

A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN EWU KINGDOM

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Abstract: *The occurrence of domestic violence (DV) is widespread throughout the Ewu Kingdom of Nigeria, impacting couples of both Christian and non-Christian backgrounds. This is primarily attributed to the inadequacy of available social assistance, which leads to a higher likelihood for women to encounter victimization, which subsequently contributes to feelings of dissatisfaction and strained marital relationships. The present study aims to assess the occurrence of domestic violence perpetrated against women in the Ewu Kingdom of Nigeria, while also exploring religious remedies as potential solutions. This study uses phenomenological and descriptive research methodologies to investigate the lived experiences of women in the Ewu Kingdom. The study reveals that domestic violence against women is a complex issue often overlooked within religious establishments and aggravated by male dominance and excessive alcohol consumption. It concludes by highlighting the significance of biblical, social, and*

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cultural values and proposing comprehensive measures at the community level to mitigate instances of violence. The study suggests that Christian churches should actively participate in addressing the issue of domestic abuse against women by providing counselling services and promoting the teaching of biblical principles regarding marital values.

Keywords: Theological Evaluation, Religion, Domestic Violence against Women, Ewu Kingdom, Nigeria.

Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) is a widespread, life-threatening issue that affects individuals in all human communities, regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic position, or immigration status. It is an ongoing cycle of coercive, controlling behaviour that affects siblings, parents, and children. The 1993 United Nations General Assembly resolution on the abolition of violence against women calls for governments to forbid violence and avoid regional or religious practices (United Nations, 2015). Domestic violence is a significant issue in the Ewu Kingdom, Nigeria, affecting both Christian and non-Christian couples. The lack of social services and businesses in the area

contributes to the vulnerability of Ewu women to domestic abuse.

The paper aims to evaluate domestic violence against women in the Ewu Kingdom and propose a theological solution. The specific objectives include examining domestic violence from theological and biblical perspectives, contextualizing domestic violence among Christian and non-Christian couples, and identifying the role of Christian theology and churches in curbing domestic violence against women. The paper employed phenomenological and descriptive research approaches. This research examines the lived experiences of women, both Christian and non-Christian, residing in the Ewu Kingdom of Nigeria, who have encountered domestic abuse, as well as those who have not. The research was conducted in four prominent communities of Ewu Kingdom: Ewu, Ogoda, Orere, and Assan. Individual interviews were conducted with a total of eight (8) community leaders, 10 church leaders, four (4) victims, and six (6) couples.

The study highlights the significance of social and cultural values and urges the adoption of community-wide strategies to raise both men and

women's status to curb the incidence of DV. It argues that planners should monitor and evaluate preventative initiatives while taking into account the intricate relationships involving norms and individual characteristics. Factors like advanced education, Christianity, and shifting societal expectations can help undermine absolute male supremacy and reduce violence among couples in Ewu Land and other communities in Nigeria. Despite the fact that the Bible condemns oppression and many churches lack resources to address this issue of DV, the paper further argues that Christian churches have a role to play in reducing and curbing the incidence of DV among couples in the Ewu Kingdom and Nigeria in general. The paper identified some preventive strategies, including teaching improved moral attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours, family-centred preventative behaviours, and improved communication to reduce conflict. The research contributes to theological and biblical discourse and literature on domestic violence.

Conceptual Framework

Domestic violence, alternatively referred to as intimate relationship violence, encompasses a range of

behavioural patterns aimed at exerting power and control over an intimate partner (Kunnuji, 2014). It may manifest in diverse contexts, including matrimonial unions, domestic partnerships, or romantic relationships. The power and control wheel is a conceptual framework employed to comprehend the aggressive and abusive strategies employed by individuals who seek to exert dominance and authority over their victims. The term "domestic violence" encompasses a range of behaviours, including physical dominance, manipulation, and exertion of control (Ayre et al., 2016). Engaging in certain prohibited behaviours can be classified as a felony, according to legal statutes. These behaviours encompass a range of actions, such as physical assault, making threats of imminent harm, committing sexual assault, and inflicting psychological distress through persistent stalking as shown in the figure below.



Figure 1: Power and control wheel of domestic violence
Source: Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, 2022

The wheel shown above aids in comprehending the aggressive and abusive tactics employed by abusers to keep control over their victims, who are domestic partners or family members (Mullender & Hague, 2005). The wheel represents the strategies an abusive spouse will employ to keep their victim in the relationship. Domestic violence refers to a pattern of actions aimed at acquiring or retaining power and control. The outside ring of the wheel symbolizes physical and sexual violence, while the inside of the circle indicates subtle, ongoing behaviours over time.

