

The Role of Media in Domestic Violence

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Abstract

Domestic violence is widespread and shows no signs of lessening in Nigeria and women have been victims of physical or sexual violence committed by a previous husband. Common forms of violence against women in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating, and corporal punishment. Media can play a lead role in the society's fight against violence against women. As media is the eye, ear and limbs of the society they could help a great deal in mitigating violence against women. Based on this, the study examines the impact of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State. The objectives of the includes to identify the nature of domestic violence among girls in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State, identify the role of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State, find out means to enhance the role of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State. The research design adopted in this study was descriptive survey design. The method of data collection was Key Informant Interview (KII). The question guide titled " Domestic Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) was used to gather the required data. The data collected were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The study discovered that media could also provide a platform for key influencers (celebrities, politicians, sports-people, women groups etc) to publicly challenge violence. Media has been a useful way to expose abuse wherever it happens, and for women and men across the world to come and disclosing information is a vital tool in this fight. With right information, women became substantially more willing to report incidents of VAW to authorities and agents of the state. Moreover, men and women became more likely to believe that their fellow community members would intervene to stop VAW. To effectively address the problem of this form of domestic violence in Nigeria, the media have to brace up to the task of uncovering cases of domestic violence by husbands, brothers, in-laws, gangs/boys, sects, etc. and following up such cases in the court of law, intensifying effort at awareness creation, giving prominence to the reportage of cases of domestic violence, devoting special page for discussion of domestic violence (in the case of print media), organizing debates on the issue to enlighten the public about the incidence of violations of the rights of women and the girl-child, carrying out in-depth analyses of issues concerning domestic violence, use of improved surveillance system such as the closed circuit system installed in strategic places such as the parks, churches, markets, schools and other public places, alerting government of any possible outbreak of violence among others.

Keywords: Media, Violence, Women, Girls, Gender-Based-Violence,

Introduction

Domestic violence is not a recent phenomenon in global space. World Health Organization, (2013) reported that it is estimated that of the 87,000 women who were intentionally killed in 2017 globally, more than half (50,000-58 per cent) were killed by intimate partners or family members, meaning that 137 women across the world are killed by a member of their own family every day. Promundo and UN Women (2017) asserted that more than a third (30,000) of the women intentionally killed in 2018 was killed by their current or former intimate partner.

In African continent, given the importance of ideas of family and kinship in many African political systems, it is not surprising that families themselves have often been the site of violent coercion. It is estimated that 35 per cent of women in Africa worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.

In Nigeria, domestic violence is perpetuated amongst other factors, by harmful traditional practices (Odimegwu and Okemgbo 2003). Domestic violence is widespread and shows no signs of lessening in Nigeria. The CLEEN Foundation reports 1 in every 3 respondents admitting 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. A CLEEN Foundation's 2012 National Crime and Safety Survey demonstrated that 31% of the national sample confessed to being victims of domestic violence (CLEEN Foundation, 2013).

In terms of the physical abuse, the authors reported that about 20% of the women required medical treatment due to the abuse and the most frequent medical complication reported was premature labour. 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 is not able to provide them with the aid they need (Efetie and Salami, 2007).

In Adamawa State, acts of violence are not necessarily physical. They include all forms of cruelty for example, denigration and refusal of affection or sexual satisfaction. They include forcing a woman (married or not) to have sex, lack of moral support to a woman, and the effects of sharing a husband. They also include attempting to control a woman's relationships with the wider community, friends, colleagues, or relatives. Furthermore, they include the use of derogatory words and purposeful attempts to make a woman feel incompetent, worthless, or inferior (UNIFEM, 1998).

