

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG MUSLIM WOMEN IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYTICAL DISCOURSE

By

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### Abstract

Women have been subjected to various forms of violence ranging from rape, battering, tracking and even murder. Although the degree differs from society to society, the occurrence has profound and destructive consequences including psychological, physical, emotional and social disorders. The fact that domestic violence prevails across all strata of the Nigerian society is no longer debatable. Despite the Quran and Sunnah go against and the spirited efforts made by the world bodies such as the United Nations (e.g. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights) and Nigeria's constitutions to eliminate discrimination and violence against women, and promote the idea of freedom, equality and justice, the Nigerian woman is often violated and without apology. This research aims at examining the domestic violence among Muslim women in Nigeria and highlights the Islamic views on domestic violence. Primary and secondary sources of information were adopted. The research finds out that women were mostly the victims of domestic violence especially the pregnant women. Finally, some recommendations were provided that when implemented the incidence of domestic violence may reduce.

**Keyword:** *Violence, Domestic, Muslim, Women, Nigeria.*

### Introduction

Domestic violence among the Muslim community is considered a complicated human rights issue due to varying legal remedies for women by the nations where they live, the extent to which they have support or opportunities to divorce their husbands, cultural stigma to hide evidence of abuse, and inability to have abuse recognized by police or the judicial system in some Muslim nations. Domestic violence is a social

problem that, although well recognised, is still associated with uncertainty and taboos. Many women, in their intimate relationships or immediate social environment experience psychological and/or physical violence, which becomes a serious health problem for them. Domestic violence is considered one of the most common forms of gender-related violence, and various studies estimate that between 10 and 35% of women had experienced domestic

violence at some point in their lives. Nevertheless, it is a frequently neglected problem in crisis intervention centres, emergency wards, and obstetrics and gynaecological emergency rooms.<sup>1</sup>

### **A Muslim woman**

A Muslim woman believes in Allah with a true heart, submits completely to Him, is aware that there is no other deity, that He is the Lord of every being and thing, and that He is All-Powerful. Therefore, she fears and respects only Him and seeks to win only His good pleasure.

She worships only Him, accepts only Him as her closest friend, and seeks only His help. She also knows that only He can direct good and bad toward her, and so lives in the full knowledge that she is dependent on Him. She knows that He keeps her alive, provides and cares for her, and protects and guards her. For these reasons, she has no expectations of other people.

She believes in Allah without the slightest doubt in her heart for her whole life, never losing heart or belief regardless of the circumstances.

She knows how to be grateful and content with her closeness to Him both when her life is good and when she is undergoing difficulties. She is in a state of constant submission, certain of our Lord's love, compassion, forgiveness and providence.

When she encounters a problem, she knows that Allah has provided a solution in the Qur'an, and that what

matters most is her continued sincere love, submission, and trust in Allah. She is certain of Allah's promise that He creates everything according to His justice and with wisdom and goodness.

Even if her problems seem to go on forever, she never surrenders to hopelessness or worries when His help will come. Content with what He has destined for her, she maintains her patience and submission, knowing that something good will come out of it. She remembers what the Qur'an says about those who abandon their belief in such times. In addition, she recites "*My Lord is with me and will guide me*"<sup>2</sup> just as the Prophets did when faced with hardship. Throughout her life, her profound faith enables her to see Allah's compassion, closeness, love, help, and friendship at all times.

Allah created men and women for a purpose and revealed their responsibilities in the Qur'an. Men and women are required to lead the moral life prescribed by Allah, worship and serve Him, and to win His pleasure. They are required to tell people who are far from the happy and contented life about following the Qur'anic teachings and to make a genuine effort to help them draw closer to Allah's pleasure, mercy, and Paradise.

Some unbelieving women consider strength and willpower to be male characteristics, out of the mistaken belief that only men have to show strength and determination for themselves, as well as for the women in their charge, in the face of

adversity. Thus, they consider it to be in their best interest to surrender to men's intellect, willpower and strength. Especially when encountering trouble and difficulty, they lose whatever little strength and willpower they have and panic, and thus give themselves up to irrational and confused behaviour.

This pale and weak personality leads unbelieving women to pay too much attention to what other people think about them. Often, they knowingly do something wrong just to impress others or to win a respectable place among them. Likewise, if they are criticized, they feel belittled and disliked, and so feel devastated. Not understanding that what matters is their value in Allah's presence, they only seek the approval of people and end up being upset and distraught, thinking that all they ever do is a waste. As a result, they become depressed and lose their strength, willpower, and courage.

