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## Impacts of Gender-Based Violence: The Nkerefi Experience 2004 - 2014

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### **Abstract**

*This work focused on the impacts of Gender-Based Violence in Nkerefi, Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. The rate of gender-based violence in Eastern Nigeria is alarming. As a matter of fact one might say that it has moved from an alarming state to a fatal stage. Worst still, the culture of gender based violence are ingrained in socio-cultural and traditional practices of many African societies. This paper examined that the stratification emanating from socio-cultural roles have ensured a perpetual prejudice on the women folks as there is no balance of cultural implication. The paper finds out that, the growing cases of domestic violence have given rise to serious health issues, its repercussion on health and overall being of women and children. The paper, thus argues that gender-based violence can limit the economic opportunities and potentiality of women owing to the society they found themselves. Relying on both primary and secondary sources, this study further argues that gender based violence brings huge economic costs to any society. This paper is historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. Useful piece of information were obtained from important relevant documents, reports and array of secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** *Impacts, Gender-Based, Violence, Nkerefi, Experience.*

### **Introduction**

The impacts of gender-based violence in the society generally cannot be overemphasised and must be totally discouraged and stiffer legislations and laws should be put in place across board to bring perpetrators of the dastard act to face the full wrath of the law in various climes. In addition, the impacts of gender-based violence which is always negative, affects not only the victims but the effects are also witnessed by the families, friends and well-wishers of the victim, and even the society at large. However, the impact of the above act in any society where it hold sway, have never been positive nor useful as it destabilises, disintegrate and as well brings the total fall out of the socio-cultural and economic fabric of any society to a halt or a near-total

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collapse, as the case may be. It has been observed from avalanche of studies, how gender based violence poses a threat to family structure, visible in children that suffer emotional wreck and damage watching their mother and female siblings being battered by their biological or step fathers. In a case of broken home leading to the emergence of single parent, it exposes the children especially the female ones to all forms of dangers and more cases of gender based violence are bound to be witnessed by the children. More so, it is worthy to also note that victims of gender based violence in most cases transfers their frustration to their children or even friends alike which will impact negatively on them as children especially will have no choice than to see violence as a conventional method of resolving dispute or conflict, owing to the experiences they have had in their formative years.

From the foregoing, several negative impacts of gender based violence abound globally and transcend culture, extraction, religion, and locality and so on. However, between the years 2004 and 2014, the above issue have affected drastically, the socio-cultural and economic sector of nations where it thrives, especially in Nkerefi in Nkanu Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria. For the case of the later, it become well pronounced because gender based violence is prevalent in rural settlement than is witnessed in urban area as a result of high rate of poverty that is witnessed in the rural areas. Morrison and Orlando posited that, there are strong impacts of gender based violence on women's health outcomes, especially on reproductive health.<sup>1</sup> Going further, they used the countries of Haiti, Peru and Zambia as case studies by quipping that gender based violence also increase not surprisingly women's usage of health services, and that lifetime physical violence by intimate partner increase the probability of working in a paid job in all three countries.<sup>2</sup> Going by the above study, one could deduce that one of the negative impact of gender based violence stems from income earnings, and in the traditional Africa society, men have been

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empowered by tradition through the concept of patriarchy to be the supreme head of the family. Thus, when the lady is a working class and in some cases earn more than the husband, there is bound to be pockets of disputes between the man and the woman which in most cases will lead the man to resort to self-help; violence. Lending affirmative voice to the foregoing, and in underscoring the debilitating effects of gender based violence which as we have noted earlier transcends physical abuse, Ebere, Chisom Sunday and Nwaroh, Jennifer Chizoba, in their thesis, posited that, the harm caused by gender based violence extends far beyond the physical injuries inflicted.<sup>3</sup> They further highlighted the deep effects of gender based violence to its victims who might even live with the effect forever. Thus, they stated that; Gender based violence is linked to a wide range of long-term physical and mental health problems. It helps fuels. The spread of HIV and women who have experienced violence are up to three times more likely to be infected with HIV than those who have not.<sup>4</sup> In a similar note, gender based violence have amplified the rate of feminism globally. Gender sensitive apologists have tended to propagate the issue of gender based violence through various channels that seeks to protect the right of the girl child and female gender generally. Thus, a feminist theorist noted that, the theory is a woman centred theory which sees gender inequality and its elimination as the starting point for working with women individually, a groups and within organisations.<sup>5</sup> The theory seeks to promote women's well-being and highlights the oppressive character of structural inequality based on gender.