Based on this premises, the study intends to analyse the impact of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State. This is becoming prevalence issues in our society and women have been at the receiving end of violence in Nigeria. The cause of violence against women can be attributed to the fact that women are deemed second-class citizens relative to their husbands. Also, analysis of domestic violence among women and girls in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State is chosen because no known author has carried out a similar work on the issue girls in secondary schools in Adamawa State.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study was descriptive survey design. Based on the length of involvement in the services in the media houses, five journalists were drawn from the media houses in Yola, while another five respondents were drawn from state executive members of FIDA (The International Federation of Women Lawyers). This group was

selected because they have a proven record of handling issues that relate to women rights in the state. Also, the study adopted a purposive sampling technique, this was done in order to select individual who understood the study and also offer reasonable information to the research work. The method of data collection was Key Informant Interview (KII). The data collected were analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Conceptual Clarification

To enhance the understanding of this study it is necessary to put the discourse in a conceptual context to provide a framework for analysis. Thus, we can proceed to clarify the concepts of Domestic Violence and Media. Domestic violence is an act of intimidation, physical, verbal or emotional abuse that has become an epidemic. Domestic violence is not new to the Nigerian society. Domestic violence happens across all sectors of society. It cuts across the educated and the illiterate, the religious and the freethinkers, classes of career women and stay-at-home wives, the married and the single as well as all ages (Project Alert, 2016).

Domestic violence is a form of violence that occurs in a situation of intimate or family relationship. Females usually are often victims of this form of violence. Therefore, domestic violence can be defined as physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional and verbal abuse between people who have at sometime had an intimate or family relationship. Fawole, Aderonmu and Fawole (2015) observed that domestic violence against women is an intimate or family relationship. This would exclude childhood abuse, which could also be seen as a form of domestic violence in the context of above definition. What constitutes physical, sexual, emotional and verbal abuses against women often times would be influenced by the sociocultural norms of a particular society.

Types of Domestic Violence

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse can be defined as a maltreatment of a person, which can result in harmful and adverse effects in respect of his or her physical health. Physical abuse may involve hitting, shaking, throwing, poisoning, drowning, suffocating, burning or scalding a person. A recent form of violence against women in Nigeria is the use of acids, which are corrosive chemicals usually used in laboratories and factories, and cause permanent disfigurement of the victims. Many cases of acid baths are a result of the refusal of the woman to renew, or at times submit to, a relationship with the perpetrator (Olaitan and Ifeoluwayimika, 2016).

Sexual Abuse and Rape: 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 have not been seen to arrest for sexual assault resulting in less reporting of the act. About 25% of women reported forced sex at the hands of either their current partner or a former partner. Furthermore, the 2008 Demographic and Health Survey 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.

Psychological and Emotional Abuse: Psychological and emotional abuse could include neglect, lack of proper care, verbal insults and a situation whereby such victims are made to feel worthless and less confident of herself. Neglect could also extend to the stage of pregnancy whereby the woman is left alone to care for herself and her baby without the needed support. Although this form of abuse is not commonly reported in Nigeria, it is the source of many revenge actions taken by women and could escalate to mental health problems and suicide.

Traditional and Cultural Practices: There are many cultural practices perpetrated against women, which constitute a form of abuse to them. One of such forms of abuse is Female Genital Mutilation. WHO gave a comprehensive definition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as follows; Female genital mutilation comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the female external genitalia and or injury to the female genital organs for cultural or any other non-therapeutic reasons. The procedure is typically performed on girls aged between four and thirteen, but in some cases, FGM is performed on newborn infants or on young women before marriage or pregnancy.

Mass media denotes a section of the media specifically designed to reach a large audience. The term was coined in the 1920s with the advent of nationwide radio networks, mass-circulation newspapers and magazines. However, some forms of mass media such as books and manuscripts had already been in use for centuries. Using mass media can be counterproductive if the channels used are not audience-appropriate, or if the message being delivered is too emotional, fear arousing, or controversial. Undesirable side effects usually can be avoided through proper formative research, knowledge of the audience, experience in linking media channels to audiences, and message testing (Olusola and Osho, 1998). According to Pate (2002), the power of the news media to set a nation's agenda, to focus public attention on a few key public issues, is an immense and well-documented influence.