But Muslim women never stagger because of people's criticism. Given that they measure themselves by the yardstick of the Qur'an, which spells out clearly what is right and what is wrong, they strive to live up to the Qur'anic morality. If they are criticized for doing so, they become even more determined and stronger in their pursuit of His good pleasure, which is the highest goal to pursue. Believing that only the Qur'an's morality gives them any value in this world and the next, they do not care what other people think of them.

The only solution is the Qur'an, which provides the easiest, as well as the

most content and beautiful path, by which to live. The only path that can lead toward righteousness is His path, for only it leads to goodness and prosperity. Allah says:

Verily, this Quran guides to that which is most just and right and gives glad tidings to the believers (in the oneness of Allah and His messenger, Muhammad s a w), who work deeds of righteousness, that they shall have great reward (paradise)<sup>3</sup> Allah reveals that the Qur'an brings people honour and dignity, and that all who abide by its values and follow this righteous path will find success in everything they undertake.

All true and lasting solutions to false ideas about women are found in the Qur'an. Islam, which was revealed to guide humanity to salvation, genuinely values women. Many verses protect women and their rights, for the Qur'an eliminated the prevalent misguided stereotypes of women and gave them a respectable position in society. Our Lord teaches that superiority in His Presence is based not on gender, but rather on one's fear and respect of Allah, faith, good character, devotion, and dedication to Him. Allah says

*O mankind we have created you from a male and a female, and made you in to nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has At-Taqwa [i.e he is one of the muttaqun (the pious). Verily,*

*Allah is All-knowing. Well-Acquainted (with all things)*<sup>4</sup>

Allah has revealed the steps that women need to take to ensure their protection and respect within society, and for them to find the love and dignity that they deserve. All of these measures benefit women and seek to prevent damage to their interests or any form of oppression and unnecessary stress.<sup>5</sup>

### **Definition of Domestic Violence**

The United Nations Commissions Draft Declaration of 1992 on the status of women defines violence against women as:

‘any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life’.

The same document also provides frames upon which violence against women could be understood. These frames include but not limited to:

- a. physical, sexual, psychological violence occurring in the family including sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related exploitation;
- b. Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions

and elsewhere trafficking in women and forced prostitution;

- c. Physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the state, where it occurs

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, domestic violence is: "the inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another; also: a repeated or habitual pattern of such behavior.

Coomaraswamy defines domestic violence as "violence that occurs within the private sphere, generally between individuals who are related through intimacy, blood or law... [It is] nearly always a gender-specific crime, perpetrated by men against women." It is used as a strong form of control and oppression.

In 1993, The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women define domestic violence as: physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.<sup>6</sup>

The term "domestic violence" is used to describe actions that occur in varying relationships. The term is used narrowly to cover incidents of physical attack, when it may take the form of physical and sexual violations, such as pushing, pinching, spitting, kicking, hitting, punching,

choking, burning, clubbing, stabbing, throwing boiling water or acid and setting on fire. The result of such physical violence ranges from bruising to killing; what may often start out as apparently minor attacks can escalate both in intensity and frequency.

Some people use the term "domestic violence" to include psychological or mental violence, which can consist of repeated verbal abuse, harassment; confinement and deprivation of physical, financial and personal resources. Contact with family members and friends may be controlled. The forms of violation may vary from one society and culture to another.<sup>7</sup>

Other people use the term to describe violence against women in the family only, and for others it is a general label to cover any violation where the victim and perpetrator have some form of personal relationship or where they have had such a relationship in the past. Used in this wider sense, domestic violence encompasses child abuse, be it physical, psychological or sexual, violence between siblings, abuse or neglect of the elderly and abuse by children of parents. Moreover, the term "domestic violence" means physical or mental assault of women by their male partners. In many countries, the term "wife assault" is used for this type of behaviour.<sup>8</sup>

### **Effects of Domestic Violence**

While it is difficult to have a precise picture of the actual extent of violence against women in their homes, the results of this violence are fairly clear.

In addition to the physical injuries already noted, ranging from bruising to death, abused women suffer from health and psychological problems. They have a significantly higher level of anxiety', depression and somatic complaints than women who have not suffered such abuse. They may often be paralysed by terror and stress from the ever-present threat of an attack. They are more likely to be depressed, which may lead to higher rates of suicide than those found among women who have not been battered.

