

Role of Religious Leaders and Gender-Based Domestic Violence: Christian and Muslim Experiences in Abeokuta, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of religious leaders in addressing gender-based violence, with particular emphasis on domestic violence within Christian and Muslim communities in Abeokuta, Nigeria. Employing a comparative theological and sociological approach, the study explores how religious beliefs, institutional structures, and pastoral practices shape perceptions and responses to domestic violence. The study finds that both Christianity and Islam promote values of love, justice, human dignity, compassion, and non-violence, which provide important theological resources for challenging domestic abuse. Nevertheless, cultural interpretations, selective readings of sacred texts, and patriarchal social structures may sometimes undermine these principles and contribute to the normalisation or tolerance of abusive practices. Both religious traditions engage in pastoral care, counselling, preaching, and advocacy, although the level of institutional awareness, theological engagement, and practical response to domestic violence varies considerably. The study argues that religious leaders have a critical responsibility in preventing and responding to domestic violence and recommends theological re-education, structured clergy training, interfaith collaboration, and stronger institutional support as transformative strategies for promoting justice, healing, and protection of vulnerable victims.

Keywords: Religious leadership, Gender based-violence, Domestic violence, Christianity, Islam, Abeokuta, Faith based response

I. INTRODUCTION

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) occurs in every culture, society and country without regard to one's religious, spiritual, or cultural beliefs.¹ Neither the grand statements such as the United Nations' Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993 nor the Beijing Platform for Action 1995 have had any significant impact on Nigerian Christians and Muslims. In Nigeria, domestic violence against women and girls is not merely a human rights concern. It also remains a cultural and religious issue that is fed by deeply entrenched patriarchal values and distorted interpretations of sacred texts and religious doctrine.² Abeokuta, the capital of

Ogun State, exemplifies Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, with significant Christian and Muslim populations whose beliefs and practices shape communal life. As a patriarchal society, Abeokuta upholds traditional gender roles, contributing to the marginalisation of women in households, workplaces, and key decision-making arenas such as politics.

In many Nigerian communities, victims often turn first to religious leaders for assistance, making their stance and actions crucial in addressing domestic violence. Moral authority and social standing are vested in religious leaders in such environments. Influences, frequently as mediators, counsellors and advocates in their support or hinder the living of a just and harmonious life in their community.³

¹ B. C. Barnes, "Family Violence knows no Cultural Boundaries" *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences* 93, 1. (2001): 11.

² I. A. Helen Oyekanmi, "Domestic Violence and Disruption in Nigeria Homes: A Search for Peace," *West African Association of Theological Institutions* (Nigeria Zone), Emmanuel O. Oyemomi, Stephen O. Y. Baba,

and Helen I. A. Oyekanmi (Eds.), (Ilorin: Amazing Grace Press, 2016), 7.

³ A. Ayodeji, "The Role of Religious Leaders in Curbing Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria" *Journal of Gender Studies in Africa* 9, 1. (2021): 45.

Their interpretations of sacred texts and public pronouncements can either reinforce harmful gender norms or challenge them constructively, perpetuate or question gender norms in a positive way. In both Christianity and Islam is a religion that teaches love, justice and the dignity of human life. However, the interpretation of these principles and implementation of them relating to domestic violence is very diverse among leaders and within communities and, denominations, which were influenced by theological views, institutional organization and socio-cultural contexts.

In the present study, a comparison is made between the ways in which the Christian and Muslim religious leaders in Abeokuta respond to domestic violence with a look at their theology, institutional by focusing on religious leadership, it underscores the critical role faith communities play in either perpetuating or alleviating domestic violence in a multi-religious society, such as that in Abeokuta.

Understanding Gender Based Violence

According to Le Roux & Pertek, Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is gender-based or gender and sexuality-based. Women and girls are the primary victims. Proponents of the women's rights movement consistently argue that patriarchal structures cause gender inequality and violence.⁴ The Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COFEM) also underscores this point. While women and girls endure the most of domestic violence in Nigeria, in rare instances men and boys also suffer.⁵

In this context, this study focuses its attention on the role of religious leaders in preventing or perpetuating violence against women and girls in homes. The most common violence against women is domestic abuse, particularly wife-beating, physical, emotional, sexual, or psychological mistreatment. Physical violence can range from bodily harm or a slap, and to even murder.⁶

Concept of Domestic Violence

In Carl Henry's perspective, domestic violence manifests as sexual abuse, which can involve coercing someone into sexual acts against their

consent and/or compelling the victim to engage in sex that causes physical pain or injury.⁷ Oyedelesupported this view by stating that domestic violence undermines the dignity of its victims.⁸ Domestic violence encompasses actions by family members, whether intentional or neglectful, leading to physical harm, sexual exploitation, emotional distress, neglect, or other forms of abuse that can hinder a person's healthy growth.⁹ Additionally, J. S. Mill characterized domestic violence as any behaviour from an individual that inflicts physical damage on one or more relatives within their household. It can be defined as "any act, threat, or negligence that results in the victim's injury or emotional harm within a domestic setting."¹⁰

Oyelade is of the opinion that violence is a great evil that must be avoided. It is not an overstatement to say that domestic violence is not a respecter of culture, race, ethnic group, religion or social class. Thus, it is a serious matter that must be dealt with as an illegal and immoral practice. While a significant number of domestic violence incidents go unreported, it is unfortunate that most of the victims prefer to keep on managing the situation and suffer in silence.¹¹ In view of that, domestic violence is often described as one of the world's best-kept secrets. The rate at which domestic violence increases is alarming, and it seems as if church leaders have remained silent about violence in the home, especially among couples.¹²

Domestic violence is fundamentally about the misuse of authority in close relationships within a home. An example would be if a man physically assaults his wife using his hands, a stick, or a belt. This type of violence is also associated with the abuser exerting control and manipulating the victim, employing various methods that do not necessarily involve physical harm.¹³ Additionally, men may engage in psychological abuse, which is another form of violence, where the husband shows

⁷Carl C. F. Henry, "Christian *Personal Ethics*." (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 18.