According to Mascolo (2023), domestic violence can be classified into various categories, including physical, sexual, emotional, financial, psychological, technical, stalking, and internet stalking. Physical abuse encompasses several forms of maltreatment, such as child abuse, sexual abuse, persistent criticism, economic reliance, and psychological abuse. Technological abuse includes the utilization of internet-connected devices such as webcams, cell phones, GPS systems, or location-tracking tools. Stalking abuse encompasses behaviours such as persistent surveillance, monitoring, intrusive observation, harassment, and unwelcome appearances at the victim's place of residence or employment (Hindi & Ansara, 2008). Cyber-stalking pertains to the act of engaging in online conduct or repeatedly sending electronic messages that result in emotional distress.

Physical violence prevails as the manifestation of domestic violence in Ewu land. This includes a range of actions such as biting, slapping, beating, shoving, punching, pulling hair, burning garments, cutting hair, and pinching. Millions of children globally are impacted by domestic abuse, resulting in feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and depression (Rolle, Ramon &

Brustia, 2019). The aforementioned factors encompass the impact on individuals' emotions, behaviour, academic performance, mental well-being, social integration, trust, and cognitive development. The phenomenon known as the cycle of violence posits that individuals who have previously engaged in abusive behaviour are prone to perpetuating this pattern in subsequent instances. Survivors of domestic violence have the potential to mitigate the occurrence of future abuse by the acquisition of appropriate education, the provision of encouragement, and the cultivation of positive behavioural patterns (Olori, 2023). Moreover, it augments the likelihood of marital dissolution, a circumstance that can have adverse effects on the psychological well-being and overall welfare of children.

According to the Nigerian National Population Commission, women in Nigeria experience domestic abuse at varying rates throughout their lifetimes, with 19% reporting exposure to emotional violence, 14% to physical violence, and 5% to sexual violence (cited in Gauge & Thomas, 2017). Cultural stereotypes perpetuate the belief that domestic violence primarily impacts women from low socioeconomic backgrounds,

while significant proportions (74%) of individuals who engage in aggressive behaviour within intimate relationships also grapple with alcohol addiction (Gauge & Thomas, 2017). Many women frequently resort to dual marriage as a means of evading the threat of lethal harm from an abusive spouse, due to enduring patterns of domestic abuse. The division of gender roles is attributed to the global occurrence of violence against women, according to the Gender in Development Division (2011). Dual violence is a manifestation of violence that arises as a consequence of patriarchy, a societal framework characterised by male dominance and authority over women and familial relationships. The progression of domestic abuse against women is commonly depicted using two conceptual frameworks: the "life cycle of violence against women" and the "cycle of domestic violence between intimate partners." Gaining insight into these patterns facilitates a deeper comprehension of the ramifications of domestic abuse for women and their families.

Biblical viewpoints on domestic violence argue that an egalitarian interpretation of the Bible is inappropriate due to its predisposition to a hierarchy

of genders and male rule. Complementary theologians Tracy and Blomberg (2006) provide biblical comments on family violence, examining how evangelical Christians have not adequately responded to the issue. Blomberg's (2011) writings on forgiveness and scripture address the question of whether forgiveness is required of Christians or only a nicety. There are many other notable authors who advocate for equality includes Fortune (1995), Nason-Clark, Kroeger and Fisher-Townsend (2011), and Miles (2011) among others. Scholer (1986) compares the contributions of egalitarian authors from the latter 1980s with those of complementarian writers like Wayne Grudem, John Piper, and John Hurley. Nason-Clark (2009) has made substantial additions to the body of knowledge on abuse in Christian households through her sociological study. She suggests that religious organisations can help address the needs of abuse victims and lessen family violence. Miles' *Domestic Violence: What Every Pastor Needs to Know* (2011), Tracy's *Mending the Soul: Understanding and Healing Abuse*, and Clark's *Setting the Captives Free: A Christian Theology of Domestic Violence* is some of the authors who have contributed to this field.

Some Theories Underlying Domestic Violence

This research delves into four distinct perspectives within the realm of Christian theology, including liberation theology, *missio Dei* theology, and theological mission. Liberation theology centres its attention on the liberation of marginalized individuals and endeavours to tackle socioeconomic challenges, political autonomy, as well as racial or caste disparities (Loland, 2021). Gustavo Gutierrez spearheaded the development of liberation theology in Latin America, exerting a significant influence on the subject at hand. Gutierrez's conviction that aiding the marginalized is a religious obligation contributed to the shaping of this phenomenon. The theological perspective known as *Missio Dei* regards the worldwide mission of the church as an expansion of God's own mission, perceiving it as a component of God's ministry (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004). Over the course of the last five decades, there has been a notable transformation in the conceptualization of the term. This shift has been characterised by a heightened focus on the Trinitarian perspective, which places significant emphasis on the mission and the establishment of God's kingdom. Consequently, this emphasis has hindered the church's

ability to effectively function as a catalyst for social and economic progress. The imperative to achieve convergence entails embodying Christ's love and solicitude for the world by assuming the role of witnesses to his teachings and actions.

