Violences faites aux femmes

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One of the most common forms of violence against women is domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence. Though the issue of domestic violence has not been systematically studied, studies by Gupta et al. have shown that 20-50% of women worldwide have been beaten by a male intimate (Gupta et al., 1996, p. 7).

Domestic violence is broadly defined as a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviours including physical, sexual and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partner. (Schechter and Ganley, 1995, p. 10)

The social, political and legal environment in which domestic violence occurs needs to be understood, as it provides an insightful and useful backdrop to understanding domestic violence in the Nigerian context. Women constitute half of Nigeria’s estimated 130 million people.1 In most African cultures, some Nigerian ones inclusive, violence against women is condoned as a fact of married life (Atinmo, 1997, pp. 80-81). Most women victims would rather endure the violence or face the consequences rather than move away from their matrimonial homes. Women comprise a larger

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percentage of victims of domestic violence while men form the larger percentage of the perpetrators. Oftentimes it takes place where the women should feel most secure – their homes. In Nigeria, acts of violence, if perpetrated in public, would be punished by law, but they often go unchallenged when men direct them at women in the confines of the home, out of public view. Even most witnesses, neighbours inclusive, ignore it and do not intervene, which demonstrates that it is a socially permissible phenomenon. According to Odujurin (1999), 81% of Nigeria’s female citizens experience domestic violence while two-thirds of women in some parts of Lagos State experience domestic violence (Amnesty International, 2005). Yet the Nigerian State (Police, Judiciary, Welfare, etc.) is not accountable.

There are no laws or policies in place to protect Nigerian women’s rights vis-à-vis violence. Rather existing laws such as Nigeria’s customary laws and the Nigerian Penal Code discriminate against women’s citizenship and rights vis-à-vis domestic violence. For instance, according to section 55 of the Northern Nigerian Penal Code, wife beating is allowed, if it is with the intention to correct an erring wife, as long as it does not amount to grievous hurt upon any person. Grievous hurt is defined in section 241 of the same Penal Code to include emasculation, permanent loss of sight, ability to hear or speak, facial disfigurement, destruction or deprivation of any member joints, bone fracture or tooth dislocation. It also includes any hurt which endangers life or which causes the sufferer to be during the space of twenty days in severe bodily pain or unable to follow her ordinary pursuits. The literal interpretation of these two sections indicates that a man is still a law-abiding citizen as long as all the above do not occur while he is “correcting” his wife. One may very well ask about injuries which are not obvious like internal haemorrhaging or the psychological trauma, and economic costs of such acts to the female citizen’s right to dignity and security. Thus these laws discriminate against women’s rights vis-à-vis violence, by constraining the conditions which define what domestic violence is and what it is not.

Unlawful assault on males in section 353 of the Nigerian Criminal Code is punishable by three years’ imprisonment, while a similar assault on a woman is punishable by two years’ imprisonment in section 360; this is obviously a discriminatory provision. The law on assault is limited in its application within the home; this is because there is no provision for a protection order which will ensure the safety of the woman within the home if and when she files a criminal charge of indecent assault on her intimate partner. It should be noted that this lack of a protection order makes the law on assault only applicable to victims attacked in public, not
in the privacy of their homes. This obviously does not ensure the safety of women who are physically assaulted in their homes, where domestic violence takes place.

Furthermore the law on rape is not impressive. Section 357 of the *Nigerian Criminal Code* stipulates that rape can only be punished if there were witnesses to the crime; where the woman cannot provide the required corroboration or provide medical evidence of penetration and physical injury, the only charge that can be brought against the perpetrator is indecent assault. Now the question is: which rapist would want to get caught in the act by witnesses? Of course he will rather pounce on his victim when he sees that the coast is clear. In addition marital rape is not deemed as rape within the *Nigerian Criminal Code Act 1990*, Section 6. This is because rape is defined as unlawful carnal knowledge. The law defines lawful carnal connection as that which takes place between husband and wife. Within this definition, therefore, marital rape cannot be regarded as rape.