⁸ S. O. Oyedele, "Marriage and Family Counseling." (Ogbomoso: Samak Press, 2011), 39.

⁹ P. Levine, "Development Behavioral Pediatric." (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Co., 1983), 56.

¹⁰ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*. (London: Oxford University, 1986), 21-22.

¹¹ S. O. Oyedele, "Marriage and Family Counseling." (Ogbomoso: Samak Press, 2011), 39.

¹²Oyedele, "Marriage and Family Counseling," 40.

¹³K. Jolin, "Ways To Encourage Communication Between Your Spouse and You." (San Deigo: Academic Press, 2007), 67.

⁴ Le Roux, E. & Pertek, S. I. "On the Significance of Religion in Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 389.

⁵Le Roux, E. & Pertek, S. I. "On the Significance of Religion in Violence Against Women and Girls" (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2023), 389.

⁶Wurata, P. W. "Pastoral Care in Africa Christianity." (Nairobi: Action Publishers, 2000), 45.

a lack of appreciation for his wife and stills fear of his potential physical aggression and public humiliation. Abusive husbands may restrict their wives' freedom and dictate their actions. Abandoning a wife is yet another manifestation of violence, as it leaves her in a vulnerable situation. It is important to note that domestic violence is not limited to spouses; it can also be inflicted upon the children.¹⁴

According to the American Psychological Association, approximately 40 to 60 per cent of males who perpetrate domestic violence against women concurrently engage in abusive behaviours towards children within the United Kingdom. Adults, including parents and relatives, may inflict physical harm, neglect, or engage in sexual exploitation of children within the domestic environment. It is also possible for older children to perpetrate acts of abuse against their younger siblings. Caregivers, such as babysitters, may subject infants, whom they are entrusted to care for, to maltreatment. The phenomenon of violence directed towards children encompasses not only physical abuse but also extends to emotional and psychological forms of abuse, such as teasing, bullying, intimidation, and sexual harassment.¹⁵

Fareo posited that female violence against men is rare; when it does occur, it often takes the form of verbal retaliation after repeated attacks on the woman or her children. This is sometimes referred to as violent resistance, in which a trapped victim sees violent retaliation as the only escape from further violence.¹⁶ From the above views of scholars, this research is of the view that domestic violence is a canker worm that has eaten so deeply into the fabric of society. Moreover, the perpetrator of domestic violence is not limited to religious leaders. The review has proved that domestic violence occurs in different forms, and it is pertinent for this study to review the types of domestic violence as highlighted by different scholars.

Types of Domestic Violence

There are various forms of domestic violence in marriage. The following are various forms of domestic violence as identified by a number of authors.

i. Physical Abuse: This form of violence can cause significant physical harm to the victim's body. This includes actions such as twisting the arm, confining, stabbing, forcibly pushing, biting, administering beatings, forcibly throwing the partner to the ground, striking, grappling, delivering kicks, pulling the hair, shoving, abandoning the partner in perilous situations, confining a partner within or outside a location, strangling, inflicting burns, threatening with a weapon or object, and ultimately, murder.¹⁷

ii. Economic Abuse: Economic abuse represents a category of violent conduct that impacts, either directly or indirectly, the economic autonomy of the victim. It encompasses one or more of the following elements: withholding financial resources, refusing to provide financial support, obstructing a partner's ability to secure or retain employment, and/or coercing a partner to engage in work.¹⁸

iii. Emotional Abuse: This is a form of violent behaviour that affects the victim emotionally. For instance, when a victim is verbally assaulted, criticized or unnecessarily blamed, the victim might become emotionally unbalanced.¹⁹

iv. Emotional Abuse: This type of violent conduct aims to instill fear or exert control. It manifests through intimidation, threats to leave or mistreat someone, restricting movement within the house, monitoring activities, threatening to remove custody of the children, damaging personal belongings, isolating an individual, using harsh language, and subjecting someone to relentless embarrassment.²⁰

v. Coercion, Intimidation and Threat: Coercion, intimidation and threats are different forms of behaviour that can be displayed by anyone at any time. These behaviours can physically harm a partner or loved ones. If left uncontrolled, they can escalate to the point of destroying possessions, denying access to family, associates, or

¹⁴ K. Jolin, "Ways To Encourage Communication Between Your Spouse and You." (San Diego: Academic Press, 2007), 68.

¹⁵ T. A. Alabi, The Church's Response to Socio-Economic Problems in Lagos State. *TheSahara Newspaper*, April 23, (2024): 45.