It is worthy to note that the African society conferred a lot of authority on patriarchy; hence the accompanying effects of gender based violence on women. On this note, this research shall further observe the following paragraphs, it will try to highlight the socio-cultural and economic impacts of gender based violence on women. However, there are other aspects that gender based violence impact negatively on women, but, the choice of the above is in consideration of the

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thrust of this research, Nkerefi rural women, are at the receiving end of gender based violence, this would be accounted for by the social stratification that is inherent in this clime and on the economic sector, and the impact is equally alarming. For instance, in our contemporary society, when a woman rises to a position of prominence or affluence, the general narrative will be that she is promiscuous or rather not submissive to her husband, as the case may be.

The paper is divided into four parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the brief history of Nkerefi, their geographical location and migration. The penultimate section examines the impacts of gender-based violence in Nkerefi. This is further sub-divided into three parts which comprises the, socio-cultural impact of gender-based violence, health impact and economic impact. The last part is the conclusion. The argument tends to suggest that the rate of gender-based violence in Eastern Nigeria is alarming. As a matter of fact one might say that it has left the alarming state to a fatal stage. The work argues that impacts of gender-based violence is always negative, affects not only the victims but the society at large. This paper deduced that gender-based violence is an age long issue and not peculiar to any society. The work also argues that there are numerous campaigns and awareness programmes against gender-based violence, yet there seem to be no solution in sight.

### **A Brief History of Nkerefi**

Nkerefis is a clan in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State in South Eastern Nigeria.<sup>6</sup> It comprises of four autonomous communities namely: Imeoha Nkerefi, Ohuani Amofu Nkerefi, Ishienu Amofu Nkerefi, and Enuogu Nkerefi.<sup>7</sup> The pre-colonial history of Nkerefi was essentially that of the migration and fusion of people and rise and fall of kindred and villages.<sup>8</sup> Various people and claims point to the fact that Nkerefi people are the descendants of Ezeokeuna – a cattle rearer from Edemberri.<sup>9</sup> According to archival reports, “the people of Nkerefi being

descendant of Ezeokeuna of Ezza at one time used to make periodic sacrifice at their ancestor's shrine at Ezza, but however, this custom has ceased for many years".<sup>10</sup>

Nkerefí traced her origin from Ezzakuna (Ezeoke-una) the founder of Ezza, whose father Una Okpoto Okumeze came from Afikpo group of the Igbo history.<sup>11</sup> These people have been organized into something like vassal state by their possession of a common dialect (language) and culture, but in reality, there is no Nkerefí state or race. The word Nkerefí refers more to the dialect and occupation than people.<sup>12</sup> One particular legend and oral school of thought state that when 'Ezeoke Una' the father of Nkerefí saw that his son – Ezeoke Una Junior (Ogbonnaa) has matured into manhood, he gave him few cows and some yams to start his own life and maintain his family.<sup>13</sup> He received the paternal gifts and blessings from his father, and moved southwards in search of settlement and livelihood. He had acquired the art of cattle rearing and farming from his parents. As he moved, his cattle (Efi) multiplied and he started selling some through trade by barter (exchange of goods for goods), and people were happy with him for his clemency, industry and enterprise.<sup>14</sup> Whenever a visitor said that he was going to the home of Ezeoke Una, people were confused it was going to be the home of Ezeoke or his father, they called him Ezeoke Una – 'Nke-na-ere- efi' which means cattle seller or dealer. This was the genesis of the name Nkerefí.<sup>15</sup>

