



ERADICATING DOMESTIC ABUSE AND VIOLENCE IN URHOB0 AND CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

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Abstract

Marriage is a well-recognized institution in every culture and religion. Most cultures and religions recognize it as a sacred institution, not just a sociological reality. Through this noble institution called marriage, the human race is perpetuated, human offspring are born, those in marriage find support for one another, inter-ethnic and family solidarity is fostered, especially through interethnic and inter-family marriages of couples, and also married couples contribute to the socio-political goals of society. With such noble goals and aspirations, it is tragic when the institution is plagued or battered with ills and evils such as domestic abuse and violence. The paper identified the fact that domestic abuse and violence take place in Urhobo and Christian marriages in Urhoboland. DAV has brought about health problems, psychological problems, and other problems for the victims of DAV. Critical analytic and hermeneutic methods are used in this paper to argue for the need to eradicate DAV. Both methods are used to decipher the basic concepts in the paper and to unravel the issues involved in the paper. The paper finds that DAV occurs in marriages in Urhoboland. The paper concludes that eradicating DAV is necessary for having fruitful and flourishing marriages and a better society in Urhoboland and beyond.

Keywords: Domestic abuse, family, gender, violence, Urhobo, Christian, Nigeria.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the noblest and most ideal human institutions, which in both the Urhobo traditional culture and the Judeo-Christian tradition is of divine origin. Marriage remains one of the crucial pastoral issues in Africa, and in a society where you have many challenges. Realize that “Africans have a worldview of their own For Africans marriage is not a private matter but embraces the extended families, both husband and wife, the living dead and the not-yet-born” (Bujo, 2009, p.17). Marriage is not simply a sociological institution that is subject to the whims and caprices of human transactions. In Urhobo traditional cultural thought, there is an acknowledgement of the supreme being, Oghene. Oghene created the universe and humans, and desires that human beings reproduce to populate and exercise stewardship on the earth. In one



Urhobo myth, when the earth was getting overpopulated, humans sent the frog and the dog as messengers to Oghene above to ask him what human beings should do. In Urhobo mythological thought, human concerns are also God's concerns, and God has input to make to them. And so the Urhobo people hold marriage to be sacred, and prayers are invoked during the occasion of marriage (Eruvbetere, 2005). All life in Africa is sacred and religious. The distinction between profane and secular for traditional Africans is useless. This is why "there is no marriage without both God and the ancestors" (Bujo, 2009, p. 18). Humans may have invented the processes of marriage, but it is Oghene who intended marriage for the procreation of human beings and the prolongation of society. While the processes of marriage among the Urhobo people are different in some respects from the Christian process, Christianity, like Urhobo culture, upholds marriage to be sacred and instituted by God. It is also to be noted that some Christian churches, like the Roman Catholic Church, uphold that even if one is married traditionally, the person also needs to undertake Christian marriage (matrimony), for Christ raised marriage to the level of a sacrament.

Arising from the sacredness of marriage and its nobility, dignity, it is unbecoming when you hear stories of domestic abuse, domestic violence, wife battery, linguistic violence, and many other negative acts perpetuated, especially against women/wives who are still seen in some Urhobo and Christian cycles as the weaker sex, inferior, and who can be maltreated. It is painful to note that even in Christian marriages, women are highly abused, and you would wonder what about the liberatory message that Jesus preached and the equality of the sexes that was advocated by the radical Paul. There are indeed passages in Paul that present a negative view of women, but these passages must be subjected to critical and deconstructive hermeneutics within their cultural context and the liberatory message that Jesus preached. No one should use biblical passages to justify human abuses and violence against fellow humans. Today, we disagree and condemn the practice of slavery, racism, Apartheid, human trafficking, and other abuses against the dignity of humans and their human rights. DAV is pervasive globally and in Nigeria. The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics states that Nigerian women, ranging from ages 15-49, have experienced some form of physical violence; while 68% have been battered with economic, emotional, and sexual abuse (Efefairoro, 2023). Unfortunately, "Violence Against Women and Girls is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in the world. One in three women experience physical, sexual, or intimate-partner violence; are victims of trafficking, or are subject to violent social norms"(The European Union, United Nations, UNICEF, Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2022, para 1).