¹⁶ O. Fareo, Dorcas "Domestic Violence against Women in Nigeria," in *European Journal of Psychological Research*, Vol. 2, No. 1, (2015): 47.

¹⁷ Campbell, C. Jacquelyn, *Assessing Dangerousness: Violence by Batterers and Child Abusers* (New York, Springer Publishing Coy, 2007).

¹⁸ M. Cascardi, and D. Vivian, "Context for Specific Episode of Marital Violence: Gender and Severity of Violence Difference," in *Journal of Family Violence*, 10, (1993): 265.

¹⁹ M. J. Garanzimi, "Trouble Home: Pastoral Response to Violence Abusive Family," in *Pastoral Psychology*, Vol. 36, (1988): 35.

²⁰ D. A. Brownridge, "Male Partner Violence against Aboriginal Women in Canada and Empirical Analysis," in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18, (2007): 65.

government agencies, which may lead to self-mutilation or a suicide attempt.²¹

vi. Isolation: This is a form of behaviour where an individual regulates their partner's activities, including whom they interact with, where they visit, and whom they communicate with, forcing the partner to decide between the abuser and their close relationships, monitoring them closely, and fostering an intense sense of reliance on the partner.²²

vii. Spiritual Abuse: This is also a form of abuse because the victim is denied her freedom of spiritual expression, such as answering to God's call to a particular ministry. Other examples of spiritual abuse include withholding love unity, expression of prejudice in either words or action, denying partner's opportunity to render services in places of worship.²³

The review on types of domestic violence reveals the different forms of domestic violence perpetrators inflict on their victims. This writer, therefore, reviews the contemporary view on domestic violence.

Contemporary Perspectives of Domestic Violence

Scholars agree that domestic violence is a significant societal issue. It manifests across a wide range of situations and is considered one of the primary contributors to mortality and disability Sethi, Habibula, McGee, Peden, Bennett, and Hyder. Researchers believe that domestic violence exists in all societies, regardless of location, economic status, age, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, or religious affiliations.²⁴ Regarding its global occurrence, the World Health Organization (WHO), as reported by Koustuv and Yusuf, Arulogun, Oladepo, and Olowookere, found that in 48 surveys examining various populations worldwide, between 10% and 69% of women

experience domestic violence.²⁵ The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported that 60% of women globally have faced abuse (UNFPA) World Report on Violence and Health, 2002.

In Nigeria, even though cases of domestic violence, particularly among the elites, tend to be underreported due to concerns over divorce, retaliation from abusers, social stigma, and the risk of losing financial support, the reality remains largely unchanged.²⁶ As a result, Etuk, Nwagbara, and Achibong discovered that in their research involving 504 participants from Niger Delta States, 344 individuals (68. 2%) had encountered some form of domestic violence, while merely 44 participants (8. 8%) reported having no such experiences.²⁷ Additionally, Adebayo indicated that nearly 50% or around two-thirds of women in Nigeria encounter domestic violence, and Alo, Odusina, and Babatunde assessed the prevalence of domestic violence in the South-West region of Nigeria to be 32%.²⁸

This study reveals that domestic violence is often equated with violence against women. As a result, society tends to view women solely as victims and men exclusively as offenders. In contrast, research over the past quarter-century indicates that men and women exhibit violent behaviour in relationships at nearly the same frequency.²⁹ Additionally, both genders are equally likely to provoke violence against each other. The reality is unexpectedly free from social-class distinctions; approximately half of all domestic violence incidents involve both partners engaging in mutual abuse, while 25% involve only men attacking women, and the remaining 25% consist of only women attacking

²¹Brownridge, "Male Partner Violence," 66.

²²J. C. Campbell, "Assessing Dangerousness: Violence by Batterers and Child Abusers." (New York, Springer Publishing Coy, 2007), 102.

²³D. A. Brownridge, "Male Partner Violence against Aboriginal Women in Canada and Empirical Analysis," in *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 18, (2007): 65.

²⁴D. Sethi, S. Habibula, K. McGee, M. Peden, S. Bennett, and A. A. Hyder, *Guidelines for Conducting Community Surveys on Injuries and Violence*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2004), 7.

²⁵D. Koustuv, *Causes and Consequences of Child Labour and Women in Developing Countries*. (Stockholm: Karolinka Institute, 2008), 7-8.

²⁶Adebayo, A. A. and T. O. Kolawole, "Domestic Violence and Death: Women as Endangered Gender in Nigeria-American," in *Journal of Sociological Research*, 3(3), (2013): 55.

²⁷Etuk, G. R., Nwagbara, E. N. and Archibong, E. P. "Working Women and Spousal Violence in Nigeria: Emerging Patterns and Strategies for Change," in *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(17), (2012): 272.

²⁸Alo, O. A., E. K. Odusina, Babatunde, G. Spousal Violence in South-West, Nigeria: Prevalence and Correlates," in *Journal of Women's Health Care*, 1(2), (2012): 1.

