
The Role Of Counsellors Towards Gender Based Violence In Agbon Clan

UMUKORO, CORAL
coralpatron31@gmail.com
08037065319

Abstract

The paper revealed the role of counsellors towards gender based violence in Agbon Clan. Gender based violence takes several forms such as; physical abuse, mental torture and emotional betrayal which occurs at the vertical and horizontal levels of the human existence, to prevent its occurrence requires major social and cultural change which are often restricted by powerful local groups and interests. The paper discussed examples of gender based violence occurrences in Agbon clan, types of gender based violence, factors that promote gender based violence and the role of counsellors in reducing gender based violence. Different studies showed that violence may increase if they react, report to authorities, report parents or in-laws, having no confidants, and the desire to protect their children and the believe that the violence will stop one day and the fear that the husbands may abandon them are some of the reasons why some women remain in abusive relationships. The paper suggests among other things that the local government should open offices which will render counselling services with the assistance of professional counsellors, religious leaders should also invite professional counsellors intermittently to speak to their congregation to avoid domestic violence, NGO'S should organize programmes whereby they will invite counsellors to speak against gender based violence as it is against human rights. Counsellors associations members should be readily available in groups or individual to help caution or reduce gender based violence challenge in Agbon clan.

Keywords: Gender, Violence, Counselling, Counsellors Domestic Abuse

Introduction

Gender refers to socially defined set of roles, rights responsibilities, entitlements and obligations of females and males. Okogbule and Okogbule (2013) observed that violence is an act carried out intentionally to hurt or kill due to violence behaviour or an extreme force or action intended to cause destruction, pain or suffering, injustice and wrong. The abuse could be physical, emotional or psychological in nature. Gender based violence can be said to be a violence directed at an individual based on his or her sex. Agbakwuru and Ekechukwu (2009) stated that gender based violence is a major health problem in today's world. It is referred to as because the situation affects both genders, although it revolves around women because of they are referred to as the subordinate status in the society.

The subordinate status of women is sustained through cultural beliefs, norms and constitutions that make it legitimate to perpetuate violence against women by their spouses and significant others in the society. It is the role assumption by women that gives the male gender the privilege to abuse or violate their right of existence as they are abused through so many ways such as threats, coercion, arbitrary, deprivation of liberty and economic deprivation which may occur in public or private life.

Counselling is in the field of applied psychology and according to Olayinka and Omoegun (1993), counselling can be defined as a person-to-person, face-to-face and group interaction between the counsellor and the client/clients. It is a personalized relationship between a professionally trained counsellor and an individual or group of persons seeking help in the process of managing self emotions, self-understanding, decision-making and coping with problems relative to developmental needs and life aspirations. Hence, if the individual, the male gender, children, societies, and families are properly counselled, they will live a positive life with their spouses without negative stereotype. Couples who understand well will inculcate a better attitude towards their spouses without looking at their weaknesses.

A counsellor is a professionally trained individual who renders counselling services to individuals or group of persons. Okoiye, okezie & Okoha 2018 and Chinweuba & Ike, 2018 defined counsellor as an individual who is guided by professional ethical principles such as, confidentiality, mindfulness, mutual respect, active listening and communication skills, genuineness, empathy and good rapport.

Domestic violence is a pattern of someone trying to control another family member with lesser power and asserts authority over them. Elabani (2015) asserts that domestic violence against women is seen as a controlling behaviour of the women which includes physical violence, behaviours that threatens, attempt or actually causing physical harm as well as psychological and emotional abuse. Gender based violence can occur throughout the life circle of an individual and it takes many forms. Examples of gender based violence include female infanticide, child sexual abuse, sex trafficking and forced labour, sexual coercion and abuse, neglect, domestic violence, elder abuse and harmful traditional practices which include early child marriage, horror killings and female genital mutilation/circumcision. Women and girls are the most affected by gender based violence, however, men and boys can also experience gender based violence from their counterparts. In most part of the world, Agbon clan in particular women continue to be treated in a subordinate manner and their basic human rights violated under the guise of maintaining or protecting cultural practices.

