abuser feels a loss of control over the victim. Abusers frequently continue to stalk, harass, threaten, and try to control the victim after the victim escapes. In fact, the victim is often in the most danger directly following the escape of the relationship or when they seek help. Reports from the US indicate that one-fifth of homicide victims with restraining orders are murdered within two days of obtaining the order; one-third are murdered within the first month. Thank God that we are Nigerians, our social network and family support group makes women less vulnerable if they escape. Let us not try to copy the western world and lose our family values. Nigeria and in fact Igbo families have been known to tackle abusers of their daughters head on. DO NOT DIE IN SILENCE IF YOU ARE BEING ABUSED. ALSO TELL OTHER SISTERS NOT TO KEEP QUIET AND DIE IN SILENCE. TOGETHER WE CAN WIN THE WAR AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Domestic violence thrives when we are silent; but if we take a stand and work together, we can end domestic violence.

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