Theoretical Framework

The notion that the media have a responsibility for contextualised, meaningful reporting dates back to the 1947 Hutchins Commission on the Freedom of the Press (Folarin, 1998, Coleman, 1999, Severin and Tankard Jr. 2001). The chief duty of the media operating within the context of this theory is to raise conflict to the plane of discussion. With specific reference to reporting crime and violence, Coleman (1999) has reasoned that, by providing information in a public health context, the media help to alter the basic conditions that predispose a society to, and sustain, crime and violence. Similarly, by reporting on underlying causes and societal factors, the media serve to facilitate discussion of crime and violence and its solutions, while encouraging the inclusion of views outside the dominant ideology, which perceive crime and violence as being individually located, and its solution in terms of punishment rather than prevention.

The relevance of this theory to this study, therefore, is seen in the need for media practitioners to be socially responsible to the community by the way and manner of their reportage of sensitive issues such as GBV since the society has a right to know and expect high standards of performance from every of its sector. In performing their watchdog role, the media practitioners should realize that they can make or mar a society and as such, should be self-regulating within the framework of law and established institutions and project public good. Social Expectations Theory, on the other hand, heavily focuses on how the presentation of people, social interactions and social problems in the media affect people's expectations and motivate their behaviour. In particular, the portrayal of racial minorities, gender differences and sociological classes has been a matter of concern (Okugo et al. 2012).

Results and Discussions

Research Objective 1: The nature of domestic violence among women and girls in Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State

Women are victimised in the name of religion and tradition especially in Adamawa state. It is difficult to change the conservative mind of people of Adamawa state where most cultures relegate women to the background and illiteracy level so high but slowly, we will

have to try to change the tradition. Good implementation of laws and clear concept at the policy making level are the most important things to change the society and this is the most difficult challenge facing FIDA (The International Federation of Women Lawyers) in Adamawa state. The above asserted was supported by one of the key informants interviewed, a FIDA executive member in the state who asserted that:

“ ...

Violence ranges from female infanticides and abandonment in infancy stage to force sexual relationship, and trafficked to work as commercial sex workers in young age. In addition, forced abortions, marital rape and dowry related abuse and sexual harassment are more common in the prenatal and reproductive phase of women. The frequency and types of violence varies according to the place of region, ethnicities and other socio-economic status” .

Similarly, another key informant and a FIDA lawyer also was in line with Kamala (2005). She posited that:

“

dating and courtship violence, economically coerced sex, sexual abuse in the workplace, rape, sexual harassment, forced prostitution, battering during pregnancy, coerced pregnancy Reproductive Abuse of women by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape.”

A key informant in the state media house staff supported the above by positing that:

“

Gender-based violence is a problem everywhere. That is why it is important to understand what it looks like... In most cases, men against girls, women, boys, or other men commit this violence. That is because many cultures around the world teach young boys and men early on that being violent, and aggressive, and sexual is part of their nature....Some examples include controlling or restricting someone's movements, threatening another person, verbally disrespecting and degrading another person.”

Similarly, a journalist in a private media outfit in the state posited that:

Most women in Adamawa State have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner. Not only in Adamawa state, globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner. Globally too, 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting and most of them go unreported.

In support of the above view, a state executive member of FIDA observed that:

Domestic violence includes physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as well as sexual coercion and stalking by a current or former intimate partner. Intimate partner violence affects millions of women each year not only in Adamawa state but also around the world.

Akosua (2008) in his work narrated that the United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) Lagos, has reiterated that domestic violence was not a family affair rather a criminal

offence and a breach of fundamental human rights. Incest, rape, abuse and all other forms of domestic violence cannot be a domestic affair. Gender-based violence has received increasing attention in recent years, and many African states, often under pressure from local women's movements, have passed laws to criminalize various forms of gender-based violence (GBV), including rape.

In their article, World Health Organization (2013) observed that a new report by global human rights group, Amnesty International accuses countries the world over of failing to protect women, saying one in three of them continues to face violence in and outside home. Amnesty says millions of women are beaten, raped, murdered, assaulted or mutilated only because they are women.

Research Objective 2: The role of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State

One of the critical success factors towards the achievement of the goals of a free and egalitarian society is the existence of mechanisms to protect citizens from oppression, suppression, discrimination and violence. Onyemelukwe (2016) argued that in Nigeria, 28 per cent of all women, almost a third of all women in the country, have experienced physical violence. This is a significant number in a country of about 170 million, where almost half are women.

