

Social Work Interventions in the Prevention and Management of Domestic Violence

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ABSTRACT The paper examined the nature and causes of violence within the family. It also highlighted some of its effects on the individual victim, the family, the society and the nation. Among such consequences are physical injuries, poor health, general emotional distress, nightmares, phobia, low self esteem, poor marital relationships, broken homes and so on. The paper also discussed some social work interventions that can help in managing or preventing domestic violence or reducing its scourge in our societies. Such useful interventions include, crisis intervention, counselling, psychotherapy, psycho-education and provision of adequate security for the victims. It is highly advocated in this paper that social workers and other care-givers should be more committed to solving the problems of victims of family violence. It is also suggested that the government and non-governmental organization should help in preventing or reducing the occurrence of domestic violence.

INTRODUCTION

Violence is an interpersonal process (Busby, 1996), or an act carried out with the intention or perceived intention of causing physical pain, or injury to another person (Gelles and Strauss, 1988). Violence exists within the family. This is called Family violence or Domestic violence.

Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behaviour that involves physical abuse or the threat of physical abuse. It also include repeated psychological abuse, rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, incest, progressive social isolation, deprivation, intimidation, economic coercion, and so on. It is now politically recognized as one of the most entrenched and pervasive forms of violence in our society (James, 2004).

It is a form of violence perpetrated by adults or adolescents against their intimate partners in current or former dating, married or cohabiting relationships of homosexuals, gay men, lesbians, bi-sexuals and transgender people (Nevada Domestic Violence Prevention Council, 2004). Domestic violence may be against women (wife battering), children (physical abuse) or against elderly individuals (abuse or neglect of older persons).

A lot of factors contribute to domestic violence. These include, hunger, difficulties with sleep, menstrual cycle mood changes, feelings of frustration and inadequacy, personality disorder, substance abuse (abuse of alcohol), brain tumor, head injury, personality change, and

rarely mental illness and mental retardation (Ephraim – Oluwanuga, 2004).

Domestic violence may be a factor of individual intolerance, incompatibility, selfish approach to issues, immaturity, lack of moral standard or lack of fear of God. Other causes of domestic violence include, failure to fulfill financial obligations to wife and children, poverty, denial of sexual intercourse, infidelity, disrespect and other social vices.

Whatever be the causes or nature of domestic violence, it is imperative for the social workers or other care-givers to acquaint themselves with the consequences of domestic violence, its prevention and management.

CONSEQUENCES /EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence have series of negative consequences on the individuals, family, society and the nation. According to Jaffee et al. (1990), Newtown, (2001) and Carter (2004) such consequences include:

- i. *Effects on Children:* Poor health, poor sleeping habits and excessive screaming, academic problems, agitation, aggression, feelings of guilt and not belonging, general emotional distress, intrusive thoughts, nightmares, phobia, obsessions behaviours, revenge seeking, truancy, suicidal behaviour, withdrawal activities and physical injuries.
- ii. *Effects on Adult Victims:* Alcohol or sub-

- stance abuse, physical injuries or trauma, death, low self-esteem, violent practices in the home, sexual problems and so on.
- iii. *Effects on the Family, Society and the Nation:* Poor marital relationship, broken homes, anti-social behaviours (prostitutions, drug addiction), criminal behaviours, economic burdens and so on.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION FOR THE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The injuries, trauma, stigma, and psychological frustration associated with domestic violence (e.g. spousal sexual abuse, child sexual abuse, wife battering, rape, etc.) call for social work interventions. These interventions also help in reducing the incidence or future occurrence of domestic violence. They include:

1. *Crisis Intervention:* Battered, raped, or sexually abused women or girls need urgent attention or immediate care. Therefore, the social workers have the responsibility of assisting such women get over their shock as quickly as possible. They should assist such victims to get prompt medical treatments in the hospitals for their trauma or injuries sustained during the violence.
2. *Counselling:* The social workers have the responsibility of working with both the abuser and the victim (spouse or child). Through counseling, the social worker could determine the cause of the abuse. They should help in counseling the victim and the abuser and try to work through their problems. They should assist in building up the victims' self-esteem and allow them to decide what measures they want to take. Legal redress should be the last option.
3. *Safety and Protection of the Victims:* Victims of domestic violence undergo emotional turmoil and fear as a result of violence inflicted upon them. Hence, their feelings and potential for further harm should always be of utmost consideration. Since they may not be able to protect themselves, the social workers must give extra attention to their safety and protection.

To this end, they should help in making alternative arrangement for their living. As the victims may be constantly afraid of where the violence takes place, such individuals may be helped to get a new house or location

where they will experience less tensions.

4. *Psychotherapy:* This is a form of psychological means for treating emotional problems associated with domestic violence. As victims of domestic violence (e.g. sexually abused or raped women/girl) may be stigmatized or feel ashamed, their wounded ego needs to be boosted. To this end, the social workers have the responsibilities of reducing their emotional problems (e.g. anxiety, fear, worry, depression, guilt, shame etc) through psychological means such as reassurance, words of encouragement, advice and emotional support.
5. *Psycho-education:* Women need to understand the severity of domestic violence. Hence, social work programmes need to be responsive to the abused women's emotional state. Women need to be taught to re-evaluate their situations, to develop self-esteem and decide a resolution for their problems. The social workers have to educate the victims to understand that though, they were abused, they still need to relate with their spouse. They should be properly educated on legal interventions. While doing this, the social workers should be less judgmental. In other words, they should allow the victims to take their own course of actions.
6. *Advocacy/Linkage with the Community Resources:* A comprehensive treatment includes collateral contacts which serve to protect potential victims, such as shelters, appropriate supporting resources, victims advocates; and so on. The social workers should therefore link the victims of domestic violence with resources in their localities, which can help in ameliorating their burdens or sufferings.
7. *Community Education:* The social workers have the responsibilities of organizing a community wide education campaign that will challenge the belief that family or domestic violence is a private and not a public concern. The campaign will also help the community to become aware of the dangers of domestic violence and report cases of such (wife battering, rape, etc) to the law enforcement agents as quickly as possible in order to bring the perpetrators to book.

CONCLUSION

It is not a gain-saying the fact that social

workers have many important or useful roles to play in reducing and containing domestic violence. Their involvement in the prevention and management of domestic violence also go a long way in reducing its scourge in our midst or its economic costs for the government. It is therefore, hoped that, the applications of the interventions discussed above by the social workers or people concerned with the care of those that are physically, sexually, emotionally or psychologically abused, will in no small measure prevent reduce or curb violence within the family.

In order to reduce the scourge of domestic violence in our midst, or reduces its economic costs, the following recommendations are hereby made, that, couples should nip their grievances or conflicts in the bud before getting out of hands, that the government or non-governmental organizations should help in creating job opportunities for social workers who will help in fighting the battle against family violence or unemployed youths and adults should be helped to ease their financial problems, thereby preventing crimes and other antisocial behaviours.

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