The paper is centered on the role of counsellors towards gender based violence in Agbon clan. According to a report by The Sun Nigeria newspaper of 6th August, 2023, a man deceived ex-lover to his house in a guise to give her money and later killed her and slowly removing her vital organs. His intention where never made known but it could be recorded as violence against the female gender. It was also reported by Daily Post Nigeria of 15th June 2022 of how a man beheaded his wife and cut off the daughters arm all this are as a result of slight provocation by the female gender. An eye witness reported a case of a man in Agbon clan who killed his wife, cut her in pieces and dispose it them off at different locations. The researcher interviewed several other persons who have witnessed gender violence either by themselves or others but could not report the cases for fear of leaving their marriage.

As a result of the several occurrences of gender based violence counsellors should do more in by engaging in workshops in religious places, women associations and

NGO's to counsell them on the need to always seek for help whenever they find themselves in an abusive relationship. approach rendered by the counsellors to help women going through such violence and also proffering solutions.

Conceptual Review

Gender Based Violence

- Domestic violence (beating and verbal assault)
- Female infanticide (killing of female infants by parents or others).
- Child sexual abuse
- Women trafficking for sex purposes.
- Sexual coercion and abuse
- Neglect
- Early and forced marriage of underage girls
- Sexual harassment at work place etc.

Violence Against Women

Violence or abuse is common in our society and Nigerians do not see anything wrong in violating women's right especially when it comes to wife battering. According to Usigbe (2023) he stated that, violence against women in the Nigeria is almost accepted as a fact of life in some cultures that perceive women as the property of their husbands. It is a general notion that women are more often subjected to severe forms of abuse and are also likely to be injured, killed or maimed by their abusers, the abuse is likely to be severe if the women is the type that solely depend on the abuser financially or otherwise. According to the manifesto of the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of violence against women (1993) which states that; "Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which has led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced to subordinate position compared with men".

Ms Abiola Akiyole-Afolabi in an organised movement titled 'Nigerian women say 'No' to gender based violence, reaffirmed the need for a continuous review of the existing policies in the productive age who are having to deal with the negative physical and psychological consequences of gender based violence, this is because the rate of gender violence occurrences among ages between 15 to 25 is high.

Subordination is perceived by many as the tenets of obedience and loyalty which must be given to the male gender who is the spouse or boss in family or office. The male gender sees himself as the lord who must be obeyed and his instruction carried out to the later by the woman as she is looked upon as the property of the man and in cases where the woman refuses or prove stubborn to the orders of the man the society frowns at such conduct. Feder and Potter (2017) define domestic violence as the act of violating human rights thereby causing social, economic and health damages. This acts include controlling, being coercive, threatening and being violent,; psychologically, emotionally, physically, sexually and financially. In essence the

violence carried out against women is an all round abuse that does not only affect the female gender particularly but could actually lead to suicidal instinct.

The declaration on the elimination of violence against women in (1993) is classified into three categories.

- That occurring in the family,
- That occurring within the general community and
- That perpetrated or condoned by the state.

The problem of violence against women has attracted so much concern from early time as seen in the unequal power relations in societies where men are regarded as being physically strong and more powerful. The assigning of role is what infirmed positions of authority to man while women were given subordinate roles. It is the understanding that has also affirm with religion and traditional conceptions of feminism and the assigned roles in society.

Customary practices and customs have also placed women in a subordinate position there by permitting the perpetration of all forms of violence against them by men. Women subordination and oppression is made complicated by poverty or social status, although violence against women takes different forms and varies from culture to culture under different guise. It is categorized into two broad types namely: the use of force and coercion and behaviours that are controlling and dominating. The physical form of violence entails the absence of consent, gross brutality, aggression and other physical acts aimed at humiliating or degrading the persons. In the aspect of rape and sexual harassment and rape perpetuated by the male gender against the female it is difficult to be prosecuted in the law court. This has lead to arguments in the definition of what sexual harassment is , it is any conduct or behaviour of a sexual nature perpetuated by someone without the consent of the other person. In the light of the difficulty in using the law to secure prosecution for the vulnerable and convictions of their attackers which have lead to the acts of domestic violence against the female gender.