Feminist theory centres on the analysis of power dynamics and gender inequalities within interpersonal relationships (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). The origins of this phenomenon can be traced back to a social framework characterised by patriarchy, wherein male dominance exerted control over various facets of life, encompassing the roles and status of women and children (Loland, 2021). Feminist theory endeavours to challenge and dismantle systems of power that perpetuate oppression through the analysis of individuals' lived experiences and advocacy for the elimination of oppressive structures. The feminist hypothesis posits that women are socialized to exhibit non-violent behaviour while also attributing the root causes of domestic violence to societal patterns of aggression predominantly displayed by men (Loland, 2021). The theory emphasises how complicated and numerous factors are that lead to partner violence,

drawing attention to how these factors interact with each other in personal, social, and community settings.

Ivan Nye formulated the theory of social control in 1958, which posits that individuals conform to societal norms and regulations when they possess affiliations, obligations, principles, criteria, and convictions pertaining to these norms and regulations (Earles, 2017). The objective of this intervention is to enhance self-regulation and reduce antisocial conduct through the utilization of socialization and learning mechanisms. Based on the social control theory, individuals who maintain strong interpersonal bonds are less inclined to participate in unlawful or aberrant activities. This theory also explores the correlation between religion and domestic violence, revealing that religion serves as a more potent deterrent for victimless crimes compared to crimes involving a victim.

Complementarianism asserts that there are shared roles between men and women within the contexts of marriage, family, and the church (Gillett, 1996). This viewpoint opposes practices that imply relinquishing leadership in favour of responsive

submission. Frame (cited in *Hancock, 2021*) argues that women's inclination to defer to male leadership can be understood as a manifestation of divine intention. He argues that the biblical directive for women to be subservient to their husbands serves as a cautionary message for leaders. Phiri (2000) thinks that the promotion of domestic violence is not primarily attributed to the emphasis on headship and obedience but rather to a deficiency in comprehending the constructs of masculinity and femininity. According to Schreiner (2001), the Bible explicitly prohibits women from assuming teaching roles or exercising control over males, advocating instead for women to engage in quiet study and submission.

The Status of Women

During the Greco-Roman period, it was common for women to possess little physical strength and experience marginalisation within Roman households (Felson, 2002). The concept of *patria potestas*, often known as the head of the family, encompassed substantial authority over various aspects of domestic life, religious observances, and material assets, particularly those pertaining to their

spouses. Men frequently employed this authority to punish women who challenged their power. During the late Roman Republic, there was a notable shift in the legal framework, resulting in a modification of the existing regulations that permitted daughters to continue residing with their fathers subsequent to their marriage.

According to Erhabor and Ottuh (2023), Christian women have been found to possess qualities that are appealing to women, such as active involvement in church activities, an enhanced sense of safety, and equitable treatment within the institution of marriage. Christian families exhibited a tendency to arrange marriages for their daughters at an earlier stage of their lives compared to pagan households (United Nations, 2006). Additionally, they held strong opposition to divorce and criticised the inequitable expectation for women to be faithful in their sexual relationships. The prohibition of abortion has been a longstanding tenet within Christian doctrine, dating back to the *Didache* (Apostolic teaching).

The status of women is a multifaceted matter that varies across countries and social environments.

Gender difference in various sectors of life has a significant influence on the subject at hand, and the elevation of women's standing has the potential to foster gender equality. The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has made reference to the status of women as being their own status. African women's history, culture, and development closely intertwine with those of the continent as a whole (United Nations, 2006). Scholarly investigations have prioritised the examination of the historical roles and positions that women have occupied within specific countries and areas. The African Charter on Human and People's Rights mandates member nations to cease acts of violence and discrimination targeting women (United Nations, 2015). However, persistent gender inequality continues to impede women's ability to obtain education, access work opportunities, and attain political representation.

Government's Efforts to Curb Violence against Women in the Past

In 2006, Nigeria endorsed a Framework and Plan of Action for the National Gender Policy with the aim of reducing the prevalence of violence against

women. The Violence against Persons Prohibition Act of 2015 was enacted by both federal and state governments to criminalize many forms of violence against individuals, including female genital mutilation, detrimental widowhood customs, harmful traditional customs, and other acts of violence occurring in both private and public spheres. Ekiti State, located in Nigeria, has enacted laws aimed at addressing gender-based violence. The Ekiti State enacted and implemented this legislative measure in accordance with the law (Gauge & Thomas, 2017). The statute recognizes that gender-based violence encompasses economic abuse, which is characterised by the withholding of financial resources, refusal to contribute financially to the family, and deprivation of basic necessities such as food, among other manifestations.

