

Violence and Cruelty Against Nigerian Women in the Context of John 7:53-8:7

Adetunji Emmanuel Olujide*

Methodist Theological Institute, Sagamu, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract

Violence against women is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's human rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets. Moreover, when the violation takes place within the home, as is very often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and the law-enforcing machinery. Therefore, this study views violence and cruelty against Nigerian women in the context of John 7:53-8:7.

Keywords

Violence, Cruelty, Nigerian Women, Biblical Context

Received: April 9, 2015 / Accepted: May 2, 2015 / Published online: June 14, 2015

© 2015 The Authors. Published by American Institute of Science. This Open Access article is under the CC BY-NC license.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

1. Introduction

The world has come a long way in terms of our treatment of women. In the words of Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, and Shelley (2002) violence against women is seen as actions which harm or cause suffering or indignity to women, where those carrying out the actions are mainly men and where women are predominantly the victims. It seems that violence against women is a very specific type of violence, linked to the masculine dominance and patriarchal values, as well as gender roles and expectations (Hines, 2007).

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. 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. For instance, 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, among others (Basu & Pratishtan 2002).

Reports from IRIN (2007) 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).

In Nigeria, reports reveal “shockingly high” level of violence against women (Afrol News, 2007). Amnesty international (2007) reports that a third (and in some cases two-thirds) of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological violence carried out primarily by husbands, partners and fathers while girls are often forced into early marriage and are at risk of punishment if they

* Corresponding author

E-mail address: ayodelewole@gmail.com

attempt to escape from their husbands. More pathetic is the revelation of gross under reporting and non-documentation of domestic violence due to cultural factors (Oyediran & Isugo, 2005, *afrolnews*, 2007).

This paper therefore examines violence and cruelty against Nigerian women in the context of John 7:53-8:7. It further proffers suggestions for public enlightenment to remedy the situation through gospel intervention.

2. Exegesis of the Passage

The Scribes and the Pharisees brought woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery now, and the law Moses commanded us to stone such... John chapter 7:53-8:7.

This paragraph (John 7:53-8:11) is omitted from later versions of the New Testament upon the basis of convincing arguments denying if a place in the sacred canon.

Hendriksen, after canvassing all of the Scholarly findings on the subject, concluded. Thus:

Though it cannot now be proved that this story formed an integral part of the fourth Gospel, with any degree of finality. We believe moreover, that what is rewarded here really took place and contains nothing in conflict with the apostolic spirit (Hendriksen, 1961).

And the Scribes and Pharisees bring a woman taken in adultery; and having set her in the midst, they say unto him, teacher, this woman hath been taken in adultery, in the very act. Overshadowing the moral lapse of the woman was the brutal, unfeeling, sadistic behaviour of the hypocrites who thus broke up a religions discussion by such an intrusion. Their partiality in not bringing her partner makes it possible to suppose that one of them was the guilt man. “Adultery....” Indicates the woman was married.

Now on the law Moses commanded us to stone such...

The Pharisees were misapplying Moses’ law here, since “Stoning” was commended for a betrothed girl before her marriage (Deuteronomy 22:23f), and the woman before them was married. They cared nothing for the law and were only interested in cooking up some charge against Jesus. Incidentally, if they had really behind their own earlier indictment of him as a Sabbath – breaker, they would not still have been searching at this later date for another basis of accusation.

Trying him... has the force of “tempting him” what did they hope to gain? (1) If Jesus had concurred in asking a death penalty for the woman, they would have hailed him before

the Romans who made it illegal for the Jews to assess such a penalty (2) If the Lord had recommended mercy, they would have placed him at variance with Moses and made a lawbreaker out of him!

Stooped... and wrote... on the ground... The Saviour reacted to such a grotesque and embarrassing situation with silence and by stooping and writing being quickly trampled underfoot strongly suggest the only other instance of deity’s writing, namely, that of God’s inscribing the tables of stone. The Decalogue too was quickly trampled under foot (spiritually), and Moses Smashed the tables of stone (Exodus 32:19).

But when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her Jesus, as ever, found the answer on the scriptures. Deuteronomy 17:7 says, “The hand of the witness shall be the first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all people”. Thus Jesus demanded that the witness, nowhere visible in this interview – that the witness should reveal himself and cast the first stone; but the Lord demanded something else – such a witness would himself have to be without sin. Again the Pharisees’ trap had closed without taking Jesus. The Lord had neither condoned any kind of sin nor contradicted Moses. He just turned the tables by an appeal to conscience, there being no coward like a guilty conscience.

And they, when they heard it, went out one by one, beginning from the eldest, even to the last and Jesus was left alone, and the woman, where she was in the midst.

The saviour’s silence, the total absence for (or silence) of any witness against the woman, and the watchfulness of the mighty through surrounding the title circle of Pharisees with Jesus and the woman at the center – all of that became suddenly a situation of profound embarrassment to the Pharisees. The oldest, being the more perspective, led the way, and they all left. Once more the Galilean had conquered (Verses 10 and 11).