Further evidence to show Ezeokuna of Ezekoha Ezza in the farther of Nkerefí are: that at the burial of Ezeokona, Chukwuma Ighudu of Obuno was among the representatives from Nkerefí that participated and that Ezeokona was buried in a house with three doors each facing and directed to Ezza, Nkerefí and Onicha. The above three towns are brothers with Ezza as eldest and Onicha as the youngest. Nkerefí then spread and constituted segments of other communities such

as Atani in Ogbaru Local Government Area of Anambra State, some others in part of Ukwuani in present Delta State and Anambra State.<sup>16</sup>

## **Impacts of Gender-Based Violence 2004 – 2014**

### **Socio-Cultural Impacts**

The socio-cultural impacts of domestic violence are quite numerous and alarming in the society, Nkerefɪ especially. However, domestic violence could be said to have emanated from socio-cultural roles assigned to them; suffice it to say that domestic violence has a socio-cultural underpinning. The causes could be multidimensional, and can be triggered by social, economic and psychological issues. In the case of social factors, this could emanate from pressures from the society to cause a partner to inflict harm on his partner. When society believes that aggression is a feature of masculinity, men tend to be abusive. However, the socio-cultural role the society has assigned to women, in one way or the other affects her general well-being. Thus, a married woman in Nkerefɪ is totally forbidden to cheat with another man. It is considered a taboo which could lead to madness or any other great calamity or nemesis. But then, the bitter thing is that a man as much as cheats and there are no consequences that would befall him at all.<sup>17</sup>

In view of the above, the stratification emanating from socio-cultural roles have ensured a perpetual prejudice on the women folks as there is no balance of cultural implications in respect to infidelity which have relegated women to the margins of the society. Globally, gender based violence remain the largest single cause of morbidity and mortality among women aged between 15-49 years, claiming more lives than cancer, malaria, traffic accident and war combined.<sup>18</sup> Studies of various Igbo society have shown that a woman who is guilty of infidelity is culturally forbidden from cooking for her husband which is believed to have several implications both on

the woman or the husband, and in extreme cases the both couple. Leading a voice to the above, a wife is not expected to even cook for her husband as long as she is suspected to be cheating whether true or not until proven innocent. This act is totally wrong because it should be done in such a way it would affect both man and wife.<sup>19</sup> Even in some parts of Igboland and Nkerefi in particular, women who fall short of these traditionally forbidden vices face severe punishments culminating in domestic violence. Here, it is noted that, there are also cases whereby the woman will probably not run mad but she would be physically abused by her husband and even the community at large would support the man, then Umunna might likely gather to decide the faith of such woman and in some cases she is told of things to buy to use and appease her husband and she has no right to complain if such man cheats openly. Therefore, because she is a woman, she has no say and should be lucky she is not sent home to her parents as someone that committed “nso ala” which is a shame.<sup>20</sup>

In a similar vein, it is normative for Nkerefi men to engage in extra marital affair, but the woman is culturally bound not to cheat on her husband nor complain of her husband’s promiscuity. However, an Nkerefi man would provide the wife with almost all necessary material things but would not be judged for being a cheat, as long as he cares for his family. He is not seen as irresponsible for openly flirting with women besides the wife because he is a man and it is considered a norm. And if the wife complains she is likely to be battered by the husband and would in turn be blamed by the society and even condemned by other women.<sup>21</sup> The wide held belief generally is that so long as a man can provide the basic needs of his family, he is regarded as a responsible man, other things notwithstanding.

Regrettably, between the periods covered in this study, several changes have been taking place which have several impacts on the socio-cultural relation of woman. On this note, it is aptly

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observed that, between 2004 and 2014 there are some changes as the women are becoming bolder and more courageous in challenging their men.