According to Gauge and Thomas (2017), Ekiti State legislation has implemented the establishment of a Gender-Based Violence Fund, which aims to provide victims of gender-based violence with necessary material assistance, among other provisions. The legislation may offer victims of such circumstances complimentary housing and vocational training, for

instance, Agbede et al. (2021) highlight that the Lagos State Protection against Domestic Violence Law of 2007 establishes the recognition of economic abuse within the legal framework. The Lagos State government has expressed its intention to establish a dedicated fund to provide free legal aid to women and children who have experienced abuse. The establishment of a dedicated fund to provide free legal aid to women and children who have experienced abuse in Lagos State is noteworthy as it differs from the approach taken in Ekiti State, where a similar fund is not explicitly mentioned (Gauge & Thomas, 2017). Nevertheless, despite the implementation of these many procedures, they have been shown to be ineffective. The eradication of violence against women in Nigeria may encounter challenges stemming from legal or cultural barriers.

According to Dienye, Gbeneol, and Itimi (2014), the Nigerian constitution includes a provision that forbids foreign men who marry Nigerian women from acquiring citizenship. The Lawyers Chronicle, an African legal newspaper, also corroborates this information. It is worth noting that within the penal law of Northern Nigeria, there exists a distinct clause

that permits the use of wife violence as a means of punishment, if grave injury is not accused. The Labour Act has a provision that prohibits women from engaging in night work. Due to prevailing social norms, women may face significant barriers to expressing their thoughts and experiences in public settings, leading to a situation where numerous female victims of abuse may silently bear their pain. The enforcement of laws aimed at preventing assault against women is lacking in stringency. Ottuh (2021) argues that advocates for women's rights and ethical behaviour contend that the implementation of comprehensive educational initiatives and the enforcement of stringent legal measures against perpetrators or violators are important.

Ewu Kingdom and Domestic Violence against Women

The research environment is the Ewu (Eghwu) Kingdom. Ewu, in Urhoboland, is located in the Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. For example, Egalase and Egherekana (2005) say that an important Ewu family history story says that the clan's ancestors came from the Middle East, specifically Egypt and Sudan. They stopped for a while

at Ife and Igodomigodo (*Aka*) before settling down in Eghwu (Ewu) town around 100 B.C. However, a duality exists between the place of ultimate origin and the place of proximate origin. Another myth regarding the origins of Ewu associates its establishment with a direct migration from Igodomigodo, also known as Aka or Benin. According to local folklore, it is said that during a period of compulsory community labour under the rule of Oba Eweka I of Benin, the Eghwu people committed an offence against the Oba. In order to avoid the potential consequences of the Oba's anger, they chose to relocate to their current settlement, which is now known as Ewu. Olori (2023) identifies four distinct communities in the region, including Ewu, Ogoda, Orere, and Assan. The Urhobo language serves as the predominant means of communication among the people, and they possess a distinct cultural and religious heritage. The religious practices observed by the individual encompass both Christianity and traditional religious beliefs. The territory in Ughelli Local Government is representative of one of the five primary clans. Additional clans found in the tropical rainforest flora zone are Arhavwarien, Okparabe, Ujevwe, and Olomu, which are known for their

abundant mineral and oil resources. The region is characterised by a variety of natural features, including rivers and floodplains. The primary occupations of the Ewu community encompass fishing, farming, and the commercial exchange of vital food commodities such as maize and cassava. Furthermore, the cultivation of palms and rubber is prevalent in the region as a means of generating income.

Instances of emotional and physical mistreatment substantiate the occurrence of domestic violence against women in Ewu Land. These forms of abuse encompass actions such as consistently criticizing a woman, diminishing her capabilities, engaging in name-calling or other forms of verbal mistreatment, impairing a partner's relationship with their children, or restricting a partner's access to friends and family. A partner may be physically abused through actions such as striking, kicking, burning, seizing, squeezing, pushing, slapping, pulling hair, biting, withholding medical assistance, coercing substance misuse, or employing other means of physical coercion. Additionally, this encompasses the act of causing harm to a partner's possessions as a result of anger, which may involve hurling objects,

striking walls, kicking doors, or engaging in acts of burning, among others. Sexual abuse refers to the act of coercing a partner into engaging in sexual activity without their voluntary and explicit agreement. A woman may potentially find herself in a relationship characterised by sexual abuse if her boyfriend or husband consistently accuses her of infidelity or exhibits frequent jealousy towards her external interactions. Furthermore, women may express this through a desire to dress in a sexually suggestive manner. Most of the men in Ewu Land engage in derogatory and sexually explicit language or employ sexualized epithets towards their partners. A few cases of DV against women in Ewu land are presented below from two communities.

Case Study One:

Mrs. "A" was a victim of domestic violence. In fact, she was still nursing her wounds during the interview with her. Mrs. "A," a skilled tailor, is married to Mr. "A," a farmer, and both individuals are indigenous residents of Orere, where they currently reside. During the time of this interview, Mrs. "A" was a nursing mother. According to her statement, Mrs.