²⁹Okoye, R. Chinasa "Domestic Violence in Contemporary Times, Causes and Effects: An Educational Perspective," in *Journal International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)*, 5(9), (2019): 118.

men.³⁰ Despite common misconceptions, women do not restrict their physical aggression to acts of self-defense, as numerous studies on domestic violence have demonstrated. Straus found that women initiate physical confrontations as frequently as men, and this finding has been consistently reaffirmed.³¹

General Factor Responsible for Domestic Violence

Domestic violence can stem from different causes. Socio-Cultural Factors

Garazinmi has argued that families with abusive or violent situations will claim that “things” are done differently within their cultural group.³² Mostly, persons with such disposition will hide under culture to justify any harsh discipline of spouses or children and the implications are that interference is seen as a violation of cultural autonomy and the perceived duties of parents. Bascon justifies this in his observation that Africans place the husband in control of his home.³³ As such he is obliged not only to protect his family, but also to provide for the members. The institutionalization of this inequality remains common in most African Customary Laws, where women have no right to inherit their husband properties. They are not regarded as sharing ownership of marital property and are almost without remedy upon divorce.³⁴ Wife battering is regarded normal in such traditional culture.³⁵

Socio-Economic Factors

The socio-economic status of the family also directly and indirectly affects the personalities of its members.³⁶ In many cases, the father’s financial standing strongly influences the type of control he

exercises over his wife and children. Because of the power bestowed on men by society, they often misuse this privilege, which can cause violence in their homes. In like manner, Oyemomilara observed that in some families, if the wife is the breadwinner, she might sometimes see herself as the sole authority in the home and want her husband to submit to her. It is reiterated that such an attitude will provoke jealousy, especially if the husband is unemployed or underemployed. This jealousy may eventually lead to violence.³⁷

Traumatic Childhood Experience

Research consistently indicates that those who endure violent and abusive experiences in childhood are more likely to become abusers themselves, whether towards children or spouses.³⁸ Even milder forms of violence tend to be transmitted across generations. Additionally, it has been suggested that domestic violence against women is linked to exposure to violence in early life. Experts have pointed out that male aggression is often a learned behaviour.³⁹ Supporters of this perspective argue that witnessing the interactions of parents and others in close relationships during childhood plays a crucial role in shaping initial understandings of acceptable behaviour in such contexts.⁴⁰ It is suggested that witnessing parental violence or experiencing direct physical or sexual abuse as a child is linked to increased aggression later in life.⁴¹

Religious Orientation and Doctrine

Religious orientation and doctrine are other factors that contribute to domestic violence. Oyemomilara said that there are religions that permit polygyny. The most A bad side of it is that some men marry

³⁰ M. A. Straus, “Thirty Years of Denying the Evidence on Gender Symmetry in Partner Violence: Implications for Prevention and Treatment,” *Partner*, No. 1, (2010): 332.

³¹ Straus, “Thirty Years of Denying,” 332.

³² Garanzimi, “Trouble Home: Pastoral Response to Violence Abusive Family,” 278.

³³ W. Bascon, *The Yoruba South-Western Nigeria* (New York: Holf Rinehart and Wington, 1989), 222.

³⁴ Glenn Bowman, ‘The Violence in Identity’, in Bettina Schmidt and Ingo Schroeder eds., *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2001), 46.

³⁵ Julia T Wood, “The Normalization of Violence in Heterosexual Romantic Relationships: Women’s Narratives of Love and Violence” *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 2001; 18; 239 – 261:

³⁶ H. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of Yoruba’s*. (Ibadan: University Press, 1978), 34.

³⁷ C. A. Oyemomilara, *The Church’s Response to Domestic Violence in Contemporary Yoruba Society*. (Degree Essay, Ogbomosho: Nigeria Baptist Theological Seminary, 1994), 45.

³⁸ R. J. Gellas, “Violence in the Family: A Review of Research in the Seventies,” in *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 42, No. 4, November (1980): 878.

³⁹ Loseke, Donileen R. and DemieKurz. *Men’s Violence towards Women is the Serious Social Problem: Current Controversies on Family Violence*. (C.A: Sage Publication, 2005), 78.

⁴⁰ Loseke, R. Donileen and DemieKurz. *Men’s Violence towards Women is the Serious Social Problem: Current Controversies on Family Violence*. (C.A: Sage Publication, 2005), 78.

⁴¹ C. L. Miller-Perrin and R. D. Perrin, *Child Maltreatment: An Introduction* (New York: Sage Publications, 2013), 25.

more wives than they can take care, so that they get themselves in a bad situation.⁴²

Lack of Effective Communication

Where jealousy and competition arise and ultimately to violence. The home, Marital communication is the continuous flow or sharing of information, messages. In many ways, including talking, writing letters, on the telephone. According to Esere, a body language and facial expression are examples of non-verbal cues.⁴³ without effective communication in marriage is at risk of falling apart, communication is the golden thread that holds marriages and other important relationships together.⁴⁴ This proposes that any partnership that isn't well put together could result in split up, which can be a consequence of domestic violence. Jolin supported this viewpoint, stating that communication is crucial for a successful marriage and that a marriage cannot thrive in a world filled with divorces without communication.⁴⁵

Demonstration of Power and Control

Kunhiyop believes that in many African cultures and traditional belief systems, women are viewed as belonging to men. To demonstrate this and maintain his reputation as the "lion" of the household, a man may not tolerate any defiance from his wife or children, resorting to verbal or physical aggression to assert authority.⁴⁶ Oyelade notes that the display of authority and dominance can begin when one partner feels the need to exert control over the other. Although most abusers share some common characteristics, it is important to note that they choose violence to get what they want in a relationship.⁴⁷