### **Health Impact**

The health implication of domestic violence cannot be overemphasised as it is the area that women are mostly affected. The unending cases of rape in the society have lift the victims with severe damages in their private parts, in extreme cases unwanted pregnancy which the victim out of pressure emanating from the society, culture, tradition, as well as pressure from parents, peers or even religious organisations, resorts to abortion. Thus the above cleavages such as have been noted, culminate in abortion through the aid of quackery, or unprofessional such culminate in either death of the victim or total damage of the womb and the end product is infertility. In a similar note, battering from the male counterparts has also not aided the women folks. Thus, in the case of the latter, the victim will end up bruised, or even having scars in strategic or sensitive parts of her body like the eyes, breast, stomach, and so on. Physical manhandling, financial threats, sexual abuse, emotional blackmailing, encapsulated as gender based violence, have not aided the course of the female folk as enough attention from well-meaning organisations, have not been accorded to it.

The growing cases of domestic violence which have given rise to serious health concern to women need an urgent attention. It is aptly noted that, literature review on reproductive health indicates an escalating concern on domestic violence, and its repercussion on health and overall being of women and children.<sup>22</sup> Also researchers across various regions have identified gender based violence as a major contributor to poor reproductive outcomes for women, with abused women twice as likely to report unintended pregnancy and three times more likely to give birth as an adolescent compared to those not experiencing any violence.<sup>23</sup>

We must however note that the above is not peculiar to any clime or peoples. Thus, in a study in South Asia, it has been stated that the issue of gender based violence hold sway in that region than any other part of the world. Hence it has been pointed out that,

Violence against women, in any form, is highly prevalent across South Asia, in Northern India, 25% of husbands reported having perpetrated physical violence against their wives during the preceding year and 30% reported having committed sexual violence. In a Bangladesh study, more than one in three men reported physical violence, sexual violence or both against their wives in the past 12 months, one of the worst results for any South Asian nation. According to this, we must however note that the above is not peculiar to any clime or peoples.<sup>24</sup>

The above excerpt lends credence to the following assertion that gender based violence is witnessed in any society, even in developed countries, and is not confined to any particular people from a particular region. In a similar study in Zambia, it was observed, that,

In Zambia, almost half (47% of 5,236) of women interviewed reported to have experienced physical violence since they were 15 years old. Recent Zambia Police Service Annual Crime Returns of 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 shows a drastic increase in reported gender based violence cases of 8147, 8261, 8467 and 11980 respectively.<sup>25</sup>

Then, on the impact of gender based violence on the neurocognitive system of victims, especially those with Human Immune Virus (HIV), suffice it to say that gender based violence and other depressive symptoms are the primary causes of neurocognitive deficiency which is mostly common among HIV patients. It has been observed in a recent study that gender based violence victims showed cognitive deficits in working memory, verbal learning and recall. Therefore it can be deduced that gender based violence is a predictor of poor performance on neurocognitive functioning.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, the root cause of gender-based violence lied in unequal power relations between woman and men. However, a variety of factors on the individual level, the family level, and at

the level of community and society, often combine to raise the likelihood of violence occurring. The effects of gender-based violence are far-reaching and extend beyond the individual survivor, to the family and society as a whole. Potential social responses to gender-based violence are most effective when there is a common understanding of the nature and causes of gender-based violence and it is addressed from all angles, through the participation of multiple sectors and entire communities.

### **Economic Impact**

Gender based violence have several implications on women, and economic impact is another area that must be given a due consideration. Thus, gender based violence can limit the economic opportunities and potentialities of women owing to the society they found themselves. In view of this, economic impacts of gender based violence can manifest in various dimensions like, rejection; ostracism and social stigma at community level; reduced ability to participate in economic activities; acute fear of future violence, which extends beyond the individual survivors to other members in Community. In addition, it has been noted that it can damage the women's confidence resulting in fear of venturing into public spaces (this can often curtail women's education, which in turn can limit their income-generating opportunities).<sup>27</sup> Moreover, it increases vulnerability to other types of gender-based violence and as a result can lead to job loss due to absenteeism as a result of violence. It can in addition, impact negatively on women's income generating power.