"A" and her spouse have been married for ten years and have three children, one of whom she is currently breastfeeding. As to the account provided by Mrs. "A", she has experienced a multitude of instances in which her spouse subjected her to physical and emotional abuse. However, the most recent incident was very severe. According to her, on November 31, 2022, within the Orere community, her spouse subjected her to severe physical assault using a stick, resulting in the dislocation of her arm (refer to the accompanying photograph below). According to her account, he failed to have his dinner prepared and waiting on the table upon his return from the farm, which she attributes to the occurrence.

When inquired about whether she had reported the accident to the police, her pastor, or her family, Mrs. "A" responded negatively. Nevertheless, the parents were aware of the situation and insisted on her return to their residence. According to her account, it was at this juncture that the senior members of both families intervened in the situation and sought to fix it, albeit not without reproaching her for failing to fulfill her wifely duties as a competent homemaker. When inquired about the cessation of spousal abuse by her

husband subsequent to the most recent episode, Mrs. "A" responded in the negative, albeit acknowledging a reduction in the frequency of such occurrences. Mr. 'A' was also consulted for insights on the subject. His perspective is that in Urhoboland, the concept of domestic violence against women is nonexistent. Instead, he asserted that an Urhobo man's approach is to administer discipline to his wife when she commits an error.

Case Study Two:

Mrs. "B" is a divorced individual who hails from the town of Ogoda. Presently, she engages in agricultural activities as a cassava farmer within the local community. The individual in question was previously married to Mr. "B" from the Ewu village, who is engaged in the production of traditional alcoholic beverages. According to Mrs. "B", for the course of their 17-year marriage, she has been unable to conceive a male child, with the exception of their daughter. Mr. "B" is married to three women, with Mrs. "B" being his first wife. According to Mrs. "B," her husband commenced mistreating her shortly after introducing another lady, referred to as his second

wife, into their household. According to Mrs. "B", her spouse would confine her within their residence and subject her to severe physical abuse in response to minor triggers. As per Mrs. "B's" account, her spouse harboured a strong aversion towards her, their daughter, sustenance, and every aspect of her existence. The individual recounted that her spouse subjected her to physical abuse by different means, such as causing harm to her person, striking her, kicking her, burning her clothing, shoving her, slapping her, and pulling her hair. Additionally, the spouse withheld financial support from both her and their child without justification. However, a significant incident occurred on March 27, 2017, wherein the individual in question exhibited intense aggression towards the victim, resulting in physical assault and the infliction of a laceration on her cheek using a machete (see the victim below). This occurrence transpired as a result of the individual's pregnant spouse (third spouse), with whom he had a minor disagreement, falsely asserting that she engaged in a physical altercation with another individual in an attempt to induce a miscarriage.

When questioned about whether she had reported the accident to the police or her pastor, Mrs. "B" confirmed that she had indeed done so. She conveyed that her spouse was apprehended and held in police custody for an extended duration of time. Nevertheless, a decision was made to grant his freedom on the condition that he assumes complete accountability for her medical care. Based on her account, it was subsequent to this unfortunate incident that she made the decision to permanently terminate the marriage, despite the fact that he had managed to cause a lasting facial injury. They located Mr. "B" at his residence in Ogoda to obtain his perspective on the matter, but found him confined to a bed due to illness. Upon being challenged with the matter about his former spouse, he acknowledged the veracity of the account and expressed remorse for his previous behavior. Mr. "B" additionally verified that his remaining spouses have departed from his company due to persistent instances of mistreatment.

According to the study conducted through personal interviews in Ewu Land, it was found that approximately 25% of women reported experiencing intimate partner abuse at some point in their lives

(Temie, personal communication, 2023; Odiete, personal communication, 2023; Odibo, personal interview, 2023). Prevailing societal norms among males that endorse violence against women within the domestic sphere diminish the mitigating effect of increased women's status on domestic violence and invert the probabilities. Males in Ewu land, like in other African cultures, primarily provide income, while females are responsible for managing domestic affairs, child-rearing, and household finances (Temie, personal communication, 2023). The alteration of established gender norms, particularly in patriarchal contexts, has the potential to give rise to instances of violence.

Instances of violence frequently discipline women in the context of Ewu land. This occurs particularly when a woman challenges or defies her husband with the intention of maintaining his power and authority (Odiete, personal communication, 2023). The effects of women's social status are different in different cultures and societies. These effects depend on things like how independent women are, whether they have access to resources, how they compare to men, whether they choose to follow social

norms or not, and whether men and women are treated equally (Ottuh, Ottuh, & Aitufe, 2014). Various elements such as female autonomy, self-determination, and gender equality influence the status of women in Ewu land, which can have either positive or negative effects depending on the specific circumstances (Odibo, personal interview, 2023). The prevalent kinds of violence against women in Ewu land encompass sexual harassment, physical abuse, cultural practices that cause harm, emotional and psychological abuse, socioeconomic abuse, and violence targeting non-combatant women during crisis situations.