The second category of gender based violence comprises of acts that do not directly resort to the use of force but constitute behaviour that is controlling and dominating. Behaviours that have among this category generally centre on deprivation of opportunities and essential needs and discrimination, financial neglect, disrespect and such acts that frustrate freedom of movement (Cusack 1999).

In Agbon clan violence against women is a common incident among males and females. It is viewed as a normal occurrence that women must face in exchange for their unruly behaviour. Women are not considered a dignified personality that need to be respected. Married women are not sometime exempted by other male when it comes to physical abuse as some parts of country where some men do give the married women respect because of their husbands.

Factors of gender based violence

1. Social Views: The social views on domestic violence may vary from person to person, region to region in many places outside Nigeria, the concept is poorly understood by many. This is because most of this countries, the relation between the husband and wife is not considered one of equality, but instead it is considered as one in which the wife must submit herself to the husband. This is stated in the Bible which Christian use in their worship, that a woman should be submissive to the husband as

the head of the family, disobeying the husband can sometime result to violence acts which the society do not consider as a form of abuse but rather as a provocation caused by the behaviour of the wife who is considered being at fault.

Beating of wives are often a response to inappropriate behaviours and in many places extreme acts such as honour killing are approved by high section of the society. eg the killing of Deborah. The social views on the influences of gender based violence is that women are seen as inferior social entities who are not deem to be equal with male gender in as much as they are meant to be males or dominated by male. Goodkind, et. al., (2012) affirmed that a victim returns to an abusive relationship as a result of negative responses from victims' families and friends which have a tendency of demeaning her morality or quality of life. The advice of close relations are a very crucial part in the life of an abused woman especially if the advice is coming from the people she trusts and respects.

2. Loneliness : In the same vein loneliness can as well be another major factor why women experiencing domestic violence remain in such relationships. According to Patzel in Yamawaki, Ochoa-Shipp, Pulsipher, Harlos and Swindler (2012) fear of loneliness and lack of support from family members and friends is a factor responsible for making women remain in abusive relationships.

3. Social stigma: This is also a factor responsible for women not to leave an abusive relationship as they would want to protect the family name and also the children. This is supported by the findings of Madhani, Karmaliani, Patel, Bann, McClure, Pasha and Goldenberg (2015) that social stigma and concerns about the impact of the violence on the children were reasons why some women refused to disclose violent incidents to others or seek professional help. Swanson and Jordan (2002) in their research found out that 62.8% of women in Afghanistan supported the fact that a husband is justified to beat his wife if she wears inappropriate clothes. Wives dressed in attire deemed to be not sufficiently modest can cause a serious violence by her husband or relatives, with such violent responses being seen as appropriate by most of the society.

The reasons given for the acceptance of domestic violence by the society has made it legitimate for women to continue in abusive marriages however the role of the counsellor will be utilized to reach out to the victims as they will have a full knowledge on what their rights are and what needs to be done in the case when someone report and abusive case.

4. Religious and Domestic Violence

No religion gives a sanction violence against women but there are some religious scriptures that have been taken out of context to support discrimination against women within a community. Christianity, Judiasm and Islam have traditionally supported male-dominant households and socially sanctioned violence against women and it has been the order since ancient times.

The catholic church has been criticized for opposing divorce and thereby trapping victims of violence in abusive marriages. The general assumption on the influence of religion on domestic violence varies as Jonathan (2014) reviewed some authors, like Phyllis chester, who argued that Islam is connected to violence against women, especially in the form of honour killings, Tahira Shahid Khan, a professor specializing in woman's issue at the Aga Khan University in Pakistan also stated that it is the

domination of men and inferior status of women in society that lead to the acts of abuse, not religion itself. In Nigerian society many Christians organizations see women as having equal rights in things of the church but still discriminate women from the men when it comes to fair issues.

5. Custom and Traditional Influence

Customs and traditional are the referrals in most domestic violence causes such customs and traditions are the preference of a male child to female child in the family, which is strongly prevalent in part of Asia, Africa and Nigeria particularly. The preference of the boy child over the girl child leads to abuse and neglect of girl children by disappointed family members; child and forced marriages, dowry, the hierarchic cast system which stigmatizes female thereby making them more vulnerable to abuse, strict dress codes for women that may be enforced through violence.