Fagboyo (2016) observed that various programmes and activities could be put in place on perceptions and behaviour related to various forms of violence, supporting advocacy, creating awareness and community mobilization. Based on the role of the media, a key informant and a FIDA lawyer posited that:

The media is expected to feature in a priority area in primary prevention because of its potential influence on public understanding of violence against women....News and information media are key factors in shaping the public discourse because they report on current events and provide a framework for their interpretation. Although news media audiences are not simply passive recipients of information, who or what is selected to appear in the news and how those individuals and events are portrayed can have a profound influence on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviours."

The key informant interviewed a FIDA executive member in the state who asserted that:

One of the most enduring myths sustained by media is that women living with abusive and violent partners are responsible for the violence because they did not leave the relationship. This is particularly evident in media reporting of intimate partner homicide.

Similarly, another key informant and a female journalist posited that:

It is interesting to note that some of the factors most commonly used by media to excuse men who use violence are the same factors that media use to blame women for the violence. Drugs, alcohol, mental illness, jealousy and provocation were commonly described in studies as mitigating factors used by journalists to reduce men's ownership of the violence."

A key informant in the state media house staff supported the above by positing that:

Media can also provide a platform for key influencers (celebrities, politicians, sports-people, women groups etc) to publicly challenge violence. Media has been a useful way to expose abuse wherever it happens, and for women and men across the world to come.”

Similarly, a journalist in a private media outfit in the state posited that:

Governments and organizations around the world employ media messaging to effect behavioural and attitudinal change. Programs like education-entertainment, which we air in our station, have the potential to markedly reduce the incidence of VAW in an enduring and scalable manner. However, there is reluctance on the part of witnesses to disclose what they know is an important reason for the continued prevalence of violence against women.

In support of the above view, a state executive member of FIDA observed that:

Silence begets violence. Disclosing information is a vital tool in this fight. With right information, women became substantially more willing to report incidents of VAW to authorities and agents of the state. Moreover, men and women became more likely to believe that their fellow community members would intervene to stop VAW.

In support of the above view, a state executive member of FIDA observed that:

A majority of cases of sexual violence in Nigeria go unreported in the media. This is due largely to fear on the part of the victim of being socially stigmatized or blamed. It is estimates that at least 2 million Nigerian girls experience sexual abuse annually and that only 28 per cent of rape cases are reported. Of those, only 12 per cent result in convictions.

Media is a powerful tool to start a grassroots campaign. The media raise awareness in communities, and also reach out across all other media channels and raise awareness about domestic violence and are taking a stand to stop it. The lack of conversation about domestic violence keeps the epidemic hidden. Many women experienced domestic violence, including financial abuse, abandonment and eviction from their homes. The discrimination embedded in the law was further exacerbated by the active discrimination experienced by women in accessing what limited justice was available (Onyemelukwe, 2016). With the view, media has a major role to play in this fight against domestic violence.

Research Objective 3: The means to enhance the role of the media in the fight against domestic violence among women and girls Yola North Local Government Area of Adamawa State

Media operators, and by extension the media especially television, by reason of its visual appeal, and generate revenue from coverage of savour and feed on crime and violence. As Dorfman and Thorson (1998) have observed reporting on crime and violence has been a staple in newspaper diet since before the penny press. Crime and violence make and sell headlines and news programmes. Based on how to enhance the media role in the fight against domestic violence, a key informant and a FIDA lawyer posited that:

the media should begin to concern themselves with how to equip the public with information and knowledge on how to protect themselves against gangsters, rape and intimate partner violence... media can play a major role in the fight against violent extremism in Nigeria if well-articulated and adequately explored. The undercurrents of crime and violence and how society deals with criminals must receive significant attention.”

The key informant interviewed a FIDA executive member in the state who asserted that:

One of the notable changes in our social environment in this century is the advent and saturation of mass media. In this new environment, radio, television, movies, videos and computer networks have assumed central roles in our daily lives. For better or for worse, the mass media are having an enormous impact on our values, beliefs, and behaviours... Public knowledge of crime and justice derived largely from the media.