Causes and Impact of Domestic Violence against Women in Ewu

Various factors contribute to male violence towards women, such as alcoholism, substance abuse, dysfunctional interpersonal relationships, a tendency to resort to violence when experiencing anger, psychological disorders arising from childhood trauma, frustration stemming from unemployment, and the interpretation of religious texts that promote male dominance (Asagba, personal communication, 2022). Domestic violence specifically directed towards women significantly violates their inherent human

rights, hindering their full engagement in the progress and growth of the Ewu community. During the current year, several female participants interviewed revealed that they faced financial challenges, especially in affording mobile phone recharge cards due to limited capacity (Orhode, personal communication, 2023). Additionally, women encounter challenges when attempting to extricate themselves from hazardous and abusive circumstances as a result of financial limitations. The perpetuation of victims' economic dependence on the perpetrator has resulted in the degradation and systematic deprivation of employment possibilities and financial autonomy for a considerable number of women (Ottuh, Ottuh, & Aitufe, 2014). Agbedo et al. (2021) suggest that in specific cultural contexts where women are viewed as possessions of their male partners, there is a significant likelihood of violence against women occurring in Nigeria.

According to academic research, the main things that lead to violence against women are rigid gender roles and identities, which include societal norms about what it means to be male and female, and the unequal distribution of power and resources

between men and women (Pincock, 2018). Numerous factors might potentially contribute to the emergence of aggressive behaviour, encompassing a range of influences such as feelings of frustration, exposure to violent media, instances of spousal or neighbourhood hostility, and the prevalence of hostile attitudes. Pincock (2018) posits that certain factors can increase the probability of aggressive behaviour. These factors include alcohol consumption, verbal insults, and environmental conditions characterised by high temperatures and crowded locations. Peer pressure, or social influence, comprises a range of behaviours, including inattentiveness, lack of respect, lowered self-esteem, maltreatment or neglect, exposure to violence in one's family, community, or media, and the presence of weapons.

Frequently, women terminate their relationships following five instances of separation as a result of heightened relational bonds and emotional attachments. The aforementioned circumstances can potentially evoke emotions characterised by sadness and unease, and the existence of aggression can intensify these emotional states. Women may also experience a sense of duty to uphold familial cohesion

as a result of cultural and religious conventions. A significant number of women exhibit a reluctance to seek help when they encounter instances of domestic violence (Lock, 2018). Men are predominantly attributed to the perpetration of violent crimes across diverse situations, but certain societies impose societal norms that enforce adherence to conventional gender roles. It is possible for women to exert influence on men, compelling them to participate in acts of violence in order to assert their masculinity. Violence encompasses various dimensions, including emotional, financial, physical, and sexual forms. Empirical evidence suggests that individuals who have been exposed to violence throughout their formative years exhibit an increased propensity to engage in aggressive conduct within their adult relationships (Erhabor & Ottuh, 2023). The experiences of domestic violence dramatically impact children's feelings of safety and their engagement in self-protective behaviours, including seeking sanctuary or ensuring their own security.

In the context of Ewu land, the prevalence of male patriarchal dominance is evident through acts of violence perpetrated against women, hence exerting

adverse impacts on the health of both mothers and children. Women who experience domestic violence tend to have more severe health issues, heightened psychological distress, and a greater likelihood of contemplating suicide. Moreover, the occurrence of domestic violence imposes limitations on women's autonomy in making decisions regarding their reproductive health, hence elevating their vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and unwanted pregnancies (Lock, 2018). The use of violence as an inappropriate mechanism for emotional expression frequently results in the isolation of individuals involved and the erosion of respect for both the perpetrators and recipients of such actions. In the region of Ewu, instances of domestic abuse have resulted in the dissolution of marriages and separations between couples, hence conveying unfavourable implications to unmarried women regarding the institution of marriage.

Theological Evaluation of Domestic Violence

The theology of suffering is a theological discipline that explores the biblical teachings pertaining to pain while also contemplating the

essence of God and the present condition of humanity (2 Corinthians 11:19). Suffering is commonly conceptualized as a direct result of human transgressions against the divine, and it functions as a mechanism for achieving spiritual purification as indicated in Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21 (Crowley, 2008). Nevertheless, the historical record reveals a multitude of instances when the true meaning of suffering has been misconstrued, mostly as a result of its frequent correlation with the endeavour to embody qualities reminiscent of Christ (Patric, 2003). The Bible condemns violence as an expression of sin, and it is widely believed that domestic violence is often associated with sin (Domestic Violence Biblical and Theological Resources, 2019). The portrayal of God in the Old Testament exhibits a propensity for violence and a desire for retribution, particularly evident on occasions where divine commands are issued for the extinction of the Canaanites and other tribes (Deuteronomy 20:17; Birch, 2001). The Bible contains prohibitions against both physical and mental violence, but the efficacy of these prohibitions may be constrained in the absence of empathy towards the victim, a comprehensive knowledge of the gravity of

the offence, and awareness of proper procedures for addressing such transgressions.