The adverse consequences of violence in the family are not confined to the victim alone; the abuser himself may suffer the consequences of his behaviour. Research indicates that women who kill their husbands do so more often than not in response to an immediate attack or threat of attack.

Domestic violence is also hazardous for family members or others who seek to intervene, who may be hurt or killed by the abusive husband. Children in families where the wife is abused run the risk of being injured or killed by the abuser if they become involved in an incident of violence, either by chance or in an attempt to protect their mother.

The effect on children who witness violence is the subject of much discussion. Some studies have established that children from homes where there is violence against the mother suffer significantly more behavioural problems and lack greater social competence than children from homes where there is no such violence. For example, a Canadian study suggests that observing parental

conflict and during childhood was "significantly predictive of serious adult personal crimes (e.g. assault, attempted rape, attempted murder, kidnapping and murder)". A high proportion of street children reports marital violence in their family home. More systematic research into the real effect of family violence on children is required before categorical statements of sequelae can be made.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Cause s of Domestic Violence**

There are many theories to explain the existence and extent of domestic violence. Some theories focus on the individuals and look for personal explanations such as the use of alcohol or drugs, the victim's actions, mental illines, stress, frustration, underdevelopment and violent families of origin.

The pervasiveness and implicit acceptability of violence in the family directed at women has led some scholars to question the validity of explanations that are tied to personal and individual characteristics. They suggest a social and structural explanation. Wife battering is a reflection of the broad structures of sexual and economic inequality in society. Studies show that rather than representing an aberration, violence in the home is widely accepted and tolerated. It is an extension of the role society expects men to play in their domestic sphere. In this analysis, the abuse of women can be seen as a display of male power, the outcome of social relations in which women are kept in a position of inferiority to men, responsible to them and in need of protection by them. These theories suggest that the social, political and

economic dependence of women on men provides a structure wherein men can perpetrate violence against women.

The origins of violence are located in the social structure and the complex set of values, traditions, customs, habits and beliefs which relate to gender inequality. The victim of the violence is most frequently the woman and the perpetrator the man and the structures of society act to confirm this inequality. Violence against women is an outcome of the belief, fostered in most cultures, that men are superior and that the women with whom they live are their possessions to be treated as the men consider appropriate.

Another cause of domestic violence is infertility. When looking at a study taken by infertile women visiting a fertility clinic, many women reported some form of domestic violence-whether physical, mental, or emotional. There were also trends showing that the Yoruba tribe women were more likely to experience violence in this case.<sup>10</sup>

### **Islamic Teachings**

Muslims are required to abide by the text of the Qur'an, which is accepted as the word of God, as well as the life example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him). From a holistic perspective, the verses in the Qur'an that address the creation of humankind are instrumental in understanding the Islamic position on gender relations and equality.

*"O mankind! Reverence your guardian Lord, who created you from a single soul. Created, of*

*like nature, its mate, and from them twain scattered (like seeds) countless men and women fear God, through Whom you demand your mutual rights, and reverence the wombs (that bore you), for God ever watches over you.*"<sup>11</sup>

The Qur'an describes the relationship between spouses as one founded on mercy, compassion, and tranquillity. Allah says:

*(And among His signs is that He created you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He had put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect)*<sup>12</sup>.

Another verse describes spouses as being garments for one another, emphasizing the mutuality in the relationship. Allah says:

*"It is made lawful for you to have sexual relations with your wives on the night of As-Saum (the fast). They are Libas [i.e. body cover, or screen or Sakan, (i.e. you enjoy the pleasure of living with them"-as in verse 7:189) Tafsir At-Tabari], for you and you are the same for them.*"<sup>13</sup>

Multiple verses remind men to treat women with kindness and justice, as do many teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him). As far as domestic violence is concerned, it is an issue that has been dealt with from a preventive stance since the Qur'an clearly prohibits any kind of injustice or oppression. There are

verses that specifically prohibit behaviours that constitute emotional and psychological abuse, such as spying, intimidating, name-calling, insulting, and black-mailing.<sup>14</sup> To serve as a living example to the Muslims, the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was known to have never hit any woman, nor to have treated women harshly or with disrespect, and he strongly discouraged others from doing so. A companion asked the prophet about the right of a woman upon her husband and the prophet replied as:

