

Domestic Violence against Women in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria: A National Security Issue Requiring Strategic Counselling Interventions

¹IBRAHIM, Haruna, ²Aliyu, Salihu Kudumi

Corresponding author: iharuna800@gmail.com

¹Department of Educational Guidance & Counselling, Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, Nigeria

²Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria represents a growing national security concern with long-term implications for societal stability and human development. This paper conceptualizes domestic violence against women as a threat national stability rather than a private family matter. Anchored on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) and Judith Herman's Trauma Theory (1992), the study explains how violent behaviours are learned, normalized, and transmitted across generations. It also highlights the enduring psychological consequences for victims. The paper identifies cultural and traditional norms, rigid religious beliefs, and low public awareness as major barriers to effective counselling interventions. The study recommends community-based sensitization programmes by federal and sub-national government, strategic engagement of religious leaders to promote faith-based messages that emphasize human women's dignity, justice, and zero tolerance for abuse. Lastly, the paper recommends the integration counselling into national security discourse.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, National Security, Counselling.

Introduction

The persistent escalation of domestic violence against women (DVAW) in Nigeria transcends the private sphere and constitutes a pressing societal challenge with significant implications for national security, thereby necessitating strategic counselling interventions. Domestic violence against women produces severe physical, psychological and economic consequences, which in extreme cases results in death of victims, thereby undermining societal stability and posing significant implications for national security.

In Kwara State, a Non- Governmental Organization, “Raising Child Foundation” (RCF, 2022), unveiled that more than two hundred (200) cases of DVAW and the girl child were recorded between January and March, 2022. Similarly, Aregbesola (2023) reported that at least five cases of sexual and other forms of gender-based violence against women were committed within Ilorin metropolis daily. The above-reported empirical figures suggest that all is not well in Ilorin Metropolis in terms of DVAW. These alarming trends threaten not only the well-being of women but also broader societal stability and national security which requires urgent counselling interventions in addressing psychological and societal disruption that could emanate from such menace.

Personal communication via text message from the office of the International Federation of Women Lawyers indicated that a total of Sixty-eight (68) cases of DVAW were reported within Ilorin Metropolis between January and December 2023, with twenty-nine of those cases involving underage female children. While some cases were mediated and settled, others involving children were duly prosecuted in the courts within the state (FIDA, personal communication, November 21, 2024). These figures escalated in 2024 as the office received a total of 79 cases of DVAW between January and October 2024, representing a 16% increase, which is highly significant considering the dangers of the menace. The exposure of the girl child to persisting gender-based violence could result in mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and post-traumatic stress disorder which can continue to adulthood, affecting their interpersonal relationships and ability to effectively adjust to the society. Children exposed to domestic abuse are more likely to perpetuate violence, creating long-term threats to societal cohesion.

Official data obtained via text (WhatsApp) message from the Gender Department of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps, Kwara State Command Headquarters, Ilorin, revealed that cases of DVAW have significantly escalated since the year 2020. The data reported ten (10) cases in 2020, twenty-five (25) cases in 2021, thirty-two (32) cases in 2022, forty (40) cases in 2023, fifty-two (52) cases in 2024 and with an additional twenty-three (cases) already reported in the year 2025 (Personal communication, NSCDC, August 26th, 2025). The Nigeria Police Force, Kwara State Command also revealed that a total of three hundred and forty cases of DVAW leading to death and serious bodily harm were recorded between January 2015 and September 2025. (Gender Unit, Nigerian Police Force, Kwara State Command). The cases of Mojisola Awesu in 2024 and Yetunde Hafsat Lawal in 2025 introduce the dimension of ritualistic practices to the understanding of DVAW within Ilorin Metropolis (Idowu 2024 & Ande, 2025). These incidents suggests that certain forms of DVAW in the metropolis may be motivated by cultural or ritualistic beliefs, further complicating detection and professional help, underscoring the need to protect vulnerable women and girls.

Theoretical Review

This study is hinged on Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura (1977) which posit that behaviours are learnt through observation, imitation, and reinforcement within social context. This explains how violent behaviours including ritualistic abuses and killings are transmitted and normalized across generations. This framework highlights the social mechanisms through which perpetrators of domestic violence acquire and sustain abusive behaviour, while also shaping the coping and response strategies of victims. Complimentarily, Trauma Theory (Herma, 1992) emphasises the psychological and emotional consequences of exposure to violence, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, which impairs victims' wellbeing and social functioning.

When domestic violence becomes pervasive, the resulting psychological trauma and social disruption could undermine community cohesion, escalate societal stability, and pose a national security threat. Hence, the integration of strategic counselling interventions is essential to mitigate trauma, disrupt cycles of violence, and strengthen societal resilience. Ndubuisi (2023) corroborated the above assertion by affirming that, the family plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's behaviour, while family education represents the teachings and principles instilled in members of society. Therefore, an

unhealthy family education disseminated by an emotionally unstable mother may have far-reaching negative consequences on National Security.