Field experiences reveal that when women make efforts to access justice by reporting cases of violence to existing institutions of state such as the police, the police tend to turn a nonchalant attitude, and if they will act at all they do not act immediately. Police often regard domestic violence as a private family affair. They more often than not remind wives that the Nigerian culture allows men to beat women. Moreover the complainant is usually advised to go and mend her ways as she is likely to be battered due to her own misdemeanour. They only take cognitive action when it turns out to be a serious case such as grievous hurt, assault or murder – but why should the police take action when the case has degenerated to death? Corruption in form of bribes, which also leads to complicity on the part of the police, is pervasive in the Nigerian political system so that justice may be perverted. Summoning and investigating perpetrators may be stalled if the perpetrator or his relatives are financially buoyant to stall the investigation process.

It is against this background that this study hypothetically adopts the human rights theoretical framework which can be traced to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948 by the United Nations General Assembly. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women* emphasizes the reality that women have rights to non-violence. Article 4 of the declaration reads: “States should condemn violence against women and should not invoke any custom, tradition, religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to elimination.”
The strength of this framework lies in the fact that it demands the state’s accountability to the citizens’ welfare. The above review of the Nigerian Penal and Criminal code vis-à-vis violence against women indicates that the Nigerian State needs to be more accountable to the plight of her abused female citizens’ welfare.

Shelters all over the world often monitor the accountability of states’ mainstream actors to the plight of victims; they also serve as sources of refuge to the victims. In recent times there has been a proliferation of shelters in high-income developed countries such as the United States, where there are over 1200 shelters in operation (Chalk and King, 1998), whereas in middle- and low-income countries they remain rare (Larrain, 1999). Nigeria falls within the range of the latter. Nigeria has three shelters in operation, all opened in the last four years, “Sophia’s Place” being the very first of these shelters. Sophia’s Place was established in May 2001 by the executive Director of its outreach office Project Alert – Mrs. Josephine Chukwuma. The shelter consists of four well furnished bedrooms, all painted green, while the living room is cream. The floors are well rugged. The living room has the facilities of chairs, television, video and radio speaker. The kitchen is also equipped for inmates’ cooking convenience. Nursing mothers or mothers with children are given four-and-a-half-by-six-foot family beds while single women sleep on double-decker bunks.

It has been discovered that little is known about the impact of shelters on their victim clients’ conditions worldwide (McNamara et al., 1997; Tutty et al., 1999). Therefore the gap located in the existing literature, within the Nigerian context, is the need for a systematic academic study of the strategic responses of a non-state actor on domestic violence as a social problem needing effective policy action.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The central problem that this paper seeks to address, therefore, is the state’s unaccountability in its response to domestic violence, with the objective to identify and examine the social responses and engagements of Sophia’s Place with regard to abused female citizens.

OBJECTIVES

The central objective of this paper is:

1. To identify and examine the social responses and engagements of Sophia’s place – the first shelter for victims of domestic violence in Nigeria with ten “lived-in” domestic violence victims at the shelter.
2. To highlight the effective and ineffective strategies that Sophia’s Place engages in to minimize the victims’ plight.

**METHOD**

Adopting the “Case Study cum Responsal Approach,” methodologically the paper relies on in-depth interviews with ten “lived-in” domestic violence victims at the shelter, and their diverse experiential case studies. In cases where they could not be reached their self-written case files were consulted. A key-informant interview was also conducted on the executive director of the shelter, Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma.

The sampling aim was to locate women victim/survivors from diverse demographic characteristics and social backgrounds. The interview guide included a series of broad, open-ended questions about the lived-in residents’ experiences of abuse and their responses. All the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The analysis of the interviews followed the technique of thematic clustering, guided by phenomenological discourse analysis. The Open Code package computer software was used to manage code and explore the data.

In-depth interviews were also conducted on two divisional police officers, social welfare officers, legal officers of the Lagos State Directorate of public prosecutions, and staff of women’s rights organizations with which the shelter collaborates.

A key-informant interview was also conducted with Honorable Funmi Smith Tejuosho, the principal legislator lobbying for the Domestic Violence bill to be signed into law in Lagos State, Nigeria.

**LIMITATIONS**

Due to the ethics involved in shelter administration and the shelter’s policy the location of the shelter will not be revealed, except that it exists in the Lagos metropolis. Due to the victim/survivors reposed confidentiality with the executive director of the shelter, the executive director directed that their names should not be revealed.

