# Gender-Based Violence in Nkerefi Nkanu East Local Government Area, Enugu State, Nigeria, 1995 - 2014

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Abstract- This work focused on Gender-Based Violence in Nkerefi, Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria from 1995 to 2014. The rate of gender-based violence in Nigeria 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 in Eastern Nigeria, there are various traditional rites that foster abuses on women. Some of which is the widowhood rites and practices and female genital mutilation. The paper finds out that, women are dehumanised by the society if they found childless or are unable to give birth to male offspring. The paper, thus argues that economic factor adds to the varying reasons for gender-based violence. And that in ruralurban areas located in Enugu state, this phenomenon is obvious, as the rate of poverty encouraged abuses. Various forms of abuses include beating, assault, rape and sex without consent, economic deprivation and threats, unequal distribution of household power and so on. Relying on both primary and secondary sources, this study further argues that gender based violence are becoming rampant in environment bedevilled with high level of poverty, low literacy level, and conservative practice of ancient socio-cultural norms. 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.

Indexed Terms- Gender, Based, Violence, Nkerefi, Nigeria.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Gender is a social construct that attribute different standards and rights to woman and regardless of individual efficiency or desires. Gender is seen at all levels of society where women's rights and freedom are mostly violated and abused both at home and outside the home. One of the remarkable features of the present day traditional setting in Igbo land, particularly in Nkerefi in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State, South-East Nigeria, has been the growing interest in perpetuating violent cultural practices against women, and also excluding them from the socio-economic development of their immediate milieu. Although this exclusion is currently strong and widely upheld, there has been a relative silence on how to liberate women from the firm hold of these cultural practices.

The Igbo are culturally endowed, and a good grasp of their cultural anthropology and cosmology show the pride with which they uphold their distinctive way of life. However, some of these cultural practices have been observed, according to Chukwu, to be very archaic, dangerous, and damaging to the psyche of women.[1] In a similar strand Ritzer averred that women's situation was centrally that of being used, controlled, subjugated, and oppressed by men. [2] Elucidating further, Ritzer concluded that women's oppression was basically by a system of patriarchy cultivated for the deliberate purpose commandeering women to achieve the intents of the so-called power structure. [3] In a related development, the erstwhile chairperson of Women Commission in Nigeria, Awe remarked: 'You know this is a patriarchal society in which men take the first place . . .', [4] but later argued that they would, however, resist being forced into embracing obnoxious cultural practices.

Contributing also to the plight of women as a result of patriarchy, Iwe observed that the perpetrators of these violent cultural practices against women were yet to acknowledge that the dignity of women was equal to that of men.<sup>[5]</sup> He stated that the splendour of womanhood, which is based on human personality, the prerogative and quality of every human being, man or

woman, is fundamentally, essentially and unquestionably equal to the dignity of man. Furthermore, he affirmed that, the truth of this statement is unassailable in spite of sex differences, for human dignity rests not on sex but on personality; and personality as such has no sex. Accepting this position therefore, there is an urgent need to change these violent cultural practices against women. This is a change Udoh asserts that cannot be achieved through muscle struggle, but simply by effective persuasion because cultural practices passed down from generation to generation are not easily discarded, but held sacrosanct.[6] Thus, the general objective of this paper is to free Igbo women of Nkerefi in particular and Enugu State in general from being victims of these violent cultural encumbrances and also, to situate them amongst their kind globally.

The paper is divided into five parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the theoretical framework on which the work derives its analysis. The third discusses the brief history of Nkerefi, their geographical location and migration. The penultimate section is an analysis of Women and Domestic Violence in Nkerefi. 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 Igbo culture and customs has justified abuse on women in Nkerefi. This paper exposes the underlying factors that make gender-based violence a prominent force in the social vices structure.