Domestic violence against women (DVAW) refers to a pattern of behaviour within a domestic or intimate relationship whereby perpetrators seek to exert power and control women, resulting in physical, emotional, psychological, or economic harm (World Health Organisation, W.H.O., 2013). These recurrent behaviours include physical abuse, sexual coercion, financial exploitation, and psychological manipulations, among others. The United Nations Women's report (2021) revealed that DVAW has escalated since the COVID-19 pandemic, noting an increase worldwide. More so, the United Nations Women Report (2023) suggested 25% increase in cases of sexual violence globally, with only 4,600 survivors, while others resulted in death in the year 2024. According to global statistics released by the United Nations (2025), up to 70% of women in some countries experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. The report further explained that 42% of women in Turkey and 70% of women in India between the ages of 15 years and above have experienced DV.

Similarly, Project Alert on Violence Against Women (2025), a non-governmental organization, reported a distressing surge in femicide cases in Nigeria, with 24 cases recorded in the first 59 days of the year across the six geopolitical zones in 2025. From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, these abusive behaviours may be learned, reinforced, and perpetrated through observation of violent norms within family system or community context. Simultaneously, Trauma Theory explains the severity of Psychological and emotional consequences of these acts on victims, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, which compromise their wellbeing and societal adjustment.

Effects of Domestic Violence Against Women

The overall impact of DVAW include substantial and often immeasurable suffering, resulting in traumatic experiences, psychological distress, and long-term mental health challenges that many victims endure throughout their lives. According to Desai and Mandal (2022), the economic burden of DVAW across public, private, and social sector is estimated at approximately 1.5 trillion dollars globally, accounting for up to 3.7% of GDP in some countries. Beyond these economic losses, the prevalent psychological trauma associated with DVAW can compromise societal integration and unity posing significant threat to national security.

Concept and Meaning of National Security

National security can be regarded as the process of protecting lives and properties of citizens by the government of a country. National security is primarily concerned with the well-being, welfare, and interests of her citizens, as well as safeguarding its sovereignty and territorial integrity from external threats (Panle & Nwakedi, 2020). The breaches resulting from antisocial behaviours exhibited by maladaptive children and victims of DVAW could jeopardize government's effort in terms of the safety of citizens and national development. The Nigerian constitution, 1999 as amended, in section 14 (2) (b) states: *"The security and welfare of the citizens shall be the primary responsibility of the government"*. Domestic violence against women in Ilorin Metropolis goes beyond internal family matters but such that that constitutes a severe threat to the national security.

Drawing from Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), violent behaviours are transmitted intergenerationally through observation and reinforcement, thereby normalizing aggression within social structure. Similarly, the trauma theory further explains the psychological impairments suffered by victims, which diminish productivity, civic engagement, and social cohesion (Ahmed & Shah, 2025). When widespread, these effects may collectively undermine human capital development and societal stability which are core components of contemporary national security framework. Accordingly, strategic counselling interventions become not merely social welfare responses but essential security mechanism aimed at reducing the menace of DVAW within the society and restoring the confidence and dignity of women within Ilorin Metropolis particularly and Nigeria at large resulting to overall national security.

The Role of Counsellors in National Security

Counsellors have vital roles to play in the national security of Nigeria, as most behaviour that threatens Nigeria's security stemmed from behavioural and attitudinal deficiencies which can be prevented and remediated by professional counsellors (Ohachenu, 2024). Parents who are the first moral inculcating agents of their children also need to be educated by professional counsellors on the need to demonstrate healthy behaviours that can be positively modelled by children in the society.

Concept of and Meaning of Counselling

Counselling is a helping relationship between a professionally trained therapist and clients whereby the client who have challenges is ready to be assisted to understand his or her challenge and how to overcome them by a professional so as to be better adjusted in the society. It was elucidated in Zarawi (2020) that counselling is a professional relationship between a trained counsellor and a client that is based on person-to-person interaction with the aim of assisting the client understands his problems. The battering of intimate partner is a maladaptive behaviour that can be modelled resulting in violent behaviour that contributes various forms of instability in society.

Counselling Approaches for Prevention of Domestic Violence

In curbing the menace of domestic violence and its effect on national security, counselling services should focus on premarital, marital and school-based counselling approaches (Lebow & Rekart, 2017).

1. *Premarital Counselling Approach:* Lebow and Rekart (2017) affirmed that premarital counselling programs are effective in enhancing marital satisfaction and reducing the likelihood of marital distress, including domestic violence. Engaging in premarital counselling will provide the intending couple the opportunity to address and understand individual values, beliefs, principles and “red flags”.
2. *Marital Counselling Approach:* it was established in Jonas and Ofunwa (2024) that marital counselling is vital for the reduction of domestic violence among married adults. Marital counselling is often necessary in reducing the menace of domestic violence due to the influence of globalisation, economic pressure, cultural differences and outdated social norms and beliefs prevalent in today’s changing world.
3. *School-based Counselling Approach:* School-based counselling, on the other hand, plays a significant role in addressing issues that emanates from home environments, which can affect students’ sense of security and well-being. By providing support and counselling services within schools, students can receive help to cope with challenges at home, which in turn contributes to a safer society (Durak et al., 2021).