Similarly, another key informant and a female journalist posited that:

The media plays an important role in the perception of crime and domestic violence and the Nigerian publics’ understanding of how the criminal justice system operates. The media must therefore provide the public with an estimation of how much crime there is, the types of crime that are common, trends in crime rates, and the daily operations of the criminal justice system. The media focus their attention on GBV that will capture viewers’ attention.”

A key informant argued that:

While the media plays an important role in creating fear of crime. The media also provide forums for important dialogue among seemingly disparate groups but media practitioners must determine inappropriate times for interviewing victims. These include immediately following a crime or immediately after domestic violence, at funerals, in hospital settings. It is during these periods that a victim's trauma and distress tend to be extremely high; dealing with the news media can create a secondary victimization that compounds the victim's tragedy caused by the violent crime.

Similarly, a journalist in a private media outfit in the state encouraged the media practitioners to work closely with others like law enforcement officials:

The need for cooperation among law enforcement, other criminal justice officials, and the news media is essential to GBV investigations and prosecutions. Often, details that journalists consider key to a good story are also details that must be kept confidential in order to successfully complete a criminal investigation.

In support of the above view, a state executive member of FIDA urged the media to be accurate in their reportage:

Accurate media coverage of details of a GBV, are very important to crime victims and survivors. For example, inaccurately reporting of an event can have traumatic consequences on that victim. Factual reporting of all details associated with a GBV is

critical not only to the media's underlying philosophy of accuracy, but also to a victim's efforts to reconstruct his or her life following a crime.

In support of the above view, a state executive member of FIDA gave detailed manner in which the media must follow to be true professional in dealing with the victims and the abusers:

Present details about a crime in a fair, objective, and balanced manner. Recognize the importance of publishing or broadcasting information that can contribute to public safety and, at the same time, balance this need with the victim's need for privacy. Respect the privacy of individuals who choose to refrain from dealing with the media or who choose to address the media through a spokesperson of their choice. Provide a balanced perspective relevant to a criminal act that reflects the concerns of the victim and offender. Never report rumours or innuendoes about the victim, the offender, or the crime unless such information has been verified by reliable sources.

Various programmes and activities can be put in place on perceptions and behaviour related to various forms of violence, supporting advocacy, creating awareness and community mobilization. People also need to be sensitised that there is a consequence for every indiscretion in this regard perpetrators will be punished. And more importantly, we must educate ourselves on the need to change the culture that permits and enables violence (Fagboyo, 2016). A critical thing to note here is that you or your loved ones may eventually be the beneficiary of a single effort you invest or contribute today towards preventing and ending this menace in our society.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Violence against women, in any of its forms, should never be condoned or romanticized under any circumstances. Therefore, this paper believes the media have the power to help create healthy communities in part by portraying healthy, constructive communities. It is the position of this research that by increasing access to confidential resources and information about sexual assault, dating and domestic violence, and stalking and by improving law enforcement communication between jurisdictions, media are critical to ending violence against women and girls.

In the light of the above findings, this study recommends that, to effectively address the problem of this form of domestic violence in Nigeria, the media have to brace up to the task of uncovering cases of domestic violence by husbands, brothers, in-laws, gangs/boys, sects, etc and following up such cases in the court of law, intensifying effort at awareness creation, giving prominence to the reportage of cases of domestic violence, and devoting special page for discussion of domestic violence (in the case of print media). Other measures include organizing debates on the issue to enlighten the public about the incidence of violations of the rights of women and the girl-child, carrying out in-depth analyses of issues concerning domestic violence, use of improved surveillance system such as the closed circuit system installed in strategic places such as the parks, churches, markets, schools and other public places, and alerting government of any possible outbreak of violence among others.

Bill for an Act to Eliminate Violence in Private and Public life, in Peace and Conflict situations; to Prohibit, Prevent and Punish all Forms of Violence in the Society and to Provide Maximum Protection and Effective Remedies to all Victims of Violence must be initiated. Bill should seek to eliminate all forms of violence against all categories of persons in the private and public sphere.

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