



**A REVIEW OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS EFFECTS ON LEARNING:  
THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT**

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***Abstract***

*This paper is a review study on the prevalence of domestic violence and its effects on learning with particular reference to Nigeria. Domestic violence has been attracting the attention of researchers because of the danger it portends for the society at large. Researchers have continued to show from their findings strong negative relationship between domestic violence, and learning as a result of inappropriate classroom behaviour, dysfunctional peer relationship, attentional challenges and low self-esteem which are aftermaths of domestic violence. The paper looked at domestic violence as a menace which should be dealt with in time so that the Nigerian learner can operate in an atmosphere that will provide the right psychological and emotional stability that can enhance high learning processes and outcomes. Counsellors' and other stake holders' roles in carrying out public enlightenment on the subject of the prevalence of domestic violence with a view to finding lasting solutions to it were also emphasized.*

*Keywords: Domestic violence, learning, children, adolescent*

## **Introduction**

Domestic violence against women and children is a major global challenge considering the negative outcomes. Nigeria is also among nations where domestic violence seems to be thriving unfettered. Women in Nigeria, like most parts of the world are victims of domestic violence without regards to age, class, religion or social status (Hamm 2000). Violence against women and children affects learning. Statistics shows that more women suffer from domestic violence than men. Children too are target of domestic violence either when they face the domestic violence like maltreatment, sexual abuse and so on or through exposure to it as other members of the family especially mothers come under cruel treatment of their partners. Domestic violence has a negative impact on learning as those children or adolescents who go through it face emotional disturbances which could lead to attention deficit, poor peer interaction and low self-esteem. Ajila and Olutola (2007), posited that the home has impact on students' psychological, emotional, social and economic state as family setting can affect their life circumstances and level of performance. Parental conflicts can affect children's emotional stability and this could translate to poor learning. WHO (2002) defined violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal- development or deprivation. Students from families where they encounter domestic violence often transfer maladjusted behaviour into the classroom environment. Jones (1994) posited that violence is any act that causes the victim to do something they do not want to do, prevent them from doing something they want to do or causes them to be afraid. Domestic abuse or violence is any abuse which could be physical, sexual, verbal or emotional which happens within the home setting. It includes: battering of partners or any other member of the family, sexual abuse of children, marital rape and customary acts that create harm for the female gender, such as genital mutilation (Dahlberg and Krug, 2002, UNICEF, 2005). Aihie, (2009) reported that West Africa as a region permitted and admitted domestic violence against women in some of its cultures. This means domestic violence is protected by certain traditional practices in Nigeria and some parts of Africa. Where there is domestic violence, children suffer the impacts as well even when they are not the direct sufferers. This is so because children or adolescents are very close to their mothers who often go through the pains of domestic violence. Studies show that more women face domestic violence than men.

Counsellors have a role to play to address the menace of domestic violence. This is because the learners' well-being is very important to counsellors. Counselling interventions will help to reduce incidence of domestic violence. Adeniyi & Ogunesan (2018), posited that counselling is a process of assisting a client who is sad, discouraged, disorganized, and need assistance from a professional who is trained in psychotherapy to identify such challenges and assist the client to adjust and live a happy life. Counselling deals with wellness, personal growth, career, and pathological concerns. In other words, the counsellor's work involves therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the client (Casey, 1996 in Osiki, 2018). Domestic violence is a social menace which must be addressed now; and counsellors must be in the front line leading the war against it. Osiki (2018), noted that counselling is a process that may be developmental or intervening and that it focuses on client's goals, thereby making it to

be both choice and change on the part of the client to enhance a well-adjusted life. Counsellors' interventions in uninvolved homes where violence is bred is critical. Pupils or students who are exposed to domestic violence should attract empathy of counsellors.