Refusal of Sexuality

Edens explained that a sexual relationship is an important aspect of the marital experience for a number of reasons. Intimacy is the bond that potentially unites a married couple. It is meant to

distinguish partners from merely sharing a friendship or cohabiting as roommates or cotenants. Withholding physical affection and closeness from a partner, without reasons tied to emotional connections or health issues, constitutes mistreatment, as it can leave the partner feeling neglected, unwanted, unappreciated, unattractive, discontented, and unfulfilled. A sexless marriage truly sinks.⁴⁸ In support of this, Kore stated, "inadequate sexual relationship is another major cause of domestic violence which leads to divorce."⁴⁹

Lack of Provision of Economic Resources

Domestic abuse and financial hardship are common experiences for countless individuals worldwide, transcending cultural and social differences. Nevertheless, certain social groups are more likely to encounter domestic violence, with poverty a contributing factor. There is a correlation between low income and higher instances of domestic violence, which can involve any family member, as anyone has the potential to become the perpetrator. McDowell and Hosteller found that "numerous studies have documented a correlation between poverty and other forms of abuse as well."⁵⁰ According to Davies, "women are entrapped within a cycle of impoverishment, and they endure neglect, discrimination, and exploitation."⁵¹ The lack of basic necessities resulting from economic hardship has compelled certain individuals, both male and female, to engage in misconduct, culminating in disputes.

Jealousy and Possessiveness

Numerous instances of domestic violence against women are frequently attributed to jealousy, particularly when the partner is perceived to be engaging in infidelity or is contemplating ending the relationship. In support of this, Kunhiyop explained that some men are so jealous and possessive that they do not want to see their wives even talking to another man. One of the most disconcerting occurrences in romantic relationships is the fear of, or confirmed instances of, infidelity.

⁴²Oyemomilara, "The Church's Response," 46.

⁴³J. Lederer, William and Don D. Jackson. *The Mirages of Marriage*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1968.

⁴⁴M. O. Esere, Communication Management Skills Training as Marriage Enrichment Programme in The Improvement of Marital Adjustment, *The Counselor*, 23 (1), (2006): 69.

⁴⁵K. Jolin, *Ways To Encourage Communication Between Your Spouse and You*. (San Deigo: Academic Press, 2007), 67.

⁴⁶Samuel WajeKunhiyop. *African Christian Ethics*. (Nairobi: Hippo Books, 2008), 244.

⁴⁷Oyelade, "Domestic Violence! Not A Christian Culture," 36.

⁴⁸Edens, David. *Marriage: How to Have it The Way You Want It*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1982), 72.

⁴⁹Kore, Danfulani. *Culture and Christian Home*. (Jos: ACTS Publications, 1995), 88.

⁵⁰Josh McDowell and Bob Hosteler. *Josh McDowell's Handbook on Counseling Youth*. (Lagos: Bible Wonderland Ltd. 1996), 45

⁵¹A. Davies, "Violence against Women and Its Effects," in *Journal of Personal Guidance* Vol. 2(2), (199):78.

Infidelity is a pervasive phenomenon that manifests with disconcerting regularity across a multitude of nations worldwide.⁵²

Factors Contributing to Domestic Violence in Religious Contexts

In Abeokuta, Christians and Muslims experience violence including against women and girls. Their understanding of religious scriptures tends to be patriarchal, thus strengthening male dominance. The male dominance and the subordination of women in both traditions, scriptures are often referred to as rationalise male domination and female subservient to normalise control and abuse in “men are superior to women.”⁵³ Domestic violence is rooted in patriarchy and a sexist attitude towards women, which is “men are superior to women.” women are objects to be controlled. Oyekanmi said that the institution of patriarchy, male-dominated system indoctrinates women to accept a subordinate role in life. Therefore, violence against women can be explained in terms of the status attributed to them by sex-role stereotyping due to the varying patterns of socialisation, and the power relationship structure of domination, and privilege existing between men and women.⁵⁴

In some instances, religious leaders unknowingly continue the abuse by encouraging women instead of being faithful or enduring to stay in an unhealthy marriage.⁵⁵ In addition, cultural practices like bride price, dowry, and polygyny can be cited as examples of how traditional gender roles may hinder efforts to prevent or end child marriage. Combined with religious beliefs, expectations of honour and other forms of polygamy add to this entrench gender inequality.⁵⁶ Economic dependency also plays a significant role; in many occasions, this fact has complicated issues, the fact that women are not independent in financial matters, and when coupled with the religious

beliefs that economically, they rely on their male partner, which leads them into abusive relationships.⁵⁷ The victim may feel embarrassed, isolated or excommunication, thus, lack of theological preparation on the part of the church leaders and misinterpretations of sacred texts result from low literacy among some adherents and religious leaders.⁵⁸ Many lack some scriptural texts and teachings that support justice, dignity and the necessity for this make it possible to have an environment where domestic violence is often not challenged and tolerated.⁵⁹

Theological Perspective on Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA)

A tentative theological lens is presented in this section. The study of theology in relation to domestic violence and abuse (DVA) falls outside the scope and capabilities of this investigation. Instead, what is presented is a survey of the body of work in this field and the subsequent arguments regarding specific scriptural passages, the patriarchal background to the translation of scripture, and their consequent detrimental influence on the perceived condoning of violence against women.