*'you should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself. And do not strike her in the face, nor revile her [by saying 'may Allah disfigure your face']. And do not shun her except within the house.'*<sup>15</sup>

The one verse in the Qur'an that mentions hitting one's wife has been the subject of much attack from non-Muslims and controversy among Muslims; it is also taken out of context and used by some abusers to justify beating their wives. This verse begins by describing the protective responsibility that men have over women, and defines their leadership role in financially supporting the family. It then identifies the steps a husband should take in the event a wife is guilty of disloyalty (nushuz),<sup>16</sup> with the final step in the process being to hit her. The majority of Muslim scholars emphasize that this verse is not teaching wife-beating; that if the verse is interpreted literally, the hitting should be done in a manner that would leave no mark or injury; and that it provides a step-by-step

procedure to deal with a very specific and very severe threat to the marriage. The verse underscores the importance of the marital unit, the gravity of sexual misconduct, and the ultimate accountability of both spouses to God.<sup>17</sup>

### **Interpretation of the Verse by Some Muslim Scholars**

The interpretation of the verse is subject to debate among Muslim scholars, along with the various translations of the passage that reads 'strike them' or '(lightly) strike them' or 'beat them' or 'scourge them', depending on the translator the verse reads:

*"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) **strike them (lightly)**; but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all)."*<sup>18</sup>

Hajjar Lisa claims Shari'a law encourages "domestic violence" against women when a husband suspects *nushuz* (disobedience, disloyalty, rebellion, ill conduct) in his wife. According to some conservative translators Muslim husbands are permitted to act what is known in Arabic as *Idribuhunna* with

the use of "Strike," and sometimes as much as to hit, chastise, or beat.

In some exegesis such as those of Ibn Kathir (1300-1373 AD) and Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (839-923AD), the actions prescribed in Surah 4:34 above, are to be taken in sequence: the husband is to admonish the wife, after which (if his previous correction was unsuccessful) he may leave her, after which (if his previous correction was still unsuccessful) he may give her a light tapping with a *Siwak*. Ibn 'Abbas, The Cousin of the Prophet, is recorded in the Tafsir of al-Tabari for quran 4:34 as saying that beating without severity is using a *siwak* (small toothbrush) or a similar object Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhsin Khan in 2007 states; men are the protectors, guardians and maintainers of women, because Allah has made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Upon seeing ill-conduct (i.e. disobedience, rebellion, nashuz in Arabic) by his wife, a man may admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful), but if they return to obedience, seek not against them means.<sup>19</sup>

Some Muslim scholars and commentators have emphasized that hitting, even it is permitted, is not to be harsh or some even contend that they should be "more or less symbolic. "According to Abdullah Yusuf Ali and Ibn Kathir, the consensus of Islamic scholars is that the above verse describes a light beating Abu Shaiqa refers to the fatwa of Hanafi scholar al-Jassas (d.



981) who notes that the reprimand should be "A non-violent blow with *siwak* [a small stick used to clean the teeth] or something similar .<sup>20</sup>

### **The Response of Some Muslim Scholars Concerning Beating of Wives**

The majority of the ulama across the Sunni schools of law inherited the Prophet's unease over domestic violence and placed further restrictions on the evident meaning of the 'Wife Beating Verse'. A leading Makkan scholar from the second generation of Muslims, Ata' bin Abi Rabah, counseled a husband not to beat his wife even if she ignored him but rather to express his anger in some other way. Darimi, a teacher of both Tirmidhi and Muslim bin Hajjaj as well as a leading early scholar in Iran, collected all the Hadiths showing prophet Muhammad's (SAW) disapproval of beating in a chapter entitled 'The Prohibition on Striking Women'. A thirteenth-century scholar from Granada, Ibn Faras, notes that one camp of ulama had staked out a stance forbidding striking a wife altogether, declaring it contrary to the Prophet's sunnah and denying the authenticity of any Hadith that seemed to permit beating. Even Ibn Hajar, the pillar of late medieval Sunni Hadith scholarship, concludes that, contrary to what seems to be an explicit command in the Qur'an, the Hadith of the Prophet (SAW) leaves no doubt that striking one's wife to discipline her actually falls under the Shariah ruling of 'strongly disliked' or 'disliked verging on prohibited.

