

# TOWARDS ERADICATING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN IGARRA COMMUNITY: THE THEATRE OPTION

**Ada Lucy Onaivi**

Alvan Ikoju College of Education

## **Abstract**

*Domestic violence issues have become heightened in the Nigerian society in recent times. These in turn has led to cases of divorce, child abuse, emotional instability in children and in some cases death. It is on this note that this study utilizes drama to explore issues of domestic violence, bringing to limelight its attendant problems. The study uses drama and participatory tools such as the Focused Group Discussions (FGD's) and the Semi Structured Interview (SSI) to derive information on the factors or causes of domestic violence, identifying who the attacker and victim are, the effects of domestic violence on the stability of the home and its members and the way out of this issue. The paper concludes that after discussions held, all stakeholders are part of the reason for violence in their homes and they should all be involved in the process of reducing it to its lowest minimum.*

## **Introduction**

Domestic violence is a widely spread health and human rights violation issue that runs across ethno-cultural affiliations and economic status. Violence especially against women is now widely recognized as a "global phenomenon and one of the major violation of human rights" (Colucci and Heredia 23). The perpetrators of the violence are often well known to their victims and it most times happens within the context of families, therefore resulting in verbal abuse, threats, coercion, harassment, intimidation, manipulation, physical and sexual abuse, criminal damage, rape and homicide.

Domestic violence has caused many negative issues in the lives of many Nigerians, separating families and friends. Based on the survey conducted, there had been incidences of domestic violence in Nigeria in the past, although at a minimal rate but in recent times it has become heightened. So the question is: where did it all go wrong? Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in an intimate relationship such as marriage, dating, family or cohabitation. It has many forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting,

shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects) or threats thereof. The second abuse includes: emotional abuse, controlling or domineering, intimidation, stalking, passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect and economic deprivation (Barnet 20). Domestic violence and abuse is not limited to obvious physical violence. It can mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing, harassment and stalking (National network 2011).

The US Office on Violence against Women (OVM) defines domestic violence as a "pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner" (Office on Violence 12). The definition adds that domestic violence "can happen to anyone regardless of race, age, sexual orientation, religion or gender and can take many forms, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional economic and psychological abuse (WHO Handbook 20). Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with victim's gender as primary motive. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional, economic and psychological abuse" (Office on Violence 2007).

Violence against women is a technical term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. Similar to a hate crime, this type of violence targets a specific group with victim's gender as primary. Sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in a private life. The 1993 declaration by the United Nations on the elimination of violence against women noted that this violence could be perpetrated by assailants of gender, family members and even the state itself (WHO Handbook 19). Women are crucial to the growth and development of any nation and the world at large. Women constitute half of the world's cultural and fundamental values of the society and permanent change is often best achieved through them.

### **The Nigerian Situation**

Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and marring

their wives in the media. The statistics presented by This day newspaper (May, 2016) is that about "50% of women have been battered by their husbands". Shockingly, more educated women (65%) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%) most endure, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing for good reason, that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2% of them are not prepared to report to the Nigeria police (*Thisday* 15). Only four states of the federation have passed laws against the insidious crime. Only recently in Lagos State, "Titilayo Arawola, a 27-year-old mother of one was gruesomely murdered by her husband. Arowola was allegedly axed to death by her husband, Kolade, in their Isolo home in Lagos" (*Thisday* 20). Before that, the scandalous story of wife battering by one Nigerian Ambassador and a traditional ruler who engaged his wife in a public brawl made the rounds thus bringing the issue of spousal abuse one again to the front burner (*The Nation* 10).

Victims of wife battery are reported to suffer from physical and psychological pain (Essen 19). Domestic violence against women constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large. It occurs at home, in public places like streets, parks, familiar places like homes of friend and relatives, offices involving highly places executives and also in churches and mosques.

### **Theories/Causes of Domestic Violence Against Women**

There are different theories as to the causes of domestic violence. These include psychological theories that consider personality traits and mental characteristics of the perpetrators, as well as social theories which consider external factors in the perpetrator's environment, such as family structure stress and social learning. As with many phenomena regarding human experience, no single approach appears to cover all cases.