This paper uses a critical hermeneutic and analytic methods to examine the issues stated previously, arguing that both domestic abuse and domestic violence in Urhobo and Christian marriages are unacceptable, never God's will, and against Christian ethics and the value of human persons in Urhobo culture. Even when Urhobo culture, like many other African cultures, is embedded in patriarchal values and tends to portray women in a negative light, which often instigates abuses against them, the fact remains that culture should not be accepted as it is. It must be evaluated in the paradigm of human rights. By way of outline and procedure, the paper shall make some conceptual clarifications, examine the dignity of marriage in both Urhobo and Christian marriages, and then present the issue of domestic abuse and violence in Urhobo and Christian marriages. When this has been done, the way forward and praxis in the light of



authentic Judeo-Christian biblical ethical values, Christian teaching, especially Roman Catholic magisterial teaching, and human rights instruments shall be presented. When that has been done, the paper will be brought to a conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

The basic concepts that need clarification in this paper are eradicating domestic abuse, domestic violence, Urhobo marriages, and Christian marriages. The word domestic, among other things, means “relating to the family or the household” (Garner, 2019, p. 558). The term spousal abuse about domestic violence is seen as “maltreatment, mistreatment, or ill-treatment of a spouse” (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003, p. 37). From this, we get the meaning of abuse. Abuse is misuse, manipulation, and oppression. Domestic abuse can be either the abuse of a man, woman, children, or other family members at home. DAV can take many forms. It includes: sexual harassment, rape, verbal abuse, emotional abuse, failure to provide for the upkeep of the family by parents (especially the men),

Domestic abuse and violence are not the same, but they are intractably related and at times almost synonymous. Some forms of abuse are actually violent in type. People can use violence or force to commit abuse, though not always. Violence is “the use of physical force, usually accompanied by fury, vehemence, or outrage; esp., physical force unlawfully exercised with the intent to harm” (Garner, 2019, p.1705). The definition of violence as the use of physical force can be restrictive, for there can be nonphysical forms of violence. This is why, for instance, some courts assert that in labour disputes, things like picketing done with misleading signs, veiled verbal threats, erroneous publicity, and false statements are forms of violence (Garner, 2019, p. 1705). The position of this paper is that violence should not be restricted to force but is inclusive of many forms of abuse, even when there was no physical contact or coercion or force.

Because society is now globalized and there is much cultural diffusion, the definition of violence needs to be situated within the global landscape. Because much of the domestic violence in Urhoboland is likely to be against women, it is important to also use the parameters of the United Nations to define violence here. Violence with the context of human rights or women is “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”(United Nations General Assembly, 1993). Violence is the use of unjustified force or coercion to accomplish one's goals, using non-peaceful means to achieve objectives, subduing and subjecting the weak to discontent (Onojobi, 2010). “Domestic violence is a kind of violence that occurs in a situation of a family or intimate relationship” (Bakare et al., cited in Ezeabasili, 2018, p. 145). Forms of domestic violence include sexual assault, physical abuse, verbal abuse, and emotional abuse among people of intimate ties (Ezeabasili, 2018). Domestic violence from another perspective is “violence between members of a household, usu. Spouses; an assault or other violent act committed by one member of a household against another” or “the infliction of physical injury, or the creation of reasonable fear that physical injury or harm will be inflicted, by a parent or a member or former member of a child’s household, against a child or another member of the house,-Also termed



domestic abuse; family violence” (Garner, 2019, pp. 1705-1706). You can see why it is difficult to separate the two terms. For domestic abuse it, “involves multiple types of violent a degrading behavior” perpetuated by one who is expected to show love and even though men are also victims it disproportionately effects women (Finley, 2013). Violence can take many forms-physical, cultural biases especially against women, religious violence that denies women equal status, psychological, and political and socio-economic violence (Offor, 2000).