And Jesus lifted up himself, and said unto her, where are they? Did no man condemn thee? And she said No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, neither do I condemn thee, go thy way and sin no more.

3. Violence and Cruelty Against Women in Nigeria

Violence towards women like other forms of violence against women in Nigeria has received little attention due to cultural, legal, and misinterpreted religious endorsements on it. Nigerian women confront a male dominated power structure

that upholds and entrenches male authority in the home. Cultural institutions, particularly religion, are often cited for their role in violence against women. The frequency with which women, the family, and the home are seen to overlap with culture indeed, to be the main vessels for the maintenance and continuation of cultural and religious traditions is quite striking (Abama & Kwaja, 2009).

Traditionally, women were generally regarded as home makers and children-rearers in Nigeria. They were practically restrained from active participation in many fields of societal life through taboos, religious belief, fear of excessive emancipation and domination by their male counterparts. The typical male attitude towards women's participation in nondomestic roles asserted that there is a vague assumption that, only men know how to manage most of the problems existing in the country and that women should be let alone to solve their home social problems with their husbands and parents as well as men to solve the public problems with the government.

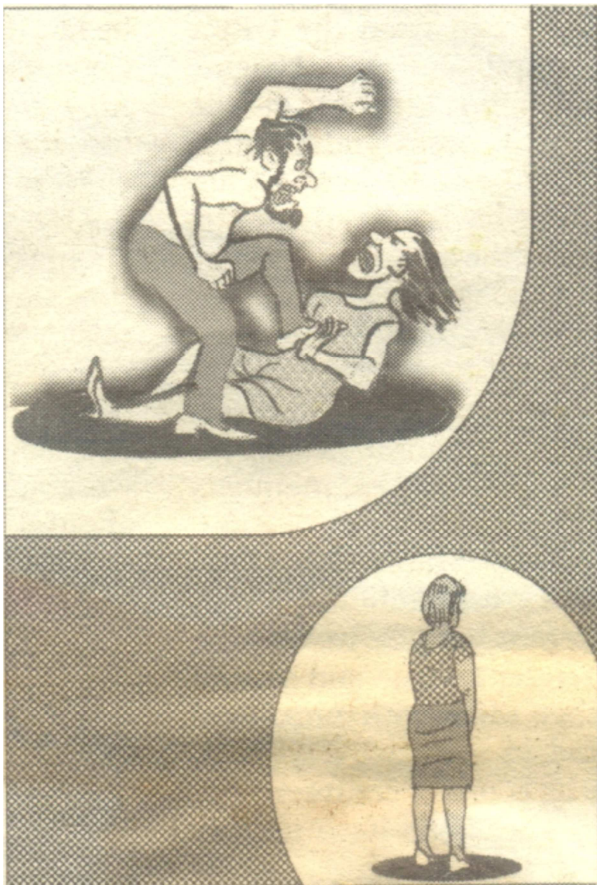


Figure 1. Wife battering (on top), beneath is depressed woman hiding her face from the public for fear of being beaten again.

Violence against women is a gender-based violence. Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and maiming their wives in the media. Traditionally,

in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, the beating of wives and children is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline (UNICEF, 2001). Therefore, in beating their-children parents believe they are instilling discipline in them, much the same way as in husbands beating their wives, who are regarded like children to be prone to indiscipline which must be curbed (Aihie, 2009).

This is especially so when the woman is economically dependent on the man. The society is basically patriarchal and women's place within the scheme is decidedly subordinate. Domestic violence therefore functions as a means of enforcing conformity with the role of a woman within customary society. It therefore does not matter if the woman is economically dependent or not, her position, like that of the children is subordinate.

Oyediran and Isugo (2005), in a study of women's perception of wife-beating in Nigeria, found that 64.4% and 50.4% of ever married and unmarried women, respectively, expressed consent for wife beating. Reports in the print and electronic media reveal vicious attacks on women by intimate partners in different forms such as 'acid bath', rape, beatings, some of which sometimes result in the death of the victim.

Statistics have shown 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 (This Day, 2011).

Violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined (World Development Report, 1993). As defined in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, violence against women is a prevalent harm to the basic rights, freedoms, health, and welfare of women. It occurs in many settings and at many hands, including those of relatives, acquaintances, employers, and the state. Yet until at least the early 1990s, most forms of violence directed specifically against women were met with silence not only by the state but also by much of the human rights community (Human Rights Dialogue, 2003). Domestic and intimate partner violence includes physical and sexual attacks against women in the home, within the family or within an intimate relationship. Women are more at risk of experiencing violence in intimate relationships than anywhere else. Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions (Lawson, 2003; Dutton, 2006). At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten,

coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with the abuser usually someone known to her (UN, 2006).

4. Conclusion

Gender discrimination and violence against women are global phenomena as old as human history. The length and breadth of the Nigerian State records one form of traditional gender practice or another which manifests in the day to day craft of societal building. This traditional gender practices have being sustained over the years as men and women in the different ethno-linguistic groups of Nigeria, manipulate their culture to promote or downplay a given gender practice. Historically, many of these traditional practices have created both violent mind-sets, structural violence as well as have unleashed unimaginable mayhem on individuals of different ages, class, ideology and gender.