**Psychological:** Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. personal traits include sudden bursts of anger, poor impulse control and poor self-esteem. Various theories suggest that psychopathology and other personality disorders are factors, and that abuse observed or experience as a child lead some people to be more violent in adulthood (Kalra 19). Dutton and Goiant (95) suggested a psychological profile of men who abuse their wives, arguing that they have borderline personalities that are developed early in life. This simply shows that people who have health, mood swing, violent nature, bipolar disorder are prone to engage in domestic violence

**Social Stress:** Stress may be increased when a person is living in a family situation, with increased pressures. Violence is not always caused by stress, but may be one way that some people respond to stress (Seltzer and Kalmuss 88). Couples in poverty may be more likely to experience domestic violence due to increased stress and conflicts about finances and other aspects (Jewkes 20). This indicates that economic factors families faced with causes domestic violence. A man who finds it difficult to meet the needs of his family due to economic factors like; termination of his appointment, reduction in salaries, inflation in cost of living, is likely to undergo through a lot of stress which could affect his relationship with his family.

**Social Learning:** If one observes violent behaviour, one is more likely to imitate it. If there are no negative consequences and the victim also accepts the violence with submission, then the behaviour will likely continue. Sometimes, violence is transmitted from generation to generation in a cyclical manner (Sanni 96). This means that the personality of men who engage in issues of domestic violence have been affected over time due to the nature of homes or environment they were born and grew in which from every indication, exposed them to Domestic Violence.

## **Management**

The response to domestic violence is typically a combined effort between law enforcement agencies, counselling services and health care.

- I. **Medical Response:** Medical professionals do not see themselves as being able to play a major role in helping women in regards to domestic violence. Injuries are often just treated and diagnosed without regard for the causes (Sugg and Inu 19). Many doctors prefer not to get involved in people's "private" lives.
- II. **Law Enforcement agencies:** In the replication studies which were more broad and methodologically sound in both size and scope, arrest seemed to help in the short run in certain cases but those arrested experienced double the rate of violence over the course of one year (Sanni 20). Generally, it has been accepted that if the understood victim has visible (and recent) mark of abuse, the suspect is arrested and charged with the appropriate crime.
- III. **Counselling for persons affected:** Since marital violence is a major risk factor for serious injury and even death, and women in violent marriages are at much greater risk of being seriously

injured or killed, counselling intervention is much needed (Odiba 23).

### **Domestic Violence in Igarra and its Effects**

Igarra as the case study is a densely populated area with its citizens and inhabitants sparsely distributed not just in its region but also across the country at large. Igarra citizens are therefore on the average income and domestic violence has become an issue in some homes in the community for some time now. They have been an increase in acknowledgment that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare (Dodd 20). Such has been the case in Igarra for some time now. They have been news of broken homes around the community due to battering and other forms of violence, which warranted the need for this study. Six Interview sessions were held with some key persons in the community such as; the Reverend father, three chiefs, two doctors who have treated victims of violence, among others, have all attested to the facts that the estimated number of families in the community that are faced with problems of Domestic Violence either directly or indirectly runs into 60%. Some of the after effects that have been drawn from cases of domestic violence within the community are as follows:

**Physical Effect:** Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization. Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome. Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence now experience greater risk of miscarriage, preterm labour and injury to or death of the foetus.

**Psychological Effect:** Among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety have been commonly reported. (Response from a police officer in Igarra). Depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that both victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship and have a greatly increased risk of suicide.

**Financial Effect:** Once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken

away their autonomy. Due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely for help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators.

**Long Term Effect:** Major consequences of domestic violence includes psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. Some victims overwhelming lack of resources has led to homelessness and poverty.

### **Theatre for Development Interactive Medium as the Way out for Stability**

Theatre for development has gone beyond the ideology of serving as a research process that tries to derive convictions that the researcher should go into the field to tell the people about their problems and guiding them on how to create a means to the end of such problems. Rather, it has tried to reduce the barrier between the "researcher as a collector of information and the people as a supplier of it" by delving into societal issues ranging from political, cultural, religious, domestic and a host of others (Okwori 149).