Theology of gender has traditionally made a distinction between the hierarchical organisation of genders and the subordination of women inside the institution of marriage, as well as their challenges related to motherhood (Patrick, 2003). The notion of gender identity is closely intertwined with the theological belief that we are fashioned in the image of the divine. Religious beliefs demonstrate patriarchal attributes as a result of their origination within civilizations characterised by the prevalence of male power (Birch, 2001). The idea of timelessness is helpful for healing because it gives God the power to transcend time and know everything that has happened and will happen in the future. During seasons of vulnerability, domestic violence poses a substantial risk to human life. The Bible provides documentation of several instances of familial and domestic abuse while simultaneously condemning all such behaviours.

During seasons of vulnerability, domestic violence poses a substantial risk to human life. In the

Book of Judges, Abimelech strategically arranges the demise of seventy individuals who are his half-siblings, with the intention of consolidating his power and seeking retribution against those who resisted his rule. Jephthah, a Gileadite, experiences social exclusion from his family as a result of his mother's profession as a prostitute (Birch, 2001). However, he emerges as a fierce warrior and assumes leadership over a faction comprised of individuals who are marginalised or considered social misfits. People regard the daughter of Jephthah as perpetually celibate, which leads to the discontinuation of his family line. Domestic abuse can be classified as a form of "oppression" according to biblical teachings and is frequently recognised and denounced in biblical texts. The biblical allusions provide clear evidence of the Lord's involvement in protecting and assisting those who are oppressed (Crowley, 2008). Domestic violence encompasses various forms of abuse, including the deprivation of physical protection, manipulation of family dynamics, financial exploitation, lying, and spiritual compulsion.

The Bible identifies oppression and abuse, especially verbal assault, as sinful actions (Domestic Violence Biblical and Theological Resources, 2019;

Birch, 2001). The concept of divine protection for women encompasses the notion of husbands being summoned to fulfill their responsibility of meeting their wives' physical and emotional requirements with attentiveness and compassion (Crowley, 2008). Engaging in abusive conduct may be considered a violation, but the individual experiencing harm is not at fault for refraining from abuse and ending the relationship. Christian forgiveness and ethics find firm grounding in the teachings of the gospel, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness and the belief in transformation. Christians are motivated to actively engage in acts of charity, rejecting and fighting malevolence, while simultaneously endeavouring to lessen the weight of servitude (Ottuh & Erhabor, 2022). The utilization of resistance as a manifestation of affection can serve as a guiding principle for the Christian community in their efforts to combat violence. However, it is imperative to avoid passively tolerating or accepting any form of abusive conduct. The perspective of Paul about slavery diverges from his position on circumcision, implying that within the framework of their religious beliefs centred on Christ, the individual who is enslaved achieves a condition of

liberation, while the individual who is not enslaved assumes a role similar to that of a servant.

Towards a Solution to Domestic Violence against Women

The acknowledgment of domestic violence and the effective communication of such awareness to victims within their congregation are crucial responsibilities entrusted to pastors and church leaders. One way in which they can provide assistance is by promoting the dissemination of healthy relationship models through marriage preparation courses and youth organisations, thereby empowering individuals to take on a leadership role in this undertaking (Wright & Hilton, 2020). The primary objective of the church is to provide guidance to family units in order to cultivate love and compassion, as demonstrated by Christ. Additionally, the church endeavours to create a safe environment and offer supportive resources for people who have encountered domestic abuse within their familial context.

Pastoral and ecclesiastical authorities possess the capacity to provide significant aid to individuals affected by domestic violence, as well as to proactively

deter such forms of abuse. According to Doebling (2015), this can be achieved through the implementation of ongoing training programmes for personnel and volunteers, the creation of a supportive atmosphere that encourages victims to disclose their experiences without fear, the avoidance of couple's counselling in cases where abuse is suspected or confirmed, the empowerment of leaders within small groups, youth programmes, and children's ministries to respond effectively to instances of domestic violence, the provision of resources to the congregation, the public endorsement of initiatives aimed at eradicating domestic violence, and the establishment of collaborative partnerships with local agencies dedicated to addressing domestic violence.

Church leaders communicate several important messages to victims of abuse. These messages encompass several aspects, such as fostering open dialogue, promoting reconciliation, encouraging the sharing of personal experiences, emphasizing the adoption of biblical values, advocating for mutual surrender, and facilitating collaborative prayer and Bible study (Doebling, 2015). Nevertheless, these signals are predicated on the idea that the perpetrator

of the aggressive behaviour possesses both consciousness of their acts and a willingness to consider altering their conduct. The church frequently promotes a perception of male dominance through its doctrines and rituals, amplifying its restricted recognition and embrace of women's abilities and possibilities (Doehring, 2015). It is of utmost importance for churches and theological organisations to acknowledge and give precedence to the significance of advocating for the emancipation of cultures, beliefs, theologies, and interpretations of texts. The prophetic role of the church encompasses not only the condemnation of violence but also the implementation of educational endeavours with the objective of preventing such acts. Restorative justice is a framework that seeks to engage victims, offenders, and affected communities in the pursuit of comprehensive and long-lasting remedies, with a focus on addressing harm, acknowledging obligations, and promoting active involvement.