### II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical conception of this work is based on the Social Learning theory. According to Albert Bandura, one of the proponents of this theory states that people learn behavioural patterns from other people around them Bandura. The theory assumes that the social environment causes people to behave in certain ways. In the views of Bandura, modelling on parental behaviour may also be relevant to the understanding of violence against women. Thus, there is a general belief that a man who witnessed violence against women in childhood is more likely to perpetrate it than a man who did not. The Social Learning theory suggest that early exposure to violence infuse in children

cognitive beliefs condoning the use of interpersonal violence and thus increase the likelihood of them engaging in it.<sup>[9]</sup> Delaney also suggests that early learning of violence make children more likely to not only engage in it but to also approve of it later in their lives.<sup>[10]</sup>

Many perpetrators of this act in Nigeria today fit into these propositions. As many women are abused by their intimate partners, most times the abusive behaviours occur in the presence of children. And this tends to have significant influence on their perception of women and how they should be treated in a relationship.<sup>[11]</sup> The efficacy of the Social Learning theory of Bandura in explaining violence is obvious in Anderson and Kras's work on interpersonal and intergenerational violence.<sup>[12]</sup> However, apart from learning through observation, there are other factors such as culture, religious practices and the low status of women which influence violence against them.

#### III. A BRIEF HISTORY OF NKEREFI

Nekerefi is a clan<sup>[13]</sup> in Nkanu East Local Government Area of Enugu State in South Eastern Nigeria. It comprises of four autonomous communities namely: Imeoha Nkerefi, Ohuani Amofu Nkerefi, Ishienu Amofu Nkerefi, and Enuogu Nkerefi.<sup>[14]</sup> The precolonial history of Nkerefi was essentially that of the migration and fusion of people and rise and full of kindred and villages.<sup>[15]</sup> Various people and claims point to the fact that Nkerefi people are the descendants of Ezeokeuna — a cattle rearer from Edemberri.<sup>[16]</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>[17]</sup>

Nkerefi traced her origin from Ezzakuna (Ezeoke-una) the founder of Ezza, whose father Una Okpoto Okumeze came from Afikpo group of the Igbo history. [18] 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 Nkerefi state or race. The word Nkerefi refers more to the dialect and occupation than people. [19] One particular legend and oral school of thought state that when 'Ezeoke Una' the father of

Nkerefi 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.[20] 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. [21] 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 Nkerefi. [22]

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

# IV. WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NKEREFI

Nkerefi is a town that is fast in transition. The building rise of commercialisation of goods and services has led to the rapid growth of development and urbanisation in Nkerefi. Women and the girl-child now have access to quality education, and like other towns in Nigeria have a remarkable representative in the labour workforce and academic terrain. Despite the increase of women and girl-child education and empowerment, the issue of Gender-Based Violence has not been curbed in Nkerefi.

Cases of domestic violence against women have been on the increase in Nkerefi. [23] There have been reports of cases of husband killing and maiming their wives in the media. The statistics presented by *This Day newspaper* are daunting. About 50 per cent of women

have been battered by their husbands. Shockingly, more educated women (65%) are also in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%). Most endure, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing, for good reason, that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2% of them are not prepared to report to the Nigeria Police. [24] In explaining this situation Ijeome Chukwu opines that:

Unfortunately, most of these abused women are well educated and high income earners. It might look and sound surprising that they choose to endure not because they cannot fight for their rights or sue their abusive partner but they simply endure domestic abuse because of societal pressure. They endure just to create a makeover for the society that they leading a successful family and career life. They also endure because of the negative image cast on divorcees by the society. Sometimes they do not have a choice than to endure; although there are some beliefs that the society will blame them because it is often seen as the role of the woman to create a peaceful home. [25]

Recently urban centres have been a haven for domestic violence. In Lagos state, Titilayo Arowolo, a 27 year old mother of one was gruesomely murdered by her husband. Alowolo was allegedly axed to death by her husband, Kolade, in their Isolo home in Lagos. Before that, the scandalous story of wife battering by one Nigerian Ambassador and a traditional ruler who engaged his wife in a public brawl made the rounds, thus bringing the issue of spousal abuse once again to the front burner. [26] In Nkerefi, the rise of domestic abuse began to increase meteorically since the year 2014. [27]

The various forms of violence against women include wife battery, denial of self-expression, female-child labour, childhood marriage, female genital mutilation, violence from in-laws, violence from sexual relationship, antagonism because of sex of new-born child, exploitation, violence by law enforcement agents, negative cultural attitudes and degrading traditional practices, e.g. widowhood rite and denial of female education. Out of these various forms of violence, this paper is particularly interested in

domestic violence... with particular reference to wife battery. [28]

Wife battery is an exposure of a married woman to serious beating or repeated injuries. Violence by the husband is higher and far more harmful form of violence, such as battery and the use of knives and guns. Domestic violence against women has deep roots in most cultures and religious and supported, even institutionalised by patriarchal values in most societies. Public responses to acts of violence range from pride, denial or tacit conceit. Wife battery may happen in 30 per cent of families but is not recognised in the public eyes.<sup>[29]</sup> Violence is a global problem that can no longer be ignored or permitted by remaining silent, excusing violence, blaming those who are involved and accepting cultural and religious biases.