It is a powerful tool that uses drama to generate communal understanding around hard to address issues such as domestic violence, using such theatre based ethnography, aimed to identify the key issues such as causes of domestic violence, establishing who the attacker and victim are, its effect on the home and the way forward. Abah describes it as "an Instrument for instigating people centre development in the field outside the academia. An instrument for mobilization and for instigating participation in the development process (XIV). The role of change played by this approach is clearly echoed in the above position. The ability of Theatre for Development to bring a group of people to a point of realization, create a motivation in them towards taking a step of change, to attain total freedom from their ailment". There have been incidences of domestic violence in the Igarra community and to generate information on the antecedent issues drawn from this phenomenon, the study was conducted in stages. In stage one, Focused Group Discussions and Semi Structural Interviews were administered to 60 people on an informal note, comprising of 10men, 40women, 10 youths (5 males and 5 females) and the session was conducted in the absence of the other gender. The aim of this was to get the views of each of the selected

groups on the aims and objectives of the research and to generate information on if any of the participants have been a victim of domestic violence. Some of the questions the participants were asked are as follows:

(a) What makes a happy Igarra family that lives in harmony?

(b) What makes an unhappy Igarra family that lives in disharmony?

While answering these two questions, when the issue of domestic violence was brought up by the participants, they were asked to describe what they meant by these, if it happened in Igarra and to provide examples. Most of the sessions held were Semi Structural only a limited number of questions were predefined by the researcher to prompt discussions for instance,

- What does it look like when there is domestic violence abuse?
- When there is such who is the attacker and who is the victim?
- What are the remote causes of most incidents of domestic violence among families in Igarra?

At the end of the session, participants were invited to provide their contact information if they wished to continue their participation in the study although some were already known by the researcher, who coincidentally is an indigene of Igarra as such, language wasn't a barrier.

**Stage Two:** Reading exercise from the information generated.

Two dramas were created as model to be used as a means towards enlightening the citizenry of Igarra on the effects of domestic violence which are:

- It affects the developmental and psychological welfare of the child.
- Physical injuries ranging from bruises, broken bones, head injuries, laceration, and sometime internal bleeding.
- Psychological effect is another consequence of domestic violence.
- Financial effect.
- Long term effect among others (the effects are fully captured and discussed under issues of domestic violence in Igarra).

It was also deduced from the discussion that the attackers most times in cases of domestic violence are the men while the victims are the women and children. It was based on these facts the drama was created to serve as a model for the intervention but unfortunately, every effort made to carry out rehearsals for the performance proved futile because very few persons were willing to be part of the performance due to certain reasons ranging from time, timidity, lack of payment for their involvement and so on. Due to this, the researcher decided to settle for reading exercise whereby reading

sessions are held, while copies of the drama are distributed and read among participants, after which facilitation are drawn out from the story. Below are the dramas in episodes along with their facilitation.

### **Episode One**

The Adewales have been married for 5 years without a child. This led to the emotional breakdown of the woman. In a bid to keep her husband happy, she made sure to always keep the house tidy and homely. But unfortunately for her two of the husband's siblings that married immediately after they did had already been blessed with the fruit of the womb. So going to visit and seeing their kids, put the husband in a state of depression. As a result of that, his attitude towards his wife changed and he seized every little opportunity to quarrel, insult and beat her up.

There was a day she confronted him about a number which kept calling him persistently with affectionate text messages. Instead of giving her a clear explanation, he resulted to insults, saying it was none of her business after all, his effort of meeting with her this past 3years had yielded no result. In an attempt to pacify him saying, it is God that gives children, he angrily threw the cup of water he was drinking at her, drenching her and further throwing stones and sand at her. She left his presence crying bitterly.

### **Facilitation:**

- (1) Who are Mr. and Mrs. Adewale?
- (2) How long have they been married?
- (3) How will you describe Mr. Adewale's behaviour?
- (4) Who is the attacker and victim during their scruples?
- (5) What is the cause of their rift?
- (6) What do you suggest the couples would have done instead of resorting to violence?

### **Episode Two**

Mr. Johnson is a gentle and soft spoken man but the wife is a direct opposite of who he is. She seized every opportunity to over haul his decisions simply because he had lost his job. It got to the point that even their children started disrespecting him. There was an incident that happened whereby he came back home after a stressful day of job hunting and asked for his food. His wife went into the kitchen and came out with a covered plate placing it on the table in front of him. But to his dismay when he opened it, it was completely empty. When he asked her the



reason for her action, she retorted that there was no food for a lazy man. In anger coupled with his hunger he slapped her. She in turn started fighting him. And the two children joined in, taking sides with their mother.

### **Facilitation:**

1. Was there any case of domestic violence seen in Mr. Johnson's family?
2. Who was the attacker and who was the victim of the incident?
3. Do you think the reason for the quarrel could have been resolved without violence?
4. What is your advice to Mr. Johnson's family?