In an analysis on the economic impact of the scourge of gender based violence, it is averred that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most pervasive human rights violations occurring in the world. It happens in every country, not only in situations of conflict or crisis, but in contexts others call peaceful, and in both public and private spaces.<sup>28</sup> Analysing the economic

effect of the foregoing, they also surmised that, studies indicate, for example, that in India women can lose an average of at least five paid work days for each incident of intimate partner violence. This fact would mean the affected woman would get 25 per cent less of her salary each time an incident of violence happens.<sup>29</sup> They further noted that women who are exposed to intimate partner violence are employed in higher numbers in casual and part-time work, and their earnings are 60 per cent lower, compared to women who do not experience such violence. For instance, in Uganda, about nine per cent of violent incidents forced women to lose time from paid work, amounting to approximately 11 days a year, equivalent to half a month's salary, affecting not only the incumbent person but her family and dependents.<sup>30</sup>

Unfortunately, violence against women and girls brings huge economic costs to any society. The negative impact on women's participation in education, employment and civic life undermines poverty reduction. It results in loss of employment and productivity, and it drains resources from social services, the justice system, health-care agencies and employers. Such, violence against women is a clear barrier to sustainable development. To this end, it was observed that it has been acknowledged in the recently adopted Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development; for the first time, violence against women and girls is included as a target area under Goal 5 on gender equality, reaffirming that such violence is a barrier to gender equality, women's empowerment and overall sustainable development, as well as to the achievement of the other Goals.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, the economic impacts of gender based violence are many and cannot be exhausted in this discourse, but, for the purpose of the study, an examination of the economic impact of gender based violence in Nkerefi, it has been found that, any home or society that has no peace does not prosper or progress. It hinders good things; once there is conflict in a home, the spouses start huddling wealth, spend money on irrelevant things and even buy properties and hide it away

from themselves. Most acquire properties with the name of their children without the knowledge of the man/woman. Thus, they end up living in slums and their wives engage in petty trading at nearby markets which at the end of the day affects the society at large.<sup>32</sup>

From time immemorial, women are been subjected to not been equal to a man in all ramifications. Yet, this day most women play the roles of breadwinners in their respective homes and the society at large. It is through domestic violence that the man deprives the wife of equality. But if a man listens to his wife, some mistakes would have been avoided. Thus, the popular traditional dictum, “It is the affair of men”.<sup>33</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This work has been able to ascertain the level of domestic abuse in Nkrefi, encapsulated in Gender-Based Violence. However, following avalanche of research and oral evidences, the work has been able to unearth the impact of this deadly phenomenon on the females.

From the study, it can be deduced that gender-based violence is an age long issue which sways in any society developed, developing and undeveloped countries, as the case may be. In other words, the issue above is not peculiar to Nkrefi, but the alarming rate with which it is being witnessed in the extraction above, informed the choice of this work, and thus became a nucleus on which this work was produced. The implications of gender-based violence can be understood in the light of its threat to peace, progress and to the principle of equality, and it has however become a normative action which have subjugated the woman folks and as well deprived them much of their humanity.

More so, if not tackled adequately and proactively, the tendency of hindering the role of human in the society cannot be overemphasised, even as it will inhibit their participation in national development. Also in the study, it was highlighted several impacts of gender-based violence

which include health problems like HIV/AIDS or STDs, unwanted pregnancies, culminating in abortion through the aid of a quick which ends in untimely death.

From the foregoing, the bane of gender-based violence if not nipped in the board, will spread like a wild fire and in long run will become an accepted societal norm which is already rife in most societies, especially in the rural areas where the cultures and traditions of the people are still been revered. In a similar note, this study was able to bear, the impacts of gender based violence in the society.

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