For ethical reasons the case files of the victim/survivors could not be directly accessed by the researcher to elicit their written responses. The researcher had access through a staff delegated by the executive director of the shelter.
Findings
According to Williams (1997), there is a myth of equal oppressions which generalizes the fact that women are oppressed in the same form. However Russo (2001) has noted that such a notion of universal sisterhood understatedly reduces the unique complexities of many survivor/victims testimonies and unduly minimizes the societal, historio-cultural, enviro-contextual experiences of domestic violence that each woman has undergone. This paper concurs with Russo’s view, hence its adoption of the case study narrative and response approach in order to understand the unique complexities inherent in the victims’/survivors experiences.

Case Study Narratives
Case Study 1
Case Study 1 had been taken to live in the United States when her parents emigrated to live and work there. So she practically grew up in the U.S. while her two sisters were born there. Her dad went to jail for gunrunning in America and served two years. She is a twenty-year-old incest survivor. She and her two sisters were consistently raped by their father for about three years. According to her, her father moved with a lot of strange ladies and under one pretext or the other he often brought the ladies to their home and used to have sexual orgies with them. Her mother was a witness to his acts but was complacent about them. Case Study 1, however, could not stand it and after one of such acts she challenged her father. His response to her query was to slap her, tear her clothes and rape her. She said despite her screams for help, her mother and her sisters who were in the same house when the act occurred did not come to her aid. Rather when she confronted her mother, her mother pleaded with her to keep quiet about it and not let anyone else know what her father did to her because it is a stigma and society frowns on people with such history, so she kept quiet about it. Shortly after the incident, though her mother did not challenge her father, she noticed that her mother was traumatized psychologically. Consequently her father also cajoled her mother to move out of the house and go and live in the village. The Nigerian Television Authority aired her plight and those of her siblings on the news. This was how the shelter took them in, and came to their rescue. After the news, The United States Consular in Lagos took it upon them to put the two sisters who were American citizens into foster homes in the United States, but Case Study 1 was left behind as she is not an American citizen.
The Shelter’s Response

She and her mother were accommodated in the shelter and counselled and encouraged to move on with their lives. The shelter has also helped them to procure funding to get accommodation.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 1 Subject to Nigerian Law

Regrettably in Nigeria there is no provision in Nigerian law on incest. However, the law on rape could have been applicable here if the victim had reported the rape immediately at the police station with supporting medical evidence from a certified government hospital. This was even if her mother and sisters had refused to attest to knowledge of the rape. By the time the media reported the incident the father had absconded and is presently still at large, yet to be prosecuted.

Case Study 2

She is presently 18 years old, she is the product of a separation between her father and her mother. Her dad had warned her several times to desist from visiting her mum who had since remarried. But she still did. So, in order to teach her a lesson her father refused to allow her to move back into the house after her last visit to her mother’s. She had nowhere to go so she took up residence on her father’s balcony, in the open, for eight months. He took her up and wanted to hand her over to the social welfare unit as a juvenile delinquent; but it was even at the Welfare Office that he was informed by the social workers that she had done nothing to be named a delinquent and that he should rather live up to his responsibility as her father and take her back into the house. Despite the fact that he saw how appalling her living conditions were, he did not take her back into his house. She needed food and money for upkeep so she applied to a primary school near their house and got herself a job as a nursery school teacher. From the salary she fed herself. She decided to visit their neighbour in order to watch television. It was while she was there that their neighbour took advantage of her and her situation and raped her. So she started falling sick and her dad took her to the hospital where she was diagnosed as pregnant. Her father there and then decided that she must pack all her belongings off his balcony. She went to the neighbor’s parents and they took her in, though their son had earlier denied the pregnancy as his. While she was there she was however ill treated by the man’s parents and she suspected that she might be poisoned. This made her to eat out a lot. It was while she was at a canteen that she saw one of the bulletins advertising the outreach
office of the shelter. She went to the outreach office of Project Alert, where she was warmly received and counselled. Then she was taken to the shelter in the eighth month of her pregnancy under strict confidentiality.

The Shelter’s Response
When she had spent three weeks at the shelter she developed complications in her pregnancy and the doctor at the Sam Ewang Air Force Base at Oshodi recommended that she needed a bed rest. So she was granted a bed space at the Air Force Base hospital due to the goodwill that Mrs. Chukwuma enjoyed from the hospital. The shelter footed all her hospital bills. During the period the shelter staff visited and encouraged her; they also took warm clothing and hot meals to her intermittently.