The Urhobo people are predominantly located in the Delta Central Senatorial District in Delta State of Nigeria. They are the major ethnic group in the state. They are predominantly in the Western Niger Delta. The Urhobo ethnic nationality is presently made up of the 24 Urhobo kingdoms of Olomu, Uvwie, Agbarha-Ame, Agbarho, Arhavwarien, Umiaghwa-Abraka, Agbarha-Otor, Ogor, Okparabe, Eghwu, Ewreni, Ughwerun, Oghara, Idjerhe, Okpe, Agbon, Effurun-Otor, Ughievwen, Udu, Okere-Urhobo, Orogun, Mosogar, Urhwarivie-Abraka, and Ughelli. Many Urhobo people speak their native Urhobo language and other languages like English, Pidgin, while some can equally speak French, Spanish, Italian, etc. The notion of Urhobo marriage here is used to describe traditional or native law marriage contracted between a man and a woman following Urhobo custom and tradition. Some people can be married traditionally and also engage in Christian marriage following Christian principles and observances. Urhobo traditional marriage is seen as “a union between a man and a woman. It is polygamous by nature, as it allows the man to marry more than one wife depending on his financial status”(Erhimeyoma, 2016). In the traditional African sense, marriage is the;

...union of a man and a woman for the duration of the woman’s life. In customary law marriage, the death of the wife does not necessarily dissolve the bond between her maiden family and her husband’s family. The husband continues to owe obligations to the deceased wife’s maiden family until the offspring of the marriage grow up to take over the obligations. If there are no children, the legal obligations cease with the death of the childless wife (Mba, 1993).

It is also important to define the concept, Christian. The term can refer to a person who follows Christ and his teaching or who has embraced Christianity or its institutions, establishments, ideologies, philosophies, places owned by Christians, or associated with Christianity. And so people can speak of the Christian church, the Christian gospel, the Christian faith, the Christian places of pilgrimage, Christian marriage, etc. Christianity is the faith tradition rooted in monotheism that adheres to belief in the redemptive role of Jesus of Nazareth, and this faith tradition is associated with beliefs, customs, institutional structures, etc (Macy,2007).

It is from the Latin word, *matrimonium*, that the word marriage is derived, and the Latin word means “munus matris” (office of the mother) or *muniens matrem* (the protecting mother), implying often the concerns of marriage weigh heavily on the mother (Etafo, 1993). What then is Christian marriage? It is informed by Christian values, and even for one who is married traditionally, when he does a Christian marriage, he rejects whatever is contrary to the Christian ideals. What then is Christian marriage? In the eyes of the document, *Gaudium et Spes*, Christian marriage is “an intimate, equal partnership of life and love, established by the Creator and governed by its own laws; marriage is rooted in the covenant made by the spouses through their



irrevocable personal consent” (Catholic Bishops of Vatican II, 48). In marriage which is called a sacrament in the Catholic tradition, but differently named in some other traditions, “a man and woman enter into a lasting contractual relationship, a matrimonial consent, which by giving them rights over each other for sexual relations not only fosters their mutual love but provides for the birth and upbringing of children in the family structure” (Lang, 1989, p. 384).

Importance and Dignity of Marriage in Urhobo and Christian Marriages

In Africa, marriage is held to be of high importance, and through it, a family comes into being and society continues (Mounwe, 2016). Marriage has been previously defined and named as sacred. Because of the value and importance of marriage among the Urhobo, marriage is an enduring institution covering a woman's lifespan, and divorce is rare unless for serious reasons (Erhimeyoma, 2016). The marriage union is not just about the couple (the man and the woman), it involves the two families, and when there are children, especially male children, the bond becomes inseparable, not even death or divorce can separate it (Oromafuru, 2007). It should be realized that marriage remains a basic institution of human society needed for establishing and maintaining the family and sustaining kinship ties, and it is the means through which children are brought to the world in African societies (Gyekye, 1996). Marriage is one of the puberty rites necessary for ushering young people into adulthood, and the persons are educated on the duties of adulthood (Gyekye, 1996). It was expected and is the norm that in Africa, every boy and girl will get married and have children. This is also what obtains among the Urhobo people. Marriage is so important in African culture, and this includes the Urhobo, that it should be seen that:

Marriage is a requirement of the society, an obligation which every man and woman must fulfil, a drama of life in which every man and woman must participate. Traditionally in many African societies, a young man who has gainful employment of any kind and earns some income is expected, in fact urged to marry. Any undue delay on the part of the young man to marry will cause his parents or the elders in the lineage to worry and even to interfere in his private life in order to advise and encourage him to marry (Gyekye, 1996, p. 76)