There is an official acceptance of violence between 'Consenting' adults and people perceive domestic violence as a private affair. The American National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Crime or violence found in large representative samples that between one-fourth and one-fifth of those questioned felt that it was acceptable for spouse to hit each other under certain circumstance.<sup>[30]</sup> Findings done in this work shows that wife beating is culturally-oriented among South-eastern Nigeria dwellers. A respondent claimed that abused women often keep silent about domestic violence, believing that marital crisis could be resolved without interference of a third party.<sup>[31]</sup> Some believe that wife beating is normal and husbands are entitled to hit their spouse as a sign of disciplinary action. There are cases where husbands disciplines their wives like a child and they does not see it as domestic violence. It is said that wife beating is commonplace in Benue State and such does not mean husbands dislike their wives. Husband disciplining erring wives is seen as his traditional role. Such disciplinary action includes slapping, flogging and asking spouse to kneel for hours. In this case consent to abuse is quite prevalent among women who observe conservative culture and less educated. However, women who are highly educated up to tertiary level consent to abuse as a result of societal pressure of not given to the derogatory status of divorce. Other reasons are laced around pretence for prestige sake or trying to be understanding, giving their abusers time to change.[32]

Finding made in this study indicates that cultural practices and social norm encourage violent acts against women. Majority of the respondents insisted that gender-based violence involves all acts by men targeted against their rights though they accepted it as their fate. Also, greater number of the respondents unanimously maintained that justice system in their various communities is not fair to the women especially widows and women with only female children. Some of them pointed out that their men team up against them on issues about inheritance to deprive them access to their husbands' properties in the guise of protecting their tradition. The Social Learning theory provides useful theoretical orientation for the analysis of obstacles to women advancement and development. As was pointed out by Albert Bandura, posits that the social environment causes people to behave in certain ways. In the views of Bandura, modelling on parental behaviour may also be relevant to the understanding of violence against women.[33] In other words, patriarchal ideology as was pointed in this work can best describe issues of male dominance in the communities studied in Nkerefi clan. The issue of male dominance as was revealed in the findings of this paper has also been discussed by Antai who observed that societal-level power imbalance within patriarchal societies create structural factors that work directly or/and indirectly to validate a male dominated social order.[34]

The perception of causes and reasons involved seems to be the focal point for women to explain why they do tolerate aggression by their partners. In this regard, the National Survey on Violence Against Women conducted in Mexico, provided qualitative analysis which led to the disciplinary reasons to explain conscious intentions and willingness to abuse by the perpetrator, while the causes of violence respond to an external origin beyond the control of the violent man. Hamel. Desmarais and Nicholls referred to these aspects when talking about coercive or intentional violence reported by offenders whose motivation is rooted in the desire to control and impose their authority and ensure that their partners listen and meet their needs. Expressive violence, on the other hand, is caused by the desire to express anger which has been accumulated over their lives due to in tolerance or early experience of everyday pressures.[35]

Regardless of the terms used, it is important to note how the meaning of partner violence is constructed from the point of view of women who deny the aggressor's responsibility with an increasing sense of blame on females themselves. This circumstance is explained by Richie under the term "gender incitement", [36] whereas the women respond to socially established expectations about the behaviour of women in their marital relationship. That is primarily determined by the fact that females are responsible for maintaining harmony at the household as their cultural and social roles ordinarily establish. [37]

Victims of wife battery are reported to suffer from physical and psychological pain.<sup>[38]</sup> Domestic violence against women constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large. It occurs at home, in public places like streets, parks, familiar places like homes of friends and relatives, offices, involving highly placed executives; and also in churches and mosques. Domestic violence that occurs in private within the family, including wife battery, rape, acid attack, and sexual abuse affect the physical and psychological wellbeing of women, and as such, they seem to erode the position of women, both at home and in the society at large. Domestic violence against women therefore deserves to be studied in order to provide possible solution.<sup>[39]</sup> It is therefore imperative to understand the underlying causes of gender-based violence or domestic violence.