Domestic violence essentially denies women equality before the law and reinforces their subordinate social status. Men use domestic violence to diminish women's autonomy and sense of self-worth. States that fail to prevent and prosecute perpetrators of domestic violence treat women as second-class citizens and send a clear message that the violence against them is of no concern to the body polity.

Sadly, Nigeria does not have very stringent laws to deal with these sorts of problems. Our society therefore can only make progress in preventing violence against women if we can change the attitudes, identities, and relations that sustain violence.

Recommendation

To remedy the domestic violence situation in Nigeria, all stakeholders must be involved. Religious institutions like churches and mosques should embark on a massive programme and orientation to enlighten their congregation on the need for a violence free society with the home as the cradle. Young couples planning to get married should be guided on the ways to avoid violence in the intimate relationship of marriage.

The need to create awareness to underscore the fact that violence in the home serves as a breeding ground for violence in the society should be ensured. Thus, seminars and workshops, where trained personnel in counselling psychology could assist in propagating the anti-domestic violence campaign must be organized. Also, the need to regard domestic violence from a psycho-religious rather than a socio-religious perspective could also be emphasized.

Propagation of the gospel through social media such as facebook, whatsapp, twitter, bbm, and the likes could also be

used as a campaign medium where people should be made to understand that we can change the social norms that justify domestic violence by being role models and working together to end violence in the home. Also, modelling non-violent relationship and disseminating information which condemns domestic violence.

References

- [1] Abama, E. & Kwaja, C. M. A. (2009). Violence Against Women in Nigeria: How the Millennium Development Goals Addresses the Challenge. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 3 (3).
- [2] Adebayo, C. O. (1992). —Female circumcision and other dangerous practices to Women's health. In Merc, N. K. (ed.). *Women's Health Issues in Nigeria*, Zaria: Tanaza Publishers Ltd.
- [3] Adekeye, O. A. (2008). Prevalence and Patterns of Gender Violence: Major Variables in the Exposure to HIV/AIDS among Women in Nigeria. *Gender and Behaviour*, 6 (2): 1827-1840.
- [4] AfroNews (2007) Half of Nigeria's Women experience domestic violence. retrieved May 22, 2008 from <http://www.afro.com/awrticles/16471>
- [5] Aihie O. N. (2009). Prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria: implications for counselling. *Edo Journal of Counselling*, 2(1), 1-8
- [6] Anikweze C. M. (1998) Threats to adolescent well being. In Orji S.A and C. M. Anikweze (eds.) *Adolescent Psychology*. 109 – 117.
- [7] Dahlberg, L. L. and E. G. Krug (2002) Violence – a global public health problem. In King E, Dahlbergl, Meray J. A and A. B Zwi, Lozano R (eds.) *World Report on violence and health*. Geneva. Switzerland: WHO, 1-56.
- [8] Dutton, D. G. (2006). *Rethinking Domestic Violence*. Vancouver, BC, Canada: UBC Press.
- [9] Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Gottmoeller, M. (1999). Ending violence against women. *Population Reports Series L*, No. 11. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, Population Information Program.
- [10] Hines, D.A. (2007) Predictors of Sexual Coercion against Women and Men: A Multilevel, Multinational Study of University Students. *Archive of Sex Behaviour*, 36, 403-422.
- [11] Human Rights Dialogue (Fall 2003): "Violence Against Women" Retrieved from <http://www.carnegiecouncil.org>
- [12] Lawson, D. (2003). "Incidence, explanations, and treatment of partner violence". *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81: 19–33
- [13] Obi, S. N. and B.C. Ozumba (2007) Factors associated with domestic violence in South-East Nigeria. *Journal of obstetrics and gynaecology*. 27. (1) 75 – 78.
- [14] Saltzman, L.E., Fanslow, J.L., McMahon, P.M. and Shelley, G.A. (2002) *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform Definitions and Recommended Data Elements, Version 1.0*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Atlanta.

- [15] Shija, M. T. (2004). *Domestic violence and its impact on women's rights*. Paper on domestic violence draft bill, Benue State, Nigeria.
- [16] Straus, M. (1994) *Beating the devil out of them; Corporal Punishment in American families*. New York. Lexington Books
- [17] This Day (2011, September 20). Domestic violence: When law fails to protect. <http://www.thisdaylive.com>
- [18] UNICEF (2001) *Children and Women's rights in Nigeria: A wake up call situation assessment and analysis*. Edited by Hodge. Abuja: National Population Commission and UNICEF.
- [19] United Nations (2006). General Assembly. In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: *Report of the Secretary General*, 2006. A/61/122/Add.1. 6 July.
- [20] World Development Report (1993). *Investing in Health*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- [21] World Health Organization (2003). Gender dimension of HIV status disclosure to sexual partners: Rates, barriers and outcomes. *A Review Paper*. Geneva, Switzerland: WHO