What Gyekye writes of most African societies is also true of the Urhobo people. Marriage was held in high esteem. One of the main purposes of marriage is to have children and ensure the survival and thriving of the family, the kindred, and the ethnic group. Marriage is also important for its supportive function. In the biblical text in Genesis 2:18, God says, “It is not good that man should be alone.” Arguing from the Hebrew word, *basar* (physical flesh, living and its functions), each person in marriage that is has value in himself/herself, so the woman should not simply be seen as valuable because of children rather there is a sharing in a communion of life, offer mutual acceptance, and this sharing of life also includes forgiving one another (Kisembo, Magesa and Shorter, 1998). The notion of supporting one another is very important in marriage. If the man and woman cannot support one another in living happy and fulfilling lives, then one of the cardinal functions of marriage is vitiated. The notion of solidarity in African traditional marriage is very important, and this is one of the reasons that informs polygamy (to have enough hands in the family to carry out farming and household chores). There is also the element that the



union of a man and a woman brings their families or kindreds into an alliance, which helps to foster peaceful coexistence and reconciliation, and friendship (Mba, 1993).

Just as marriage is important in the Urhobo-African cultural tradition, so also it is important in the Christian tradition. Marriage is ordered for the good of the spouses, the good of the children they will have, and the well-being of society (Catholic Bishops of Vatican II, GS, 48). In the Christian tradition, marriage is ordered by God and sanctioned by him. Different Christian traditions have peculiar teachings on marriage. While in the Catholic tradition divorce is not allowed in a validly administered marriage, in some Christian traditions divorce is allowed. In the Catholic tradition, a marriage not validly contracted can be brought for annulment. The fact is that marriage is a covenantal relationship of a man to a woman. This relationship is like that of Christ and his church. In the Pauline letters it is clear that as Christ loved the church and sacrificially laid his life down for the church, so also husbands should love their wives (Ephesians 5). This is why it is tragic, painful, and troubling when there are DAV in marriages. The love that Christ showed the church is missing in such marriages. Christ will never beat the church, his bride. Even when the bride had failed, what is needed is repentance, not beating or insult. The true understanding of a husband's headship and a wife's subjection is often missing in many Christian marriages (Ikeke, 2024). It is in this light of what marriage should aim for that the paper now examines DAV in Urhobo and Christian marriages.

Christian marriage should be a true expression of Christ's love. While sexual love and intimacy in marriage are restricted to the couple, in real life, married couples have a duty to collaborate in helping to promote the message of the gospel in the world. A married couple should practise agapic love in helping to build the human society. They should contribute to charity and philanthropic projects of the church and society. Marriage should not just be to share sexual love and have children. They have a duty to educate the children for the good of the human society, also. Married couples have a duty to promote justice and peace in the world. They should promote the social gospel. Marriage has a social mission in the world, also. The marriage institution, whether traditional or Christian, is not cut off from the world or set apart from society. Marriage is not a fortress; rather, it is lived in the town, the city, the village, and in society. Married people should not say they will show no concern for social and political issues, after all, those engaged in social life and politics come from the family, one of the basic units of society. Marriage is like a "little church," using the words of John Crystotom, and the couple has a ministry to one another, to the children they give birth to, the church, and then to society at large (Krouse, 2007). For too long, many married couples have excluded themselves from political issues and discouraged family members from participating in politics, claiming that politics is evil. It is important to re-echo this point, for Christians have a duty to participate in the socio-political transformation of the world. Marriage, then, is also important for this reason of the socio-political transformation of the world. Married life shares in the mission of the church, the mission to promote holiness, promote life, promote communion (Phiri, 2011). This is life in its fullness and all dimensions. The family created out of marriage should influence the government to promote social welfare (Agostoni, 1997). Married couples are instruments of Christ's love in the world and should foster justice and respect for human rights and duties (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005).



In the biblical text, marriage was created in the garden, and man and woman were to cultivate and till the garden. In light of the ecological crisis, we cannot help but pay attention to this. Man and woman are entrusted with the responsibility of being stewards of creation, not spoilers of creation. We hardly hear about the ecological responsibilities of married couples and families in Christian sermons, homilies, bible studies, and in other fora. It is time for married couples to take up the ecological challenge.

Are there Domestic Abuses and Violence in UCM?

