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**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND NIGERIAN WOMEN**.

The more we choose not to talk about domestic violence, the more we shy away from the issue, the more we lose!

It is important to note the harm that domestic violence has impacted on Nigerian women. In many areas, this act is seen as something normal. But in actuality, it’s as a result of the patriarchal and misogynistic thinking of our fore fathers, instilled upon us.

Domestic violence is an act of intimidation, physical, verbal or emotional abuse that has become an epidemic. It is defined by the Wikipedia as any violent or aggressive behavior within the home, typically involving the violent abuse of a spouse or partner. Domestic violence in my own definition is the act of enforcing power or the feeling of dominating and controlling a particular person.

With all the definitions above, I think that domestic violence is not a word that should have a definite meaning. Instead, it is a word that can be defined by every individual it has happened to based on their personal experience. Most importantly, domestic violence is a word that defines you after it has happened to you.

Domestic violence is not new to the Nigerian society, it 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 UN says around 23% of women in Nigeria have been victims of physical or sexual violence by their husbands and the percentage keeps increasing daily. Shija report that 300-250 women are killed every year by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends, or male relations.

Often, we have woken up to read of murder and violence. Domestic violence happens across all sectors of society. It cuts across the educated and the illiterate, the religious and the free thinkers, classes of career women and stay-at-home wives, the married and the single as well as all ages. In local communities, domestic violence is mostly perceived as what is due to women who nag, disobey or want to take over the seat of authority from the man, who is always revered as the head of the house. It is also known as a “therapy through which a man can conveniently vent his anger or frustration on a ‘lesser being’ who is his wife or children”. Many women now believe that physical abuse is most times justified.

In this setting, most women bear the pain and grieve in silence believing that one day the man will have a change of heart and amend his ways. They continue to second-guess their ability to leave the abusive relationship and would prefer to endure until the man changes which in most cases never happens. The stigma and shame it will elicit also contributes to the silence.

Women, whether married or single, condone various degrees of abuse for reasons such as no income, fear of losing custody of the children, exposure to information, low self-esteem, stigmatization and many more. More often than not, the woman is prevailed upon to be forgiving regardless of the ordeal she undergoes daily or the scars she has tattooed all over her body. Most heart-wrenching fact is that the physical trauma, the psychological torture and the emotional disenchantment transforms a once beautiful and loving woman into a recluse. To this end, many have died and many more are held in severe bondage they cannot easily escape from.

As with everything in life, with a problem there is also a causer agent. So what would you say is the causer agent of domestic violence? What can be so grave that a woman would do that would warrant her husband abusing her. To this day, no one can say for sure the cause for this grave doing. But there are some things that we presume causes it and acts as the influencing factors.

Domestic violence has various influencing factors that enhance the terrible act and one of the leading factors is the society. The social context of violence in Nigeria is based largely on its patriarchal society. Violence against a wife is seen as a tool that a husband uses to chastise his wife and to improve her, it is perceived to be an honor to his masculinity. “In order to be a man, you have to be able to subdue a woman” even if it means hurting her physically and forcibly having sexual relations without her consent-this is the twisted masculinity that the society glorifies. The society encourages implicit obedience and deference towards Men. Some people with traditional beliefs may think they have a right to control their partners, and that women aren’t equal to men. Other factors linked with domestic violence are lower socioeconomic classes, substance abuse, couple age disparity, unemployment, rejection of a partner’s sexual advances and infertility. These factors constantly put women at risk of physical and sexual violence.

Physical violence which is very common and affects Nigerian women compared to other forms of domestic violence involves the use of physical force in a way that injures the victim or puts the woman at risk of being injured. It includes beating, kicking, knocking, punching, chocking, acid baths, confinement and other forms of mutilation. It is one of the commonest and it makes the victim severely injured and in most cases leads to death. Sexual violence on the other hand involves any attempt to obtain a sexual act by violence or coercion. In Nigeria, domestic sexual violence occurs and in most cases, the woman is the victim. Often, the man coerces the woman into sexual acts believing that his action is legitimate because they are married or in any form of relationship. As every human would want to fight back and resist the coercion, it leads to further infliction of physical injuries on the woman because the man believes that he is in total control of her body. These forms of violence are capable of rendering a woman physically, emotionally and psychologically unstable.

The effect of domestic violence ranges from psychological to physical. So many people would suffer domestic violence and as a result, seek a form of escape. And that escape sometimes leads to a form of addiction on certain drugs that would ease them of the pain they are experiencing at that particular moment. Most women that make it out of an abusive relationship suffer from PTSD ( Post traumatic stress disorder), the impending feeling of sadness, constant feeling of shame and disgust for their body and the male gender. Most women lose their pregnancies and their children due to the constant battering and the list goes on and on. It is so clear that domestic violence is a menace to the female population and it has to be paid attention to in order to prevent loss of lives of women in Nigeria.

Nigerian women need to be educated on the importance of speaking up early, it is necessary for them to seek help whenever their human rights are being trampled upon. Various non-governmental organizations are reaching out to women to help them leave every form of abusive relationship because it is better to be safe than sorry. The Nigerian constitution is also strongly against domestic violence which is a good start to curbing it. We can only hope that the perpetrators get the punishment they deserve. If the society is enlightened on this crime, the effects and the punishment it brings, there would be a decrease and subsequent eradication of Domestic violence.