It is pertinent to note that the participants were interested in the exercise and agreed vehemently that domestic violence should be shunned and harmony emphasized among families in the community. Therefore, based

on their responses, some recommendations were drawn out for families to follow in order to ensure harmony. These are thus listed below.

### **Discussion**

It was derived from the facilitation that a significant number of participants accepted that domestic violence possesses a threat to the stability of homes in Igarra but sometimes incidences of violence that occur are unintended. The perpetrators of this act do not know how to desist from doing it and tend to regret their action after the deed has been done. One of the respondents, a man whose age is rated at 37 years said most times men who beat their wives are under stress either from work, no money to take care of the family, influence from friends or a way of showing dominance over their wives. As the facilitation continued, there were more opinions given as to the likely causes of domestic violence. A woman who puts her age at 41 years said “sometimes we women frustrate our husbands into raising their hands on us either by the way we talk to them or over step our boundary”. Based on this information derived, it can therefore be said that, both couples are most times responsible for incidences of violence in their homes. From further facilitation, recommendations were drawn out which are written below.

### **Recommendations:**

- (1) Comprehensive and extensive premarital counselling should be given to intending couples on how to manage their marital relationship.

- (2) There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative effects of domestic violence against women, especially wife battering.
- (3) Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against marital violence in their places of worship.
- (4) Youths should be encouraged and taught to detest from imitating brutish treatment of wives around them.
- (5) Medical professionals are in position to help abused women, after physical treatment, they should refer them to counsellors and psychotherapists.
- (6) Punishment given to grievously offending husbands should be publicized, so that it can serve as deterrence to others.
- (7) Counselling should be given to offenders in the home.
- (8) Counselling should be given to affected persons of domestic violence to ease their pain and gear them towards avoiding situations that could lead to violence in the home.

### **Conclusion**

Domestic violence is a domestic hazard that should be shunned by all and sundry to ensure stability in homes in Nigeria, especially in Igarra. Based on the research conducted, Tfd has served as a veritable too in not only ascertaining the level of domestic violence in Igarra but also enlightening the community members on the need to shun such an act. In all, the research was rewarding because the participants involved in the interactive sessions did not only see the need to desist from such act, but also went further in turn to tell others about the effects of this act. It was also the first time the Theatre for development approach was experimented in Igarra community and some of its members urged the researcher to return for further continuity.

### **Works Cited**

- Abah, Steve Ogah. *Performing life: Case Studies in the Practice of Theatre for Development*. Kaduna: Tamaza, 2003. Print.
- Barnett, Desmond. *Why Battered Women do not Leave*. Nsukka: Lamonde Press, 2013. Print.
- Berriows, Getrude. "Domestic Violence: Risk Factors and Outcomes." *Western Journal of Medicine* 7.2 (2009): 133-143. Print.

- Dutton, Golant. *The Batterer: Psychological Profile Basics Book*. Gabon Grolier Incorporate, 2014. Print.
- Domestic Violence Offender Management Board. Web. 1 Sept. 2010. <http://dcj.state.co.us/odzom/domesticviolence/DVpdfs>.
- Goets, Cothema. *The Evolutionary Psychology of Violence*. Ibadan: Emman, 2006. Print.
- Justice, Essien. "Trends in Domestic Violence" *The Nation* Mar. 2016. 10.
- Odiba, James. *Domestic Violence in the Home and its Aftermath*. Anyigba: Ojonimi Press, 2010. Print.
- Ogunsanya, Remi. "Women and Domestic Violence." *ThisDay*, May, 2016. 5.
- Okwori, Jenekeri. "Theatre as Action Research: The Example of the Research on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability in Nigeria." *Mukabala: Journal Performing Arts and Culture* 1.1 (2008): 147-160. Print.
- Sanni, Hassan. *Family Psychology: Recent Trends*. Ankpa: E&P Press, 2012. Print.
- UN. *A Handbook on the recent Trend in Domestic Violence*. WHO, 2005. Print.
- UN. *A Handbook on the Recent Trend in Domestic violence*, WHO, 2007. Print.

### **Oral Interviews**

1. Ozigagun Monday police officer on case of Domestic Violence in Igarra
2. Reverend Father James Ojo, Parish Priest St. John the Apostle Catholic Church Igarra
3. Dr. Amune Patrick, medical practioner, Igarra Community Hospital