Urhobo society, like every other Nigerian society, is patriarchal in nature, and the patriarchal influence and value still pervade the culture and society. A patriarchal society is one in which men control women, significant material resources are available to men, women are considered to be inferior and cheapened, and it is painful to note that in such a society, men can use violence to subdue women, and men benefit enormously from the limitations that women face as it is to their advantage (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003). This is why many men don't see any value or anything good in feminist values and ethics. Domestic abuse is common in Nigerian marriages, and women are victims, and people rarely talk about it since it is presumed that women should be subordinate to men (husbands) (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003). The fact is that DAV occurs in Urhobo marriages and Christian marriages in Urhoboland. While it is true that DAV can be perpetuated by any family member, often it is men who perpetuate DAV.

It is not out of place to highlight some of the factors that encourage domestic abuse and violence, especially against women. For some scholars, it is "the historical formation of the family in a capitalist society, separation of the public and private/domestic domains, and specialization of permissible male and female family functions (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003, p. 38). What happens in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is not peculiar to some men in Igbo culture. It is the way some men view life. Okonkwo beats his wife mercilessly, even when people intervene, he refuses (Achebe, 2005). It is important to note that the chief priest and Ala do not see this as the norm in the week of peace. Okonkwo is rebuked, and his beating his wife is a desecration and a sacrilege. A reading within the line shows that Okonkwo was seriously rebuked and fined because it was the week of peace. If it were not the week of peace, he could have beaten his wife and gotten away without any repercussions. While not established as a norm, in a patriarchal culture, it is condoned. In traditional culture, people hardly question a man who beats his wife, unless it is excessive. But in the truest sense of it, no beating should be accepted. Cultural and traditional religious practices of privileging the male child and subordinating women as inferior precipitate domestic violence against women, unequal access to education, confining women to child bearing or care giving at home, jealousy on the part of men over their wife relationship to others, stress, need for power and control can also in different ways instigate domestic violence (Ezeabasili, 2018).

The situation of environmental insecurities in the Niger Delta, in which Urhoboland is located, can also predispose people to domestic abuse and violence. It is a known fact that there is heavy environmental stress in the region, the adverse effects of oil exploitation such as pollution, petroleum fire, despoilation of farmlands, death of fishes in the streams destruction of food



sources and biodiversity has hindered people from enjoying their right to food, clean water, freedom of movement, etc. as people find it difficult to meet up with their lives they can easily get angry and transfer the aggression to people at home at any little offence. Furthermore,

...causes of domestic violence in Nigeria are deeply rooted in multiple factors, including gender inequality, harmful cultural practices, poverty, and lack of education. The persistent adherence to patriarchal norms and beliefs contributes significantly to the perpetration of violence against women, with women often being seen as subordinate to men and their opinions and needs disregarded. Moreover, harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation, and the dowry system further perpetuate violence within marital relationships (Efefairoro, 2023, para 2).

In Urhobo culture, it is expected that when the man (husband) is speaking, the woman is not to utter a word, and if she does, she can be rebuked or shouted at.

There are many obstacles to eradicating DAV in Urhoboland. One of the authors of this paper (Ikeke) has heard cases of men who have told their wives never to discuss anything that happens in their marriages outside the home or to outsiders. Then some women have endured and refuse to have their husbands counselled because they fear their husbands may get angry and aggravate the matter. This culture of don't talk, don't tell the police of DAV, and settle it within the family, even at the pain of death, is common in Nigeria (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003).

What about the issue of absentee parents (father or mother)? There are many cases of parents who, due to no just cause, have abandoned their marriages and families and allowed their children to grow up without their physical presence and financial support. This is common in Urhoboland in both Urhobo and Christian marriages.

Another area where there can be so much abuse is in the issue of infertility and childlessness. In Urhobo culture, as in other African cultures, women are often blamed for being childless. They suffer from a lot of verbal and even physical attacks from the husband and the husband's family. In Urhoboland, Christian marriages are not exempt from this. Urhobo Christians are deeply influenced and informed by their cultural beliefs. The male child is given priority of place, and not having a male to take after you is seen as unacceptable. These authors have witnessed situations in which men and women who have given birth to female children continue to reproduce to get a male child, even when the couple is advanced in age, like 60 years and above. They often fail to take into consideration the health and mental health implications of having babies at such an advanced age. Some continue to go from one hospital to another or prayer house to another seeking solutions. Much of the mental torture and pressure is put upon the woman as if she were the one who produced male children.