Considering all that have been discussed so far, it is safe to say that domestic violence is great challenge to the world. Learners are pupils or students who come to school to learn in order to become responsible citizens. Their learning ambitions can be truncated by domestic violence. As a result of the enormous strain domestic violence has placed on our learning system, this study intended to review literature on the subject matter and highlight points that are needed to create learning drive among learners and to reduce domestic violence on learners because of the challenges it places on their learning path. To achieve this purpose, this study considered: the concept of domestic violence, the prevalence of domestic violence, Effects of domestic violence on learning, implications of the study for counsellors with conclusion and recommendations.

### **The Concept of Domestic Violence**

The concept of domestic violence has attracted a number of definitions. Like many other psychological constructs, it will be difficult to have a consensus definition of it. However, all definitions point towards the fact that domestic violence is a home maladjustment. There are two key words to be clearly defined here: 'domestic' and 'violence.' The word 'domestic' comes from the Latin word 'domus' which means a 'home' or a 'dwelling place' (Tony 2002). Similarly, WHO (2002) looked at violence as the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. In a nut shell, domestic violence simply means 'home violence' from a literal or general point of view. Many experts have attempted to define or to explain the concept of domestic violence with slight variations perhaps because of individualistic perception of the concept. Akpan and Usoroh (2005) postulated that domestic violence is an intimate violence that could be physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional that are inflicted on women. Hester (2006) contended that domestic violence is manifested as a desire of one party in a relationship to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence is the victimization of a person with whom the abuser has or has had an intimate, romantic, spousal relationship (UNICEF, 2014). Adams (2001) saw domestic violence as a pattern of behaviour that includes physical, psychological and/or emotional abuse toward an intimate partner. Domestic violence can be seen as a deliberate abuse or pain inflicted on anyone in the home which results in distress, injury, undue dominion or control over others. Some of the definitions of this concept tend to focus domestic violence on women; others look at domestic violence from all angles in terms of all members of a family or home setting. The major thing here is that domestic violence implies application of force or coercion which could result in inflicting pains on others. Benedictis, Jaffe & Segal (2016) categorized domestic violence as follows: Physical abuse (pushing, kicking, murder and so on), verbal or nonverbal abuse (psychological abuse, mental abuse, and emotional abuse), sexual abuse (sexual assault or harassment), stalking or cyberstalking (repetitive threat phone calls or through the internet platform), economic abuse

or financial abuse (withholding financial resources to punish others), spiritual abuse (preventing others from practicing their religion).

Domestic violence can lead to psychological or emotional challenges like depression and substance abuse, low self-esteem, withdrawal, poor learning and high school dropout on the part of students.

### **Prevalence of Domestic Violence**

Prevalence implies existence of something. In this context, prevalence of domestic violence means the existence of it. Literatures which reported prevalence of domestic violence abound. It is very important to look at some of the prevalence reports based on available literature. Studies on the impacts of domestic violence on children have gained ground and prominence in the western world (Meltzer 2009). However in African countries like Nigeria much is yet to be done. This is attributable to the fact that in most African settings, domestic violence is perceived and treated as a family matter which should not attract other people's interventions (Aihie 2009). Project Alert (2004), observed in an interview with market women, women in other places, girls and ladies in secondary schools and universities within Lagos state, Nigeria that 64.4% of the 45 women working in other places apart from the market confessed they had been beaten by their partners who were their husbands or those in romantic relationships with them. Similarly 56.6% of 48 market women reported violence against them within the home setting. Alabi and Oni (2017) carried out a study aimed at determining the impact of domestic violence on a child academic performance in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo state and reported prevalence of different kinds of domestic violence such as physical, economic, emotional and psychological domestic violence in most of the homes

Obi & Ozumba (2007), in a study on the factors associated with domestic violence, in South East, Nigeria, reported that 70% of participants indicated abuse in their homes with 92% as female partners and the remaining 8% as male ones. The study also confirmed that common forms of abuse as indicated by participants were shouting at a partner (93%), slapping or pushing (77%) and punching and kicking (40%). Literature confirming children or adolescent exposure to domestic violence are also available. The commission on Academic Success for Boston children (2006), confirmed in a study that trauma reactions in children resulted mainly from exposure to domestic violence in the Boston community and noted that studies of abused children showed high academic and other school problems.