Eventually both her father and the man who raped her were contacted for reconciliation and footing of bills for her welfare, but they refused to appear in person nor did they foot her bills. After she had put to bed, the Director of the shelter Mrs. Chukwuma decided that the environment of the shelter was not conducive for her as a young nursing mother amidst mature mothers with their children. Besides residents were expected to move out of the shelter by the fourth week of their stay at the shelter, a period by which inmates are expected to have recuperated and decided what their next step of action would be. Mrs. Chukwuma therefore referred her to a faith-based shelter which specializes in rehabilitating young girls.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 2 Subject to Nigerian Law
If Case Study 2 had been aware of her rights and had gone immediately to report the crime at the police station with substantial medical evidence of the rape when it occurred, she could have sued the neighbour on rape charges. But even then she still needed to be financially capable of footing the medical bill for a medical examination report, which she was not.

Case Study 3
Her stepbrother brought her to Lagos from the village and promised her parents that he was bringing her to the city of Lagos to enrol her in a school. Contrary to expectations he and his wife put her under servitude as a housemaid and did not enrol her in school. Coupled with this she was also being sexually harassed by her stepbrother when his wife was not at home. She reported him to his wife, who admonished her to endure it. The wife also said that it was because her husband had also harassed her own younger sister that the latter had to stop living with them. Case Study 3 reported him at the police station, he was arrested and let go after a few
hours in police custody. She suspects that the police officers received bribe from her brother. Once he came back from police custody the situation did not change. The victim client began to try and keep out of her brother’s way by sitting outside on the balcony of his house. Unconsciously while sitting on the balcony she would find tears steaming down her eyes. A neighbour had been noticing her reluctance to enter the house for a space of days and after much coaxing, she confessed that she was a victim of incest by her stepbrother. The neighbour took it upon himself to take her to Project Alert, the outreach office of the shelter.

The Shelter’s Response

Case Study 3 was warmly received at the shelter and she spent four weeks at the shelter. A summons letter was issued out to the victim client’s brother; he went to Project Alert, the outreach office of Sophia’s Place, and denied the allegation. Sophia’s Place has established friendly links with most police divisions in Lagos State. These links to police make for effective interventions to access justice for victim clients. The shelter’s director reported his offence at the police station. He was arrested and remanded in police custody. Later he confessed to the act and asked for his sister’s forgiveness; he alleged that he might have been possessed by a demon and pleaded with the shelter not to inform their parents as it is a taboo in their village. He also pleaded for an out-of-court settlement, to which the victim client obliged. However the victim client refused to go back and live with him. She gave the shelter staff a cousin’s cell-phone number and that cousin came and took her from the shelter’s outreach office to return her to her parents in the village.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 3 Subject to Nigerian Law

Under Nigerian law this is rape. The Criminal Code Section 357 defines rape as “unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent.” Case Study 3 obviously knew her rights and reported the crime at the police station, but since her brother bribed the police officers, she could not gain access to justice. It took the collaborative efforts of the shelter with the police to access justice on behalf of the victim.

Case Study 4

Case Study 4 is a twenty-year-old. Her father and mother had been separated for six years. She lived in a three-bedroom flat with her father and two brothers. Her father, a bank employee, lost his job, became severely ill and was in dire need of money. This made him let out one of the rooms in the
three-bedroom flat to a young male tenant. She arrived early from school one day and the tenant was the only one at home. He forcefully pinned her to the wall with his elbow, lifted her skirts and raped her. He later apologized and said he had been drunk. Her father was an authoritarian so she could not bring herself to tell him what had happened. She discovered she was four months pregnant and her father got the tenant locked up under police custody. Her father also sent her packing out of the house at around 10 p.m. She found nowhere to sleep that night but out in the open at the bar beach. Some thugs at the beach tried to rape her but she was rescued by security guards. In the morning she went to her uncle – her father’s brother – who took her to his pastor. The pastor referred her to Women’s Consortium of Nigeria (WOCON) from where she was referred to the Women Advocates Research and Documentation Center (WARDC). The latter made a phone call to Mrs. Chukwuma and a space was made ready for Case Study 4 at the shelter. She stayed at the shelter till she put to bed. Her mum also came to stay with her at the shelter all through the period.