Christian Theological Perspective to Domestic Violence

Christian theology affirms the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of every person, grounded in the belief that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27, NRSV). This foundational doctrine stands in direct opposition to all forms of violence, including domestic abuse. This basic doctrine is contrary to any kind of Violence, including domestic violence. Jesus Christ teaches us the importance of love and mutual Tolerance, and resistance to oppressive behaviour. “Husbands, love your wives, like Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians

⁵²Kunhiyop, “*African Christian Ethics*,” 245.

⁵³S. Bawa, Religion and the Subjugation of Women in Nigeria. *Journal of Gender and Religion in Africa*, 16(2), (2010): 52–54.

⁵⁴Oyekanmi, “Domestic Violence,” 7.

⁵⁵F. Adesina, The Role of Religious Institutions in Domestic Violence in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social* 12 (1), (2021) 88–90.

⁵⁶C. N. Okhengbo, A. K. Omideyi and C. O. Odigmegwu, “Prevalence, Patterns and Correlates of Domestic Violence in Selected Igbo Communities of Imo State,” *Nig. Afr. J. Reprod. Health*, 6 (2), (2002): 4.

⁵⁷O. N. Aihie, Prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria: Implications for counselling. *Edo Journal of Counselling*, 2(1) (2010): 1-8.

⁵⁸O. Imasogie, The role of theological institutions in the mission of the church in Africa. *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 9(4) (1985): 369-377.

⁵⁹Ibrahim, Nada. “The Power of Women’s Faith in Coping with Intimate Partner Violence: Systematic Review of the Literature,” *Journal of Religion and Health*, Vol. 60, No. 5, (2021): 3266-3273. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-021-01334-9>.

5:25, NRSV). While some have historically misunderstood passages, like Ephesians 5:22: “Wives, be subject to your husbands.” “to the Lord,” (i.e., “as to the Lord”) in the context of the modern church to mean “to the Lord,” but also male superiority. Such literature in the context of an overall ethic of mutual submission and Christ-like service.⁶⁰

All mainline Protestant denominations and Catholic social teaching agree that denounce domestic violence as a sin against the individual and the community. Theological perspectives like liberation and feminist theology have also controversial, questioning patriarchy that allows for abuse, calling for justice and equality.⁶¹ The role of churches in providing pastoral counselling has increasingly become a feature of the work of the church, safe spaces and educational programmes to combat abuse and promote healing.

Muslim Theological Perspective on Domestic Violence

Islamic theology also affirms the value of life and the spiritual equalness of men and women. One of His signs is that “He has created for you, He has chosen for you, mates from yourselves, that you might dwell in tranquillity with them., O between their hearts love and mercy...” (Qur'an 30:21). These are ideals that lie behind marriage as a partnership which is based on compassion and respect. However, interpretations of certain verses, such as Qur'an 4:34, which discusses men's authority and the disciplining of wives, have been controversial. While some traditional interpretations have been used to justify physical discipline, contemporary Islamic scholars emphasise contextual and metaphorical readings of such verses, asserting that Islam does not condone violence.⁶² Some point to the Prophet Muhammad's conduct as a model, as he never struck his wives and encouraged kind and respectful treatment of women.⁶³ Laleh Bakhtiar

provides a translation in which the female gender is indicated by the (f). (In every other case, the Arabic Lexicon's male address includes the female.)

Men are supporters of wives because God has given some of them an advantage over others and because they spend of their wealth. So the ones (f) who are in accord with morality are the ones (f) who are morally obligated, the ones (f) who guard the unseen of what God has kept safe. But those (f) whose resistance you fear, then admonish them (f) and abandon them (f) in their sleeping place, then go away from them (f) and if they (f) obey you, surely look not for any way against them (f); truly God is Lofty, Great.⁶⁴

The controversy concerns the translation of the words ‘go away from them.’ This translation is a break from usual translations, where the words have been more commonly believed to imply ‘strike them.’ It has been suggested that religious doctrines with patriarchal social institutions favour translations that uphold women's subordination.⁶⁵ Syamsiyatun explained that, Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) includes principles of ma'ruf (kindness) and adl (justice), which guide family life and prohibit cruelty. Islamic organizations worldwide are increasingly active in addressing domestic violence through religious education, community support, and legal advocacy based on Islamic principles of compassion and non-harm (la dararwa la dirar).⁶⁶

Religious Response to Domestic Violence in Abeokuta

The Christian and Islamic responses to this section of the study are analysed the incidences of domestic violence in Abeokuta.

Christian Response to Domestic Violence

Domestic violence, and how Christians respond, is heavily influenced by theology, convictions, ecclesial structures and concrete involvement in the challenges of society. Rooted in the biblical principles of love, justice, and the dignity of the human person, Christianity offers a moral and spiritual foundation that rejects violence and upholds the sanctity of marriage as a covenant of mutual respect and care. Below are some of the

⁶⁰ L. S. Cahill, *Family: A Christian Social Perspective*. (USA: Fortress Press, 2000), 10-11.

⁶¹ M. A. Oduwoye, *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 1-18.

⁶² Wadud, Amina. *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1-12.

⁶³ A. Barlas, “Believing Women” in *Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. (USA: University of Texas Press, 2002), 1-16.

⁶⁴ L. Bakhtiar, The Sublime Quran: The Misinterpretation of Chapter 4 Verse 34. *18 European Journal of Women Studies*, 18, (2011): 431–39.