From available literature, it is clear that domestic violence has sufficient prevalence reports and empirical work which can provide valuable information to researchers and the general public.

## **Effects of Domestic Violence on Learning**

Learning as a concept is difficult to be captured in a single definition. Ojugo (2016) citing (Ogundire 2000) suggested that the complexity surrounding the concept of learning can be reduced by considering learning as a process and also as an outcome. Learning as a process refers to the activities that bring about a change in behaviour while learning as an outcome is considered as the end product or the result of series of activities one engages in during the course of learning (Ojugo 2016). No matter how learning is defined, domestic violence affects it. Learning processes are disrupted by domestic violence and this leads to poor learning outcome.

Domestic violence has been reported to have effects on learning in many parts of the world. This is because domestic violence leads to emotional disturbance which could create impairment of daily functioning among children and adolescent learners. Alabi & Oni (2017) in a study carried out in Owo Local Government Area of Ondo State reported that academic performance differed significantly among the students who participated in the study. Their findings collaborated the views of Iarskaia-Smir nova, Romanov, & Antonova, (2008), who opined that children from dysfunctional families are unlikely to function well at school. Similarly, Bostock, Plumpton & Pratt (2009) postulated that children who are traumatized usually show high inability to maintain friendships or healthy peer interactions. Children who are traumatized by domestic violence may be functionally impaired (Elbert, Schauer, Schauer, Huschka, Hirth & Neuner (2009). This means such children could have difficulty concentrating in the class which will affect learning. Researchers have confirmed that learners who are exposed to violence lack Reading, Mathematics, and General Knowledge skills (Silverstein, Augustyn, Cabral, & Zuckerman, 2006). Children who face domestic violence are prone to stress which can affect the executive function of the prefrontal cortex, a part in the fore brain responsible for reasoning and memory. Children who are traumatized often lack inhibitory or coping skills to overcome intrusive thoughts emanating from traumatic episodes. This can lead to attention deficit, anxiety, insomnia and other related affective disorders.

Domestic violence often set the stage for children's maladaptive behaviour since they usually emulate and practice learnt behaviour from family members and significant others within a social context. Again, the effects of domestic violence could affect many areas of the learner which could be psychological, emotional or even physical. Researches have shown that children whose mothers were abused by their partners have lower intelligent quotient (IQ) when compared with peers without such challenges (Aihie 2009). Anikweze (1998) found out in a study that domestic violence can alter adolescents' well-being as they may become socially violent. This certainly has a negative impact on learning and academic performance since the effects of domestic violence can alter their perception about life and distorts memory capacity. A child who has gone through domestic violence or witnessed it may become isolated, sad, depressed and distracted. Martinez-Torteya, Bogat, Eye, & Levendosky (2009) postulated that children who have association with domestic violence are prone to report stressful life events than children from peaceful homes. Volpe (1996) observed that youths from violent background are found to have eating, concentration maladjustments, and generalized anxiety challenges. As a result of domestic violence, an adolescent may have low interest in social activities due to low self-esteem.

The commission on Academic Success for Boston children (2006), observed in a survey in 2004 of Boston high school students that there was high exposure to violence among the students who enrolled for the study: 89% had encountered at least one type of violence in the previous year, and 44% had been traumatized. The study noted that up to 20% of this violence were witnessed in the home. The study confirmed that the traumatized children became willful and stubborn, leading to withdrawal from learning and maladaptive behaviour that could result in suspension or even expulsion from school. The situation in the study shows that children who go through domestic violence have school adjustment problems and have learning challenges.