The Shelter’s Response
A summons was made to the victim client’s father. He came and still refused to take her back into his house; neither did he want to sponsor her education any longer. The tenant and his father also came and signed a memorandum of understanding that they would provide cash and kind for the baby’s needs and money for its upkeep. This the tenant and his father have faithfully adhered to till date. The shelter and WOCON footed the hospital bills of the victim client as she could not afford it. The shelter also paid the fees for her Senior Secondary School Examination, which she passed.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 4 Subject to Nigerian Law
Case study 4 was not bold enough to report the rape as a crime at the time it occurred. Even though her father later reported the crime, the perpetrator settled for out of court settlement of providing for the baby’s needs.

Case Study 5
Case Study 5 is a twenty-seven-year-old married woman who had two children for a man. He started keeping late nights and whenever she confronted him he would beat her up. On one of such occasions he beat her up in a frenzied state, tore her clothes and bit her on the right breast that she started bleeding profusely. Despite this he sent her packing out of his house with her two children. She reported him at the police station but when the police went to arrest him they met his absence. She also notified the Nigerian
Television Authority through the New Dawn Television program. The presenter of the program took her to Project Alert so that she might be lodged at Sophia’s Place.

The Shelter’s Response
The shelter took her in and offered her a refuge coupled with proactive counselling. Her husband reappeared one month later to plead with her for reconciliation through the executive director, Mrs. Chukwuma. Both of them were reconciled by the shelter staff. Case Study 5 forgave her husband and she is back with him.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 5 Subject to Nigerian Law
Case Study 5 was aware of her rights and reported the crime under the law as indecent assault at the police station, but the man absconded and the police could not trace his whereabouts. She also eventually settled for out-of-court reconciliation.

Case Study 6
This lady was a twenty-nine-year-old woman who was brought from the village to marry the chairman of the Ketu Alapere Bus Drivers’ Association in Lagos. He used to beat her black and blue; there was hardly a week when she had no wound or plaster on a part of her body. She reported him at the police station, but he just bribed the officers in charge and he was let to go scot-free. She moved out of her matrimonial home and went to stay with her friends at Ibafo, a little village on the outskirts of Lagos. Even then he kept stalking her. She went to the Lagos State Directorate of Public Prosecutions to lodge a complaint; from there she was referred to Project Alert.

The Shelter’s Response
She lodged at the shelter for four weeks. Mrs. Chukwuma made a summons to the victim client’s husband and she warned him that he should stop stalking Case Study 6 or face serious legal consequences. There and then the stalking stopped. The victim client’s fees to learn the art of beadmaking were paid by the shelter. This was done so that she could become financially empowered independently of her husband.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 6 Subject to Nigerian Law
The husband of Case Study 6 realized that the shelter had links with the police and could make good its claims of arresting him on a charge of indecent assault; he therefore reneged from stalking Case Study 6.
Case Study 7

Case Study 7 is educated and married to an engineer. They live in one of the rich estates in Lagos. They have three girls and a baby boy. Six years into their marriage the man started being quite possessive and stopped her from going to functions, visiting friends and relatives. One day she went to the market and came back only to receive the beating of her life. Her husband accused her of having extramarital affairs. At times, he beat her up in the middle of the night. Then she discovered that he was sexually fingerling their three daughters because they told her. When she confronted him he beat her up and began to lock her up in the house when he went to work. Neighbours alerted Project Alert.

The Shelter’s Response

Mrs. Chukwuma alerted the police at Ilupeju Police Station and the Ilupeju Police Station alerted the Ikoyi Police Station, which was closer to the estate where the woman lived. A warrant was issued and two police officers were mandated to help pack out the woman’s property from the house. The police broke into the house and rescued the lady and her children. The husband was also arrested and detained in police custody. The lady took refuge in the shelter with her children for three weeks before she relocated. Though the husband has sought to be reconciled to her she would not hear of it. As she said: “It is only when you are alive that you can be a wife and a mother, not when you are dead.”

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 7 Subject to Nigerian Law

Though Case Study 7’s husband was detained in police custody on the charge of indecent assault, he was also let go by the police because Case Study 7 did not press for charges.