⁶⁵ Roux, and Pertek, “On the Significance of Religion,” 46.

⁶⁶ S. Syamsiyatun, Domestic Violence in Muslim Societies. *Studia Islamika* 21(1), (2014): 1–28.

identified responses of the Christian faith to gender-based violence (GBV).

Theological Grounding

Church teachings across denominations increasingly recognize domestic violence as both a moral sin and a matter of public justice. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, condemns violence within the family as a grave violation of Christian teaching and urges pastors to protect victims and promote healing United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.⁶⁷

Pastoral and Institutional Interventions

Churches in Abeokuta have responded to domestic violence through various pastoral initiatives. Some offer counselling services, crisis intervention, and referral networks for professional support. Pastors and lay leaders are being trained to recognize signs of abuse and respond appropriately with compassion, confidentiality, and clear referrals.⁶⁸ Fellowships and counselling ministries for women can in some cases provide a safe space for women to express their problems, counselling for those who have suffered abuse with prayer support, Group mentorship and empowerment seminars also help a lot. Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) alongside with its counterpart in Canada(The Conference of Adventist in Canada) had made public statements denouncing domestic violence, instructing churches to be sanctuaries of healing not silence.⁶⁹

Advocacy and Community Engagement

Beyond the pulpit, Christian leaders have increasingly engaged in advocacy and public education on gender-based violence. Christian speakers have increasingly taken on the role of advocate and raising awareness of gender-based violence among the public. Faith-based organisations; such as the Diocese Domestic violence Response Team of Lagos and Baptist Women's Missionary Union have partnered with

non-governmental organisations (NGO) to conduct awareness. Some campaigns offer support, shelter, and advocate for the strengthening of laws protecting victims.⁷⁰ Churches are also involved in preventive education, incorporating topics such as nonviolence, health, Including relationship, gender equality in premarital counselling and youth ministries. This proactive approach fosters cultural change within faith communities that have historically been shaped by patriarchal norms.

Muslim Response to Domestic Violence

The Muslim response to domestic violence is grounded in the ethical teachings of the Qur'an, Hadith, and the broader Islamic legal and moral tradition. Islam promotes justice, compassion, and harmony within the family and strongly discourages any form of harm (darar) in marital relationships. However, the diversity of interpretations, cultural norms, and institutional capacities shapes how Muslim leaders and communities address domestic violence.

Theological Foundations

Islamic teachings emphasize that marriage should be a partnership of mutual love and mercy (Qur'an 30:21) and affirm the equality and dignity of men and women before God (Qur'an 33:35). One example is the Prophet Muhammad, who never struck his wives and commanded his followers to treat women with kindness: "The best of you are those who are best to their wives."⁷¹ To re-express Islamic ethics in ways that condemn all forms of spousal abuse, progressive Islamic scholarship increasingly encourages ijtihad, or independent reasoning.⁷²

Institutional and Clerical Responses

Mosques and Islamic organisations in Abeokuta and other Nigerian cities have responded to domestic violence by offering marital counselling, conflict mediation, and educational sermons. Imams often serve as moral guides and advisors,

⁶⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops *When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women*. (Washington DC: USCCB, 2002), 12-14 <https://www.usccb.org/resources/when-i-call-help-pastoral-response-domestic-violence-against-women>.

⁶⁸ A. Adesupo, The Role of Religious Leaders in Curbing Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria. *Journal of Gender Studies in Africa*, 9(1), (2021): 43–54.

⁶⁹ Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). (2019). Position Statement on Gender-Based Violence.

⁷⁰ O. Oludipe, Faith-Based Response to Domestic Violence in Nigeria: The Role of the Church. *Nigerian Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, 12(2), (2020): 27–35.

⁷¹ Mernissi, Fatima. *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam*. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1991), 1-14.

⁷² El Fadl, K. A. (2001). *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic Law, Authority and Women*. Oneworld.

using Friday khutbahs (sermons) to address family life and condemn domestic abuse.⁷³ However, the effectiveness of these interventions depends on the training and theological orientation of individual religious leaders. Some Islamic organizations, such as the Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), play a pivotal role in addressing gender-based violence (GBV) through advocacy, education, and shelter services. Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) collaborates with community leaders and legal professionals to support victims and challenge harmful customs that perpetuate abuse.⁷⁴

Community Outreach and Legal Integration

In recent years, Muslim leaders have increasingly partnered with NGOs and government agencies to combat domestic violence through public awareness campaigns, interfaith dialogues, and legal education. In some parts of Northern Nigeria, shari'ah court provides remedies for legal action against abuse, but this depends on who is being abused and with what impact.⁷⁵ Youth and couples' education programmes focus on non-violence, and conflict and ways to avoid abuse, with the use of resolution, and spiritual ethics are also engaged within the religion.

Comparative Analysis of Christian and Muslim Responses to Domestic Violence

The Christian and Muslim Responses about domestic violence in Abeokuta are both common values and unique theological, cultural and institutional interests. This section provides a comparative assessment in three aspects: theological frameworks, institutional responses, and socio-cultural influences.