Church leaders play a crucial role in providing support to individuals affected by domestic abuse by offering a compassionate listening ear, a safe setting, guidance rooted in biblical principles, prayer, and

spiritual companionship. They emphasise the importance of marriage and familial relationships, but adhering to the teachings of Christ does not require hardship or persisting under oppressive conditions (Miriti, 2009). Christian ethics, which are distinct from perfectionism or idealism, address the intricacies of imperfect people in an imperfect social framework. Love plays a key role in Christian ethical standards, directing individuals towards acts of charity and forgiveness. Christian leaders, such as pastors and elders, are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of the congregation, resolving doctrinal inaccuracies, and enforcing disciplinary actions. They should integrate their church and family lives to cultivate a Christ-centred existence within their familial spheres (Miles, 2000). In instances of violence or abuse, church leaders should actively intervene and provide protective measures and support to the victim. The Roman Catholic Church has hesitancy towards modernization in relation to marital sacredness, as it seems incongruent with biblical teachings about the significance of the family unit. The church should evolve into a sanctuary that provides a secure environment for individuals who have experienced

abuse, enabling them to contemplate their options while receiving spiritual support from both divine sources and those who have had similar challenges.

Conclusion

The research revealed a high incidence of domestic abuse within the Christian community, wherein several victims do not seek assistance from church leaders and law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, the matter frequently goes unnoticed within religious establishments, resulting in long-lasting consequences and inadequate acknowledgment. Males in the Ewu Kingdom frequently utilize incidences of domestic violence as a means to establish dominance, particularly in the context of gender norms that lack a fair division of power. Domestic violence against women is a complex issue involving abusive behaviours in intimate partnerships, household structures, and familial contexts. It is considered a sinful act and unethical behaviour in the Bible.

In the Christian community, domestic abuse is prevalent, often involving male dominance and excessive alcohol use. Power dynamics between

genders, particularly men, contribute to domestic violence. Women often avoid reporting abuse to religious leaders or law enforcement due to fear of arrest. Theology of suffering and gender theology highlight gender hierarchies and the subjection of women in marriage. Prevention and intervention are crucial, and both men and women should learn about domestic violence. The church's role in preventing and intervening in domestic abuse is significant, and improving enforcement of domestic and gender-based violence regulations is essential.

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Oral interviews

S/N	Name	Sex	Status	Place	Date
1	Godwin Odiete	M	Community leader	Ewu	12/1/2022
2	Monday Odibo	M	Pastor	Ewu	12/1/2023
3	Agnes Temie	F	Teacher	Ogoda	30/3/2022
4	Faith Orhode	F	Midwife	Ewu	12/1/2022
5	Urhuemu Okotie	F	Trader	Ogoda	30/3/2022
6	Janet Ojoboh	F	Farmer	Orere	1/4/2022
7	Precious Oweh	F	Housewife	Ewu	12/1/2022
8	Bleder Olomu	F	Tailor	Assan	14/2/2022
9	Famous	M	Pastor	Ogoda	30/3/2022

	Potokri				
10	Ajarhor Ajeba	M	Farmer	Assan	14/2/2022
11	Magnus Owhobeno	M	Community leader	Orere	1/4/2022
12	Obiehbi Asagba	M	Community leader	Ewu	1/4/2022
13	Kovoh Ogban	F	Business	Orere	1/4/2022
14	Friday Fada	M	Pastor	Ewu	1/4/2022
15	Adam Ighoyoma	M	Pastor	Ogoda	30/3/2022
16	Patience Oseh	F	Women leader	Orere	1/4/2022
17	Pius Osawe	M	Priest	Ewu	12/1/2022
18	Beatrice Eghaghe	F	Student	Assan	14/2/2022
19	Moses Omoghene	M	Tecnician	Ogoda	30/3/2022
20	Monday Oyibo	M	Teacher	Ogoda	30/3/2022
21	Edmond Ujevwechia	M	Politician	Ewu	12/1/2022
22	Thomas Efeturi	M	Lawyer	Ogoda	30/3/2022
23	Clement Akpode	M	Medical Doctor	Orere	1/4/2022
24	Janet Kpokpo	F	Councillor	Ewu	12/1/2022
25	Emos Koko	M	Farmer	Assan	14/2/2022
26	Nelson Edafeurhobo	M	Priest	Ewu	12/1/2022