Case Study 8

This is a case of an educated architect who has an eight-year-old child. She however refused to grant the researcher an interview.

Case Study 9

This is the case of an educated 32-year-old Congolese refugee who migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo during the war years. She migrated with four of her five children and she was a victim of domestic violence. Her husband was a fervent Christian, but he used to demand sex from her several times a day. She could not cope and if she refused him sex he beat
her. She had reported him to relatives and friends who could not believe her because he was to all a very dedicated Christian gentleman who could not possibly be beating his wife. Due to his excessive sexual demands she fell sick several times. Even when she returned from the hospital with a new baby and he had been warned by the doctor to let her recuperate he still forcefully had sex with her, without her consent. The worst of all her experiences was when she refused him he tied her two wrists together and attempted to insert a small pestle in her private parts; she screamed and he came to his senses. Now she does not even want him to know her whereabouts or that of her children.

The Shelter’s Response

An official at the Congolese Embassy, who was aware of the Congolese woman’s plight as a war survivor and also a survivor of domestic violence who had immigrated to Nigeria, liaised with Mrs. Chukwuma on her behalf. Mrs. Chukwuma graciously took the woman into the shelter for a period of time. When Mrs. Chukwuma noticed that the lady had recuperated and was ready to move on, she got the lady a job in an establishment where her fluency in French are being put to use. The shelter helped the lady to secure an accommodation.

Case Study Analysis of Case Study 9 Subject to Nigerian law

This is a case of marital rape. Case Study 9’s domestic violence experience would not have been treated as marital rape within Nigerian law. This is because in Nigerian law there is no such term as marital rape. Rape is defined among other definitions in Nigerian law to include “unlawful carnal knowledge”; this excludes the carnal connection which takes place between husband and wife. This makes it clear that any carnal relations including marital rape between a husband and wife is deemed lawful within Nigerian law (Criminal Code Act 1990, Section 6).

CASE STUDY 10

This is the case of an educated 34-year-old woman who is a cripple and has a postgraduate diploma in Banking and Finance. She has three children, one for her late husband and two for her intimate partner. Even though she has a bad leg she still was able to fend for herself; she roasted fish which she bought from Badagary, a border town near Lagos. From the proceeds and the money she received from people who took pity on her plight she paid for his diploma course at Lagos State Polytechnic. Her parents had never wanted her to associate with her intimate partner. She however was impregnated by him and had her second child by him. Then her parents
became hostile and sent her packing. The man got a one-room apartment for her at Oshodi. His mother and brother also lived with her in the one-room apartment. Through a friend she applied for a job for him as a driver at one of the fast-food eateries in Lagos and he got the job. His mum and his brother used to beat her mercilessly on one pretext or the other. Her intimate partner did not however stay with them; he resided with his friend at Festac town. He used to come once a month with only one thousand naira ($8.50) and he used to have sexual relations with her but he made her take pills to prevent pregnancy because he and his mother had an ulterior motive – to take her baby daughter from her once she had weaned the baby and to throw her, the victim client, out. But she outsmarted them and quickly got impregnated for the man again. Even though she was three months pregnant they threw her out. Being educated she knew her rights and she reported him at the welfare office at Alausa Lagos. She was however not speedily attended to. Her parents accommodated her till she put to bed. But once she delivered the baby, they ejected her and she started moving from one relative’s house to the other. She put up with her younger brother who was also soon to be ejected by his landlord as he had not paid his accommodation fees. While visiting a friend she came across the *Genieve* magazine where contact details about the shelter were printed. She contacted the shelter.

**The Shelter’s Response**

The shelter accommodated her and liaised on her behalf with the Social Welfare Office at Alausa. Her intimate partner was summoned and made to sign a memorandum of understanding to the effect that he would pay for her accommodation and that of their two children. He had no choice but to comply with this.