Gendered roles in society can be discriminatory and abusive. Women, especially, are restricted from performing certain functions, whereas almost all functions are open to the menfolk. Gender often stereotypes women and demands that they be submissive, passive, emotional, and even illogical (Onojobi, 2010). This stereotyping of women is common in Urhobo culture. Even in Christian marriages and life, women are stereotyped. There are still Christian churches in



Urhoboland that see women as weak, whose function is childbearing, and who should keep silent even at home. They are to be submissive to their husbands. While there is nothing wrong with submission, it is just that submissive is often misunderstood to mean subservience or slavish obedience. A woman who dares to assert her rights in marriage is often threatened with divorce, as Victor Jike has noted (Erhimeyoma, 2016). This form of treatment amounts to a form of psychological violence. As should be noted, violence is not just physical. When people are denied their dignity and treated as nobodies or less than a person, this, at times, can be worse than physical violence. One of the greatest violence done the black people in the United States, Africa, and other parts of the world is the denial of African personhood, dignity, and worth. In their struggle for the blacks in the civil rights movement, Martin Luther King emphasized the philosophy of personalism and somebodiness. He made blacks realize and recognize that they are somebody. They have human rights like others and dignity. To see women as less than human is troubling. In a fieldwork carried out by the following author, it is clear that among Urhobo people, there are still many who don't see women as equal to men, place the woman in a subservient position, and on who exists to do the bidding of the man (Erhimeyoma, 2016). It is painful to note that, outside the issue of bearing male children, it was seen as an anomaly for a person not to be married in a traditional Urhobo society.

Refusing to educate the girl child can also be seen as a form of abuse and violence. It mitigates against the dignity of the girl child. The refusal to educate the girl child has not totally been erased from Urhobo society and marriage or the domestic front. The need to educate the girl child and empower her for a greater role in society is well noted by many scholars (Odewumi, 2010). Even when the girl child is sent to school, the expectation often is that she should read courses that will make her play her role as a woman (Erhimeyoma, 2016). Victor Jike writes that a woman who cannot give birth to male children receives little or no regard (Erhimeyoma, 2016). To regard a person less than the person should be regarded does emotional violence to the person and dehumanizes the person. It is painful to be regarded as less than a human person because you have not given birth to male children. The pain of discrimination has been suffered by women for giving birth to only girl children (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2010).

While not in all cases, polygamy can cause violence and even lead to abuse in marriages. Polygamous marriages are common in Urhoboland, and there are Christian churches in Urhoboland that permit polygamy. Polygamy is fraught with many challenges and problems. Women often fight and quarrel over a man's affection. Children of different mothers fight for prominence and paternal recognition, and wealth inheritance. It should be noted that: "Women in African societies want and hope to be married; in fact, an unmarried woman is almost an anomaly" (Gyekye, 1996).

Then there is the whole issue of female circumcision, called female genital mutilation (FGM). It should not be glossed over. It does harm to women and violently offends against their dignity. FGM is common in Urhoboland, in both Christian and non-Christian homes. It is a form of women oppression and girls who refuse it are castigated and discriminated against and even educated people champion it (Bujo, 2009). It ought to be stopped. With findings in the biotechnological and medical sciences, it should be fully realized that it harms female agency.



It is important to state some of the effects of DAV, no matter where they happen. Physical effects can include broken bones, injuries, internal bleeding, miscarriage on the part of women, death of fetus, emotional pain, and the psychological health effects can include depression, low productivity in the workplace, aggression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc (Ezeabasili, 2018). “Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that affects societies worldwide, with Nigeria being no exception. This silent pandemic continues to erode the social fabric of Nigeria, hindering progress and leaving countless individuals, particularly women and children, traumatised and suffering” (Efefairoro, 2023, para 1).