According to the author, Violence, Women and Islam, written by Dr. Muhammad Sharif Chaudhry, condemns violence against women, by saying: "How loathsome (Ajeeb) it is that one of you should hit his wife as a slave is hit, and then sleeps with her at the end of the day."<sup>21</sup>

### **Cases of Domestic Violence against Muslim Women in Nigeria**

Domestic violence is prominent in Nigeria as in many parts of Africa. There is a deep cultural belief in Nigeria that it is socially acceptable to hit a woman to discipline a spouse. Cases of Domestic violence are on the high and show no signs of reduction in Nigeria, regardless of the age, tribe, religion or even social status. The Clean Foundation reports 1 in every 3 respondents admitting to being a victim of domestic violence. The survey also found a nationwide increase in domestic violence in the past 3 years from 21% in 2011 to 30% in] A CLEEN Foundation's 2012 National Crime and Safety Survey demonstrated that 31% of the national sample confessed to being victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence takes many forms including physical, sexual, emotional, and mental. Traditionally, domestic violence is committed against females. Common forms of violence against women in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating, and corporal punishment.

The Nigerian government has taken legal proceedings to prosecute men who abuse women in several states. There is currently a push in Nigeria for federal laws concerning domestic violence and for a stronger national

response and support for domestic violence issues. Incidents of domestic violence in Nigeria include battery, beatings, torture, acid baths, rape, and consequently, death. It is however, estimated that approximately one in every three women suffers domestic violence and intimate partner violence from the hands of those who claim to love and supposedly, protect them.<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusion

Domestic violence is a frequent problem which can affect any woman, regardless of her age, socioeconomic or sociocultural status. No clear risk profile exists; the health consequences of those affected by violence are serious. It is still unknown how many percent of women seek medical attention due to violence-related complaints. Initial studies, especially in Nigeria, indicate that a considerable number of women do seek first aid because of various cases violence. In Islam, domestic violence is discouraged by the prophet (S A W). In view of this, the paper proffers the following recommendation.

### Recommendations

1. Parent should not force their daughters into marriage.
2. The couple should try to study one another very well.
3. The domestic violence cases should be reported to the security personnel.
4. Government should provide laws and penalty on the cases of domestic violence.
5. Muslims should learn to emulate the life pattern of the prophet (SAW) on how he lived with his wives.

### Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> Yusuf, Ali Abdullahi. *The Holy Qur'an Roman Transliteration and English Translation*. Lahore: Book House. 2014 Qur'an Ash-Shura 42:62 p.

<sup>3</sup> Yusuf, Ali Abdullahi. *The Holy Qur'an Roman Transliteration and English Translation*. Q17:9 p. 360

<sup>4</sup> Yusuf, Ali Abdullahi. *The Holy Qur'an Roman Transliteration and English Translation*. Q49:13 p. 360.

<sup>5</sup> Yahaya, H. ideal character of muslim women in Arab news Saudi. No. pg, 2016.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations New york, Tools strategies for confronting domestic violence. vienna centre for social development and humanitarian affairs. new york: united nation publication pp 1993 pp 6-8.

<sup>8</sup> United Nation Newyork. Pp 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> United Nation Newyork. Pp 9-10

<sup>10</sup> United Nation Newyork. Pp 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> Yusuf, Ali Abdullahi. *The Holy Qur'an Roman Transliteration and English Translation*. Q4:1 p. 360

<sup>12</sup> . Translation Yusuf Ali Quran 30:21 p 539

<sup>13</sup> Translation Yusuf Ali Quran 2:187 p 35

<sup>14</sup> Q 2:231, Q 16:90, Q 65:6.

<sup>15</sup> Al-Jazairy J.A. Minhaj Al-Muslim. Riyadh: Darussalam 2001 p 337ccc

<sup>16</sup> An Arabic word that has been interpreted in a variety of ways, including sexual misconduct, disobedience and ill-will.

<sup>17</sup> Elkadir, A.S, A perspective on Domestic violence in the Muslim community. NP: Faith trust institute 2010 P.3

<sup>18</sup> . Translation Yusuf Ali Quran 4 :34 p 112

<sup>19</sup> Elkadir, A.S, A perspective on Domestic violence in the Muslim community. NP: Faith trust institute 2010 P.3

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<sup>22</sup>Wikipedia Domestic violence in Nigeria Retrieved from [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic\\_violence\\_in\\_Nigeria](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_violence_in_Nigeria) on 20th June 2021