### CONCLUSION

This study recommend that the government of the day should make legislations that will give adequate attention to gender based issues, and as well give priority to already existing laws on the subject of discourse, especially as it deals with gender discriminatory laws. Thus, when the foregoing laws are put in place, it will however give woman a strong voice and as well give them the courage to participate fully in all societal roles even as it will lead to developmental goals in the country which can be pioneered by women leaders.

More so, suffer penalties should be put in place on perpetrators of gender violence especially on the vexed issues of rape, bantering, and so on. Suffice it to say that existing laws have done little or nothing to protect the victims of the above stated acts and they have been left to languish in the sorry state which has continued to have a psychological effect on them and their relations. In addition, the judiciary must muster courage in dispensing justice without fear or favour. Thus, the rigorous processes in the courts in order to achieve justice have however, continued to expose the already traumatised women to the bulk of the society which does not reflect the inalienable right to personal life as enshrined in the constitution.

Above all, obnoxious practice that impedes the right of women should be uprooted. The government must liaise with stakeholders at all level, especially traditional institutions, to ensure that all harmful traditional practices which target only women are eradicated. The above could be achieved through dialoguing with the traditional rulers who are custodians of our culture; they should be made outlaw all oppressive practices in their societies. Hence, gender right activists should extend advocacy and enlightenment programme on gender rights violation to the grassroots level as research has been shown that women in our clime have been indoctrinated into believing that gender based violence is culturally and socially accepted in the traditional society. However, the onus is on Human Right Activist to ensure these perpetrators of this dastard acts are adequately prosecuted to serve as a deterrent to others.

From the foregoing, the victims of gender based violence must be encouraged to speak up because it will assist relevant agencies to bring perpetrators to book, although most victims are either ashamed or afraid of disclosing their experience as a result of the shame and inability of the government to respond swiftly to it. In addition, are the fear of being hurt more by the abuser, fear of social stigma attached to such abuses like rape and so on. To this end, social workers, and those in charge of social welfare agencies and also the government should establish more gender violence monitoring agencies especially at the grass root level like in Nkerefi which is subject of this discourse for an effective monitoring and reporting of gender rights violates against female gender in Nigeria. Moreover, since rape is the most prevalent form gender based violence in Nkerefi, hence, there is need for serious intervention of security agencies and other relevant

bodies, in safeguarding the lives of citizens in that extraction.

Finally, the general populace should be enlightened on the ills of gender based violence which will form the nucleus on which information on gender based issues will be transmitted to the society, especially at the grassroots level. The relevance of public enlightenment cannot be overemphasised as it must be at the front burner of organisation like schools, churches, mosques, mass media, town union, age grade, and social clinics.

This work has been able to ascertain the level of domestic abuse in Nkerefi, encapsulated in gender based violence. However, following avalanche of research and oral evidences, the work has been able to unearth the motives and views of the people from that clime on the reasons and factors that have necessitated the vexed issue above. In view of the foregoing, the work was conceived out of the 1995 Beijing Conference which underscored the emancipation of women, thus, it caught the attention and interest of the researcher on the subject matter.

Moreover, 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 Nkerefi, but the alarming rate with which it is being witnessed in the extraction above, informed the choice of this research, and thus became a nucleus on which this work was produced. The implications of domestic 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 women 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 women in the society cannot be overemphasised, even as it will inhibit their participation in national development. Also in the study, it has been established that the society at large have a role to play if the issue must be laid to rest. However, this work equally highlighted some forms of domestic violence in the society, Nkerefi especially which is the thrust of this work. In addition, this

research above all things through oral evidences it was able to gather, equally devised additional means to abating domestic violence which have several health problems like HIV/AIDS or STIs, unwanted pregnancies, culminating in abortion through the aid of a quack 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 the 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 bring to bear, the impacts of domestic violence in the society and went ahead to proffer recommendations on ways the government at all levels can improve in curtailing the spread of the menace.

Finally, this work is not all encompassing, but with the solutions it has proffered, it is hoped that it can serve as a model for improving on the available literatures on gender based violence in the society, Nkerefi, especially even as it hope to be an eye opener that will dissuade the perpetrators to rebuff the dastard act completely.

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