Similarities in Approaches

Both Christianity and Islam teach respect for life, the dignity of the person and compassion and justice in marriage. Both sacred traditions focus on love, mercy and non-violence. Christian and

Muslim religious leaders are increasingly exposing domestic violence as being contrary to religious teachings. Both had counselling sessions, awareness programmes, and community outreach interventions. Faith-based organisations such as; Baptist Women's Missionary Union, The Women Muslims Union (WMU) and the Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN) are both playing a major role in the fight against the polio virus. Both perform important advocacy, support and public education positions. Additionally, both traditions use their religious forums such as sermons, marriage counselling sessions and community assemblies, to bring followers' attention to the need for mutual respect in marriage and not being okay with abuse.

Differences in Theological and Practical Responses

Christian leaders generally ground their responses in the teachings of Jesus, biblical principles of love, forgiveness, human dignity, and the command to love one's neighbour (Matthew 22:37–39). Muslim leaders generally ground their responses in the Qur'an, Sunnah, and Islamic jurisprudence, emphasising justice ('adl), mercy (rahmah), compassion, and peaceful family relations.

Christian leaders commonly emphasise marriage as a covenantal relationship characterised by mutual love, fidelity, sacrifice, and respect between husband and wife (Ephesians 5:21–33). Muslim leaders generally understand marriage (nikāḥ) as a lawful and responsible partnership involving mutual rights and obligations, with emphasis on family stability, responsibility, and justice.

Christian leaders may emphasise forgiveness, reconciliation, pastoral counselling, prayer, and transformation of the offender, while increasingly recognising the need to protect victims and condemn abuse. Muslim leaders may emphasise reconciliation, mediation by family or religious authorities, justice, and the protection of family members, while drawing on Islamic teachings concerning mercy and responsible conduct.

Churches may respond through pastoral counselling, women's ministries, marriage counselling, prayer, shelters, advocacy, and referral to professional or legal services. Mosques and Muslim organisations may respond through imams, family mediation, Islamic counselling, community elders, charitable organizations, and referral to appropriate social or legal services.

⁷³ A. Lukman, The Role of Muslim Clerics in Addressing Domestic Violence in Southwestern Nigeria. *Ilorin Journal of Islamic Studies*, 5(2), (2020): 65–78.

⁷⁴ Federation of Muslim Women's Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), Annual Report on Gender and Social Justice, 2021.

⁷⁵ N. Abdulqadir, Access to Justice for Victims of Domestic Violence in Shari'ah Courts. *Nigerian Journal of Islamic Law*, 11(1), (2019): 41–59.

Christian leaders often stress the equal dignity of men and women before God, although interpretations of gender roles differ among denominations and traditions. Muslim leaders emphasise the spiritual dignity of men and women while often framing gender relations around complementary rights, responsibilities, family obligations, and Islamic ethical principles.

Influencing Factors

The differences in response are not purely theological but are also shaped by cultural norms, gender roles, literacy levels, access to resources, and the level of exposure to human rights discourses. In some instances, traditions of patriarchy prevail over religious moralities, this resulted in a silence or complicity on the part of both Christians and Muslims.⁷⁶ Moreover, in Abeokuta, interfaith relations have revealed that collaboration between Christian and Muslim leaders particularly via interreligious councils and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), governmental organisation can help to promote joint advocacy and more coherent responses of local communities to domestic violence.⁷⁷

II. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has explored theological grounds and practical responses of Abeokuta's Christian and Muslim communities to the issue of domestic violence. It found that both at the heart of religions call for love, justice and the sanctity of human life. To Christian, Christmodel of sacrificial love and mutual submission provides a solid basis for theology that disapproves domestic violence. Similarly, Islamic teachings lay emphasis on compassion (rahma), justice (adl) and non-harm (la darar), all of which question any justification of abuse. But despite these theological ideals, cultural norms, and ideologies of patriarchy education, a lack of an effective religious education is still impeded by structures and misinterpretations of scriptures. Both Christian and Muslim leaders have made notable efforts through counseling, advocacy, and community education.

⁷⁶M. A. Oduyoye, *Beads and Struggle: Reflections of African Women Theologians*. (New York: Sam-Woode Ltd, 2001), 78.

⁷⁷ Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC). (2021). *Report on Religious Responses to Gender- Based Violence in Southern Nigeria*.

Therefore, in light of the above, the study gives the following recommendations:

For this reason, based on the above, the following recommendations are given:

- i. Scriptures should be taught to support the positive advancement of humans in a way that religious leaders can understand. value and dignity and refuse violence of any form. Contextual emphasis should be focused on. teaching and learning problematic texts and in encouraging the teaching of nonviolent teachings in both Christian and Islamic teachings.
- ii. Seminaries, Bible Colleges, Islamic Training Institutes should make use of Training on Gender Based Violence, Trauma Informed counselling and Ethical pastoral care. Faith leaders need to have the ability to respond sensitively and effectively to cases of abuse.
- iii. Churches & mosques need to have formal policies regarding domestic violence, referral systems, safe spaces and legal and health partnerships services. Women and youth ministries can actively participate in education and early intervention.
- iv. There is a need for joint action by Christian and Muslim leaders in fighting domestic anticipate violence by means of interfaith councils, public campaigns and community forums. The united religious front has the potential to break up the negative cultural practices and give voice to the message of nonviolence.
- v. Faith-based organisations need to work together with NGOs and government organisations to establish training, shelter, legal and awareness initiatives. Policy national level food security, and should incorporate them as partners in addressing these issues.

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