The tradition also place a strong requirement on female virginity before wedding, violence can also ensue to non-conforming women and girls, taboos about menstruation leading to females being isolated and shunned during the time of menstruation. In culture where the policy and legal authorities have a reputation of corruption and abusive practices, victims of domestic violence are often reluctant to alert the necessary law enforcement for formal help.

Causes of Gender Violence

The causes of gender violence are not spelt at formally but can be observed among the following in the society. One of the most important cause is the believe that abuse, whether physical or verbal, is acceptable. The environment in which one grows up also contribute to the act of passing out the practice. Other factors could also be related to substance abuse, unemployment, psychological problems, poor coping skills, isolation, and excessive dependence on the abuser which will be discussed one after the other.

1. Substance abuse: According to Larry (2021) alcohol or drugs use increases the risks of men's violence against the female gender who could be their spouse or significant others. This is to buttress the fact that substance users are likely to abuse their partners under little provocation. In the process of developing this paper the researcher interviewed some persons who agreed that after taking the substance (drugs or alcohol) they loose their sense of reasoning and acted out of context and were sorry later for their actions. Though most abusers according to research were not involved in substance intake or alcohol as the case may be and it could be premeditated or spontaneous.

2. Unemployment/ insecurity: Unemployment which could also mean lack of financial resources is another cause for gender based violence, being jobless could lead to frustration when their are bills to pay in the family. Male who are not employed could suddenly begin to get jealous of the spouse growing career and feel jealous about the women making more money than him (Shapiro, 2021). Insecurity which is a sign of dissatisfaction leads to control and restriction from the male gender which the female may not want to comply with and this causes violence if not properly handled.

3. Control and power: Control and power are what the male gender would want to exercise in the course of a relationship. These could be extreme when the spouse wants to control woman on who she talks to, who she greets and who she visits.

Having a controlling and power intoxicated spouse is likely to lead to gender based violence (Garret in Shapiro 2021). The list of causes are numerous and it is looked at from individual points of views some persons are abusers due to the background of their upbringing. Some men who grew up in an abusive homes tend to replicate such and also see it as a normal occurrence based on the fact that their abused mothers never left the marriage or the abusers which they feel is a normal occurrence in marriage.

In all the causes of Gender Based Violence the counsellor should be considered as the first option to visit when the problem occurs, he/she should be able to help and guide the couples or significant others to come to a compromise in other for them to live peacefully together.

Effect of Gender Based Violence on Females

1. Physical Effect: Scars, bruises, broken bone, black eyes deformation, laceration, and internal bleeding and maiming are some of the physical effects of domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization. Arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome, chronic pain, pelvic pain and migraines are some chronic health conditions that been linked to domestic violence. According to Kaiser family foundation in U.S. News and report (2023), Victims who are pregnant during a domestic violence experience greater risk of miscarriage pre-term labour and injury to or death of the foetus.

2. Psychological Effects: Stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported among women who are still living with their abusers. Depression is one of the commonest as women are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse and are repeatedly subjected to fierce criticism. It is reported that 60% of women meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after the annulment of the relationship which may also lead to a great increased risk of suicide (Shapiro, 2021). Women who are battered either emotionally or physically often are also depressed because of a feeling of worthlessness.

These feelings often persist long-term and it is advised that many of such victims receive therapy for the abuse because of the high risk of suicide and other traumatic symptoms. Also victims of domestic violence commonly experience long-term anxiety and panic and are likely to meet peculiar criteria for generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is commonly identified as the most common psychological effect of domestic violence (Kerstin Stewart in Shapiro,2021).

3. Financial Effect: Due to economic abuse and isolation, the women usually have very little or no money to their name and there are few people who they can rely on when seeking help. Financial situation has shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing women who are domestically abused and it is also the main factors which cause women to be discouraged from leaving their perpetrators. Furthermore, lack of financial resources according to Swanson (2002) observed that women suffering from domestic violence are often unskilled, uneducated and lack any special training that are necessary to be gainfully engaged, and may also have so many children to support. Agbon clan women are not exempted from these scenarios as they are fully reliant on their spouses for provision of everything as they are full time stay at home parent.