Many of the abuses and violent acts mentioned above that happen in Urhobo marriages also happen in Christian marriages. Whether Urhobo or Christian marriages in Urhoboland, they exist within the same Urhobo society and land. Christian marriages where DAV occur are ones in which the persons, especially men, have failed to take into consideration the egalitarian teachings of Jesus, or they have an erroneous interpretation of scripture in which they see women as inferior and can be subjugated. In his research in Urhoboland, a previous author mentions the fact that even some Christians in Urhoboland see women as inferior (Erhimeyoma, 2016). The counselling offices of churches are often overwhelmed with people who want to know more about DAV.

The Way Forward in Eradicating DAV in UCM

The legal instrument must be wielded to campaign against DAV. It is imperative, then, to state some of the key things about DAV in the Nigerian law... “Nigeria’s government has taken steps towards addressing this issue with the enactment of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act in 2015, which criminalises various forms of violence and provides avenues for support and justice to survivors. However, effective implementation and enforcement of these laws are vital to create a deterrent against domestic violence”(Efefairoro, 2023, para 2). The law is a powerful instrument to combat DAV.

Ongoing and further education and creation of awareness on the evils and negative effects of DAV. DAV dehumanises the human person, violates their rights, and limits the person in achieving a fuller human person. The fact is that DAV has brought some persons into lacking confidence in life, developing low self-esteem, causing sickness and ill-health, maiming and crippled people, incapacitating some, and making some develop abnormal personalities. It is crucially important that people are made aware of the negative effects of DAV. There may be some who perpetuate DAV who may not know it is evil and antisocial. Within Christian cycles, it is both evil and sinful. It offends against the person created in God’s image and likeness. Educational programs should teach people social skills in relationships, conflict resolution, anger management, communication skills, and at the communal level, there should be efforts to raise public awareness, actions geared at preventing violence, extensive premarital counselling, legal aid, rehabilitation centres, and religious leaders should preach against it (Ezeabasili, 2018). The Urhobo concept of Okugbe should be propagated in creating this awareness. Okugbe means togetherness and unity. When there are challenges in marriage, such as childlessness, lack of a



female child, etc, the issue should be handled collectively, communally, and in solidarity, not blaming or attacking the woman or any other member of the family for the issue.

Speaking of education and the creation of awareness on the issue, women's groups, associations, and clubs have a great role to play in this. Different women's groups, whether in religious circles or the secular society, should not just meet as if it is business as usual, or just meet to organise parties and buy new wrappers. They should meet among themselves and brainstorm on what they can do. In Christian churches such as the Catholic church, the Anglican church, the Baptist church, etc, you have vibrant women's groups. They should take up these issues. Women should be taught not to hide DAV. At times, it can be better to save a life than to save a marriage when one's life is at stake. Don't endure DAV unto death. If, through legitimate means such as counselling, meeting, dialogue, the situation does not change, then other legitimate means have to be taken. The theological foundation that men and women are created in God's image and likeness, share in equal "sonship" or "daughtership", and are both co-heirs with Jesus must always be affirmed. In his life and ministry, Jesus never abused or demonstrated violence against the human person, male or female. In the few cases where he was critical in his comments and violent in behavior it was against situations that was evil, unjust structures and human personalities engrossed in unjust behaviours such as his attacks against the Pharisees in Matthew 23, his condemnation of sinful human behaviours in the Sermon on the Mount, There is radical egalitarianism in God's kingdom and in his church. There is no justification to maltreat any of the sexes or genders. There is also the reality that the Nigerian constitution enunciates an egalitarian ethos. In Urhobo ethics, there is a high regard for being a person of character, moral responsibility, humanness, consideration for others, communal harmony, value for the sacredness of life, and peacefulness (Erhimeyoma, 2016). This being the case, it becomes abnormal to maltreat family or society members to satisfy one's ego or for any other reason. Christian ethics value love, agape, and the ethics of equal regard (explicated by Don Browning), sacrificing for others (Erhimeyoma, 2016). All these traditional and Christian values should be fostered to mitigate DAV. The Christian teaching in Matthew 7:12, "Always treat others the way you desire to be treated," should never be overlooked. Those who perpetuate DAV would not like to be treated in the same manner. The intention is not to say that it is only women group that have the responsibility. It is the responsibility of all members of society. Whether a marriage is Christian or not, the value of equal unconditional positive regard should permeate it. In the biblical story from both Genesis 1-2:4a and Genesis 2:5-25, the dignity of humans created in God's image and likeness is given recognition, man and woman have equal status, and it should be realized that: "the marriage itself is the priority which God blesses, and from it comes fruitfulness. The emphasis then is not on fertility but on the man-woman relationship in marriage not conditioned by anything else" (Kisembo, Magesa, and Shorter, 1998, p. 128). Man and woman cleave to one another and this is prior to fruitfulness of bearing children, if any; and establish a mutuality of life; and must continue to be asserted that "Each of the partners in marriage has value as a human person. Like the man, the woman has value as a human person and importance in her own right and not necessarily in her children" (Kisembo, Magesa and Shorter, 1998, p. 129). This is one of the places where the Christian message should heal Urhobo culture. In a world of cultural diffusion, the Urhobo people should allow the Christian value to permeate Urhobo culture and marriages. There is nothing to be ashamed of; no culture is perfect. In Christ and culture...