Counselling Interventions

There are various counselling interventions that counsellors can apply to prevent, reduce and or manage the menace or victims of DV (Masoumi et al., 2021). These interventions include;

1. **Role Play:** According to Masoumi et al. (2021), Role-play as a counselling intervention will not only support personal and relational growth in the context of domestic violence but also enhance preparedness and response capabilities in security-related scenarios, thereby contributing to broader efforts in promoting national security and community safety.

(a). *Skills Development:* Role-playing allows individuals to practice and develop communication skills, assertiveness and conflict resolution techniques. In the context of domestic violence, victims and perpetrators can rehearse scenarios where assertive communication and non-violent conflict resolution strategies are employed, thereby promoting healthier interactions and reducing the likelihood of escalation of domestic violence.

(b). *Empathy and Perspective-taking:* Role-playing allows participants to put themselves in “each other’s shoes” and by so doing promote empathic understanding among couples. This technique is very vital in the process of counselling of partners involve in domestic violence as it enables partners to realise the gravity of their actions on their partner’s feelings and experiences.

(c). *Behavioural Change:* Counsellors can guide intimate partners to explore and exhibit more adaptive behaviours in response to violence. The perpetrators of domestic violence can rehearse behaviours that promote mutual respect, empathic understanding and tolerance and as a result reduce instances of abuse.

2. **Behavioural Experiment:** Perpetrators of domestic violence often have ingrained patterns of behaviour that contribute to abuse (O’Donohue & Fisher, 2019). Behavioural experiments allow them to try out alternative behaviours and responses in role-play or real-life scenarios. For instance, experimenting with non-violent communication techniques or recognising triggers and practising self-regulation strategies can support behaviour change.

3. **Relaxation Techniques:** can play a crucial role in the prevention and control of domestic violence and in promoting national security. Domestic violence situations are often characterised by heightened stress and emotional turmoil. Teaching relaxation techniques such as progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing exercises, or guided imagery can help individuals manage their stress levels effectively (Roemer & Orsillo, 2019).
4. **Assertiveness Training:** This technique can be a valuable counselling intervention in the prevention, control, or management of domestic violence among married partners, contributing to both personal well-being and national security. Domestic violence undermines social cohesion and trust within communities. Assertiveness training promotes healthy relationship dynamics and respectful communication, fostering stronger social bonds and collective resilience against interpersonal violence and its broader societal impacts (Morrison & Benneth, 2021).
5. **Systematic Desensitisation:** This is a therapeutic technique typically used to treat phobias and anxiety disorders; it can also be adapted as a counselling intervention in the prevention, control, or management of domestic violence among married partners. Domestic violence often escalates in response to specific triggers, such as financial stress, jealousy, or substance abuse. Systematic desensitisation can help individuals identify these triggers and gradually reduce their emotional reactivity through controlled exposure (Craske & Hermans, 2020). Perpetrators of domestic violence may struggle with intense emotions such as anger and frustration, which can lead to abusive behaviour. Systematic desensitisation teaches coping skills to regulate these emotions effectively.

Constraints to Counselling Interventions in Combating Domestic Violence Against Women

Some of the factors militating against eradication of DVAW in society include the following;

1. *Cultural and Traditional norms and values:* cultural beliefs that normalize male dominance over women, discourage victims from speaking out thereby emboldening the perpetrators.
2. *Stigma and fear of social backlash:* The fear of been blamed for escalating family private matters, fear of perceived shame and family pressure leads to silence and underreporting of cases of DVAW.

3. *Religious and Moral Misinterpretations*: some religious teachings are wrongly interpreted to encourage endurance of abuse rather than safety and justice
4. *Low awareness*: many victims of DVAW are not aware of their rights and or available support services. Also, some communities do not perceive DVAW as a crime.
5. *Limited Counselling services*: counselling services are not available to meet the demands of victims especially at the rural level, hence victims rely on parental and religious guidance (Ugwu, 2020).

Conclusion

Domestic violence is prevalent in Ilorin Metropolis and poses a serious threat to family stability and National stability. Its continued existence contributes to psychological harm, social instability, and cycles of violence. Counselling interventions remain vital in preventing domestic violence through awareness, behavioural change and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. It is therefore essential that counselling services be enhanced across Kwara State especial at the rural community level.

Suggestions

Based on the challenges identified in this study, this paper suggests as follows;

1. The Federal and sub-national governments should implement policies that enhance more community-based sensitization programmes that extinct harmful cultural beliefs and promote non-violent family relationships, adopting traditional institutions as change agents
2. The government should consider legalizing and establishment of confidential and community-supported reporting mechanisms to protect victims from social backlash and encourage timely help-seeking.
3. Religious leaders should be engaged and trained to promote faith-based messages that emphasizes dignity, safety, and justice rather than endurance of abuse.
4. Public education campaigns should be intensified to knowledge of legal rights, reporting channels, and available support services, especially in the rural communities.

5. Professional counselling services should be mainstreamed into primary healthcare centers, schools, and community settings to provide early intervention and psychosocial support.

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