Role of Counsellor in Reducing Gender Based Violence

Counselling is a very important approach needed to reduce this age long problem of gender based violence. The counsellor is saddled with so much responsibility in the lives of the victims and the community in general. The counsellor is obliged to use different counselling approach and skills to assist the victims of domestic violence. Umezulike and Eneasator (2011), stated that a counsellor should recognize the norms and rules of the people when engaging in counselling services. The counsellor should take into cognizance of the general philosophy, religion and issues of the society as well as the culture. In reference to the behavioural theory of B.F. Skinner, it could be applied to situations of Gender based violence in order to assist the abusers to change their behaviours towards the victims.

Behavioural theories of domestic violence have based on the use of functional assessment with the objective of reducing the abuse to zero rates. In recent time, more attention has been placed on prevention and behavioural prevention theory. To cause the individual involved in this problem is given orientation towards these services in order to have the knowledge of their rights and to have a better knowledge of the change expected from the victims and tradition of the people. The various roles the counsellor will engage in the reduction of and control of these problems are:

- 1. Awareness:** The counsellor should create an awareness on the existing issues, its frequency, effect and strategies for reducing, controlling or eliminating the problems, Agbakuru and Ekechukwu (2009) define awareness as a way of mobilizing the government and various agencies in the society to rise up against violence of all soot. The awareness can be carried out through the different social media platforms, public enlightenment media, advocacy, workshops, campaigns and seminars. These advocacies can be carried out in Agbon clan with the aim of minimizing or eradicating gender based violence by visiting the head of the clan (Ovie), elders and council of chiefs (Olorogun), opinion leaders, women and men social groups, youths and children of the clan.
- 2. Reassurance and Rehabilitation:** These services will help the victims to overcome their traumatic experiences, this is achievable through individual and group counselling as it will help the women to share their experiences and joy after undergoing counselling.
- 3. Education Counselling:** Counselling women who are abused about education is very important especial if they are school dropouts and are still willing to study. The girl child education should be given priority. Promotion of education among women is important because the rate of gender abuse violence is higher among women in lower socio-economic status (Agbakuru & Ekechukwu, 2009). Women who are given proper education will recognize their rights and defend themselves effectuated. Obtaining a good education will also give and awareness to them with employable skills and open the doors of good cares and prospects for them. Educating them on the need for education will also assist them to see the need for their children to be educated especially the female, no child should be deprived of attending school to acquire a certificate. By giving the children (boys and girls) education on they can take legal actions against the parents abusers in other to stop the abuse.
- 4. Referral Services:** Referral services are pointed out to the victims by counsellors who are more professional to handle the issues of abuser. These professionals could be psychologist, health practitioners, women right activist etc. The health practitioners

or leaders of reproductive health programmes are to be involved so that they can carry out reproductive teaching to avoid teenage pregnancies and unwanted pregnancies that are common in the clan. The counsellors is also to involve other organizations that can work with his/her like NGO's that have interest on women's progress like FIDA, Trauma healing institute and health educators who will work with the counsellor as a team to organize seminars, workshops etc to help the women and children of Agbon clan.

Religious and community leaders should not be left out in the team to fight against gender based violence as they will help to prevent gender violence occurrences by urging understanding, compassion and concerns for victims of violence to provide emotional and spiritual guide.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is the intentional and persistent abuse of anyone in the home that inflicts pain, physical injury and emotional injury or distress. It is a form of battering of intimate partners and significant others in the home who suffer marital rape and traditional practices that are harmful to women. Gender based violence may be physical, emotionally, sexually, economically and psychologically based. Using counselling approaches changes and effective protection of women rights will be achieved if counsellors take it upon themselves to visit communities with Non Governmental Organizations (NGO's) to sensitize the people of Agbon Clan on the ills of domestic violence against women.