Similarly, a study carried out by Yusuf (2017) titled “Impacts of domestic violence against women on students’ academic performance as perceived by primary school teachers in Nigeria” reveals that 85% of the respondents agreed that domestic violence against women led to pupils’ poor concentration and fighting with others in the class. 83% of them agreed that children from homes of domestic violence lacked writing materials, and were hostile, untidy and exhibited low self-esteem. 80% of them agreed that the pupils from such homes were moody in the class and lacked essential textbooks. 79% of them reported lateness to school and poor performance in the examination. 78% of the teachers confirmed inability of pupils from domestic violence homes to complete homework and they also reported violent acts being associated to them. 77% of them confirmed that poor performance in the test/examination of such was attributable to effects of domestic violence. 76% of them agreed that it led to truancy. 74% of the teachers agreed that it led to poor performance in the class work. 72% of them reported poor study habit. 71% of them agreed domestic violence was responsible for improper feeding and aggressive acts of pupils from such homes. 68% of the teachers agreed that domestic violence against women contributed to poor assimilation and disobedience of pupils in the class or in the school. The study shows that domestic violence affected learning processes and learning outcomes of learners. Nigerian children and adolescents based on this study are at high risk of dysfunctional learning as a result domestic violence.

Furthermore, a study carried out by Adejobi ;Osonwa; Iyam, ; Udonwa, and Osonwa, (2013) titled “Child Maltreatment and Academic Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Ibadan, Nigeria” revealed that children and young people who encounter persistent and different types of abuse have higher chances of destructive behaviour. The study showed that there was a relationship between child maltreatment and academic performance. The experiences of those involved in domestic violence included: being yelled at or spanked, insulted, threatened, neglected physically or emotionally, and relatively less common, exposure to sexual abuse. These traumatic experiences encountered by the Nigerian students used as research subjects led to their poor academic performance. The finding supported Mill’s (2004) which contended that abused and neglected children performed poorly on standardized tests and with poorer school marks, even when socio-economic factor and other background variables were taken into consideration.

From the foregoing, it is clear that domestic violence can lead to poor learning. Nigerian children and adolescents from the research evidence provided so far have experienced impaired

learning capacity as a result of domestic violence. The effects of domestic violence also portend danger for the overall education of the Nigerian pupils or students.

### **Implications for Counselling**

This study has implications for counselling as it tried to find a lasting solution to domestic violence and its effects on children in the society, particularly Nigeria by reviewing literature related to the subject matter. Counselling remains a formidable tool in repositioning learners' emotional well-being in order to enhance good learning processes and outcomes. Counselling department should be created in every institution of learning to help students with emotional issues. Community chiefs and members of the public should be helped by professional counsellors by putting in place seminars or workshops to educate them about the dangers of domestic violence and its implication on learning. The Parents' Teachers Association (PTA) should be used extensively by counsellors in conjunction with school heads to counsel parents on the need to maintain peaceful homes for the benefit of their children's developmental well-being.

Counselling interventions should be put in place by counsellors to help learners who are facing domestic violence. Emotional stability is needed for learners to cope with the ever growing challenges and life stressors around them (Adomeh & Enokela 2020). Domestic violence contributes immensely to life stressors, making it necessary for counsellors to work diligently to ensure learners are emotionally stable through appropriate counselling interventions.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This study considered domestic violence and its effects on learning, making Nigeria a focal point. It is believed that domestic violence has become a global challenge. One of the effects of domestic violence as revealed in this study is poor learning. Learners from violent homes have been discovered to have problems with learning.

Based on all that have been discovered from literature about domestic violence and the danger it poses to learners, it is hereby recommended that all members of the Nigerian society should see domestic violence as a menace that has to be dealt with. Religious leaders are to emphasize the need to deal with domestic violence in the messages they preach to their followers. Government should encourage marital counselling by engaging the service of professional counselors so that marriage counselling services can be made available to the general public. The mass media should also be engaged with talking or writing against domestic violence. World children and adolescent bodies need to form strong relationships to speak against domestic violence. Researchers in Nigeria should carry out more researches reporting domestic violence to provide literatures with local contents.

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