Non-governmental organizations also have a great role to play in educating against DAV. They can help to create awareness of these issues. These NGOs can be professional groups such as National Association of Women Lawyers, National Association of Women Journalists; activists women's groups such as Women in Nigeria; research-driven groups such as Women, Law and Development Centre, Women's Research and Documentation Centre; Women religious groups such as Young Women Christian Association, Federation of Muslim Women Association can work for gender equity and thus prevent cultural practices that victimises women (Karunwi, 2004). These are indeed women's groups and national groups. But even national groups do have local chapters or have their works spread throughout the country. And so they can make a contribution to the issues in Urhoboland. There are many Urhobo lawyers and journalists, both men and women. They should engage in campaigning against DAV. In the Catholic Church, there is the Catholic Women's Organisation, the Catholic Men's Organisation, and the Catholic Youth Organisation. Similar groups exist in other churches. There is also the Justice, Development, and Peace Commission in the Catholic Diocese. They all have a duty to create awareness on the issue and educate against DAV.

Since environmental stress factors, especially the negative effects of the oil industry and its exploitation activities, can predispose people to domestic violence, oil industries must carry out their activities in a socially responsible manner, minimizing environmental pollution to the barest minimum and helping to create a healthy social environment where people can flourish.

When DAV occurs, often people's human rights are infringed upon. These rights include the right to dignity, to life, etc. There must be human rights education in Urhoboland and beyond. The school curriculum, especially in subjects like Social Studies, History, Geography, Government, Civic Education, etc, should emphasize fundamental human rights. Human Rights instruments like Chapter Two of the Nigerian constitution, 1995 women conference in Beijing, UDHR, the African Charter on Human and Peoples 'Rights, etc, should be taught. Because of the diversity of religious adherence, one does not have to agree with all that is contained in the Human Rights Declaration, especially the Global Human Rights Declaration. For instance, human rights instruments that promote gay and lesbian lifestyles are troubling, and people have a right to disagree with them. The 1999 Nigerian constitution protects the rights of all sexes and their rights are guaranteed, and that is why in the case *Ukeje v. Ukeje*, the judge ruled that discriminatory practices and customs are contrary to the constitution (Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria, 2010).

Conclusion

The paper examined the problem of domestic abuse and violence in Urhobo and Christian marriages. It was shown that marriage is a sacred institution created by God in both Urhobo and Christian traditions. God instituted it for procreation and the prolongation of the human family. Married couples are to live in solidarity in their respective marriage, and husband and wife are to be helpmates to one another. It was also shown that every couple has socio-political and ecological responsibilities. Marriage is something beautiful, like a flower and a blessing. But unfortunately, the ideal is not often manifest in marriage. The beauty of marriage is often



negatively impacted by domestic abuses and violence, such as wife beating and battery, absentee fathers/mothers, insults and other forms of linguistic violence, inability to take care of financial responsibilities, discrimination against the girl child, and many other negatives. Some of the roots of all these are a patriarchal cultural tradition and the misuse of biblical passages to support the oppression of women in the name of subordination. The paper then argued for a radical transgressive and transformative education to combat these ills, the enforcement of the law against domestic abuse and violence, the safeguarding of human rights instruments to protect married couples, especially women, etc. It is hoped and believed that if these are done, they will help create more harmonious and peaceful Urhobo and Christian marriages in Urhoboland.

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