**Case Study Analysis of Case Study 10 Subject to Nigerian Law**

Within Nigerian law Case Study 10 could not press charges of assault on her intimate partner’s relatives because even though she was frequently battered by them, there was no grievous hurt. However Case Study 10 knew her rights and therefore sought Welfare Office assistance for the upkeep of the children. Project Alert, the outreach office of the shelter, remains a staunch member of the Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence against Women (LACVAW), a coalition of 45 founding members seeking to lobby legislators in the Federal and State Houses of Assembly to sign the draft domestic violence bills into law, particularly in Lagos State, where the shelter is situated. Project Alert is liaising in conjunction with the Deputy Chief Whip, Chief Mrs. Funmi Smith Tejuosho, the first among the only two female legislators among the 40 members in the Lagos State House of
Assembly. In Lagos State a draft Domestic Violence Bill, which has received two readings in the House of Assembly as at November 20, 2006, continues to face resistance emanating from male legislators and was hinged on the subject of fierce debate about cultural values, as they did not agree for the criminalization of perpetrators.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is critical at this crossroads to ponder on the shelter and its strategies. The shelter is doing a great deal to help salvage battered women’s lives and to move them forward. In the first place there is more the shelter could do with funding as the needs of the shelter are still great. The rate of violence is increasingly escalating as more and more women are becoming family breadwinners and not only eaters; it is fuelling a lot of jealousies and frustrations on the part of men-folk who unleash them out at the home-front in the form of violence. Therefore there are no hopes for the percentage of women being battered to decrease; in actual fact it will increase. The shelter therefore needs more funds to be able to get better housing to accommodate as many as come to its refuge. The likes of Case Study 7 who was referred to another home for young girls need not be referred if the shelter can have access to funds to meet their needs.

Most victims usually contacted the shelter on cases which involved grievous hurt, rape or assault which the Nigerian law provides for inadequately. This implies that those who are undergoing mental cruelty, psychological trauma and those who are absent from work for a few days (which may not be up to twenty days) due to bodily hurts not listed in section 241 of the *Penal Code* cannot be said to have undergone domestic violence under Nigerian law. Rather they can only be said to have been “corrected by their husbands” under Nigerian law. There is therefore a need for a law that adequately defines what domestic violence is; it should also include the penalty for incest within it. The law should be one which prevents the violence from escalating into assault. Without the Nigerian State signing the bill on violence against women into law, the concerned institutions of state will not take effective action. There is therefore the need to still lobby the legislators in the State House of Assembly and at the national level to sign the bill into law.

An ineffective strategy which has basically hampered the shelter from aiding some victims is its method of summoning of perpetrators. Some perpetrator husbands or intimate partners refuse to appear at the shelter’s outreach office when they are invited. So there is need for the shelter to
collaborate with the Social Welfare Offices, which have authority under law to issue a bench warrant and a court summons to the perpetrator. This is because the issuance of a court summons leaves the perpetrator no choice but to appear or face a legal action.

On a final note, the shelter needs to continually increase its network collaborations with concerned state institutions. It should also widen its scope for information dissemination and education awareness literature so that more and more victims might be informed of its existence.

CONCLUSION

The response of Sophia’s Place to her victim clients’ plight is essentially a response to patriarchal terrorism and the masculinity inherent in some Nigerian cultures. “Patriarchal terrorism involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics” (Johnson, 1995, p. 284).

As it is apparent from the case studies most of the victims were under threat, just as Case Study 3 was made to have sexual relations with her brother under duress. The intimate partner of Case Study 10 refused to pay for her upkeep until he was made to sign a memorandum of understanding which had legal backing. Patriarchal terrorism is mostly fuelled by the dependence of the woman on the man due to poverty. The significant role of culture, ethnicity and race as an intervening factor when domestic violence occurs has been observed (Bent-Goodley, 2001; Hampton and Yung, 1996; Richie, 1996). Most African cultures condone domestic violence and it usually occurs when a woman is perceived by her husband or intimate partner not to be fulfilling her ascribed gender roles. Male perpetrators view it as a form of reasserting their authority over their intimate partner whom they perceive is not performing her ascribed gender roles efficiently. Case Study 9’s case is a good example – her husband expected her to be willing to have sexual relations with him at all times. This indicates that there is interconnectedness between culture and violence. When she refused to fulfil his perceived gender roles it resulted in physical and sexual violence. Sophia’s Place’s strategies of mediation, counselling, housing provision and economic empowerment are an indicator that ethnocentrism is taking place in Nigeria, though it is a gradual process. In other words, Nigerian non-state actors working on violence against women are beginning to constitute agents of change advocating for nonviolence in the Nigerian sociocultural context.
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