The paper also attempted to points out the intersection between culture, religion, old tradition, society views on gender based violence. Similarly, the effects of gender based violence is also extensively discussed under the features of physical, psychological and financial constrain. The functions of the counsellor which are listed in the body of the paper need some level of understanding, co-operation and collaboration with other professional bodies like the NGO, FIDA, health practitioners, human right activist, trauma healing institute, governed and traditional rulers in other to be effective in carrying out its role towards gender based violence in Agbon clan.

Suggestions

The researcher suggests the following:

1. Counsellors should collaborate with Chiefs and village heads to organize seminars to sensitize women on the importance of speaking out against women violence.
2. Counsellors should arm themselves with the counselling techniques to be used in counselling couples when the need arise.
3. The state government and local government should create counselling offices whereby counsellors can carry out counselling services to women who are going through gender based.
3. School counsellors can organize sessions and sensetize youths on the ills of violence against gender.
4. The female gender should engage the services of a professional counsellor during the early stages of the abuse before it escalate.

References

- Agbakuru, G. & Ekechukwu, R. (2009). Sexuality education and reproductive health counselling for adolescents. Career publishers Nigeria.
- Azekhueme, K. U. (2015). Counselling strategies to curb domestic violence: The Nigerian Perspective. *Nigerian Journal of Empirical Studies in Psychology and Education*. 1(15) 57-63.
- Cusack, K. (1999). Defining violence in Coker-Appiah, D. & Cusack, K. (eds) violence against women and children in Ghana: Report of a National study on violence in Accra: Gender studies and Human rights Documentation centre. 14-33.
- Council of Europe-convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Council of Europe portal.
- Elabani, S. M. A. (2015). Attitudes to and perceptions of domestic violence against women in an Arab community: A case study of Libyan migrants in the UK. <https://e-mmu.ac.uk/582276/1>.
- Feder, G. & Potter, L. (2017). Why gender cannot be ignored when dealing with domestic violence. [Http://theconversation.com/why-gender- can't -be-ignored-when-dealing-with-domestic-violence-74137](http://theconversation.com/why-gender-cant-be-ignored-when-dealing-with-domestic-violence-74137).
- Jonathan, H. (2014). Family law. A very short introduction. Oxford University Press.
- Kasier family foundation in U.S News (2023). Understanding the impact of Domestic Violence. <https://www.mcleanshospital.org>.
- Usigbe, L. (2022). Nigerian women say 'No' to gender-based violence. <https://www.org.news>
- Okogbule, N. S. & Okogbule, U. B. (2013). Culture and gender based violence in Africa: A human right contextual perspective at a seminar in Kenya.
- Okoie, O. E., Okezie, N. E. & Ukoha, C. A. (2018). Senior secondary school students' perception of counsellors' expressed genuineness and empathy on disclosure during counselling relationship in Owerri, Imo state Nigeria in Influence of student's and counsellors' gender on the attitude of senior secondary school students towards seeking counselling services in Minna, Niger state, Nigeria.
- Olayinka, M. S., & Omoegun, D. M. (1993). Principles and practice of guidance and counselling. Bab Sheriff & Co. Ltd.
- Oluwakemi, E. B., & Aremo, I. J. (2023). A reflection on Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria.
- Rimjhim & Dandapat, S. (2022). Is gender based violence a confluence of culture? Empirical evidence from social media. [Dol:10.7717/peerj-cs1051](https://doi.org/10.7717/peerj-cs1051).
- Swanson & Jordan (2002). @Acid attacks: Bangladesh's efforts to stop the violence. Harvard Health Policy Review Archive, Spring. 3(1). 12-20.
- UNICEF (2000). Domestic violence against women and girls. *Innocent digest no 6*. [Http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf](http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/digest6e.pdf)
- Umezulike, R. Q. E., & Eneasator, E. U. (2012). Organization and administration of counselling services for the special needs. Ofona publishers.
- Yamawaki, N., Ochoa-Shipp, M., Pulsipher, C., Harlos, A. & Swindler, S. Perception of domestic violence: The effects of domestic violence myths, victim's relationship with her abuser and the decision to return to her abuser. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 7(16), 3195-3212