

POLICE STRATEGIC INTERVENTION AND MITIGATION OF INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE IN SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Violence within intimate relationships until the 20th century was viewed as a private affair until it gained recognition as a social and public health problem that has necessitated agencies' intervention within the Criminal Justice System (CJS) for preventive, control and adjudication of justice. The intervention of law enforcement however has led to the criminalization of intimate partner violence (IPV), with the police as the first point of contact for victims of IPV in the CJS. The study sought to interrogate the available strategies within the police force in addressing IPV. In-depth interview from eight police officers and State officials in four local government areas of Lagos State, were analyzed using content analytic procedures. Respondents were purposively selected as they were all within the LGAs with the highest IPV reportage. The paper identified strategies such as referrals, mediation, issuance of protective orders etc. The study concluded that most of the strategies adopted by the police adequately addressed the menace of IPV, however there is the need to ensure law enforcement officials are properly trained alongside religious and community leaders who sometimes serve as the first point of contact for survivors of IPV. This study has extended the frontiers of knowledge on the role and administration of the criminal justice system in handling cases of intimate partner violence in Lagos state by providing a scientific and empirical analysis of the strategies employed by the government through the police.

Keywords: Police, Intimate Partner Violence, Intervention, Mitigation, Nigeria

Introduction

The term intimate partner violence was introduced and adopted to encompass a broader understanding of violence within intimate relationships. The National Domestic Violence Hotline defines Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) as “a pattern of behavior in any relationship that is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner”. Intimate partner violence refers to harmful behaviours exhibited within a relationship by a partner over another. This relationship may be a marriage relationship, cohabiting, boyfriend, or girlfriend. Some of the deadliest and most inhumane violent treatments are found (Zara & Gino, 2018). Despite the images of supportive families caring for each other's needs and desires, intimate relationships are often ridden with dangerous levels of violence, abuse and aggression (Cervantes & Sherman, 2019; White et al., 2024).

Intimate partner violence is a growing and troubling menace in our society today, and it poses numerous problems for individuals and society as a whole. Survivors of intimate partner violence experience varying degrees of physical injuries; sexually related injuries, and sexually transmitted infections and diseases; mental health consequences such as; anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts and attempts; other health challenges such as gastrointestinal disorders, substance abuse, diseases and gynecological or pregnancy complications (Miller & McCaw, 2019).

The initial view or traditional perspective of violence in a relationship focused on the marriage relationships, where the husband was the abuser and the wife, the victim, and the abusive behaviour existed within a domestic relationship. As these violent cases grew, it became evident that various types of violence exist within intimate relationships, and in reality, the roles of abuser and victim are not gender-specific. Globally, many nations now respond to the menace of IPV by engaging the police and special courts' services through the enactment of Laws prohibiting acts of physical, sexual, verbal, economic and psychological violence. Although majority of the victims of IPV are women, men are also not left out and the Nigerian criminal Law, for instance, has not been able to proactively and pragmatically enforce the protection of women from certain forms of practices that result in violence like marital rape, early marriage, and barbaric widowhood practices (Egharevba, Chiazor & Suleiman, 2013). Social scientists argue that aggressive human tendencies are “in-born”, “inherent”, or “instinctual”, and these tendencies are kept under control through organisations such as schools, family institutions and law enforcement agencies (Levine, 2017; Vandello & Puryear, 2017).

The majority of IPV victims are women (Kumagai, 2016). Evidence from literature shows that approximately one in three (33.3%) women worldwide have experienced either physical or sexual violence by partners in their relationship or during their lifetime (World Health Organisation, 2017). Across the globe, up to 38% of murdered women died from

violence at the hands of an intimate partner (World Health Organisation, 2013). For instance, in Russia, 12,000 women die every year due to intimate partner violence (Adebayo, 2014). In Pakistan, 80% of women there are victims of intimate partner violence. About 50% of Bangladesh women are abused, violated, or murdered by their partners.

In contrast, in the United States, at least 1.8 million women are assaulted every year by their male partners, and 25% of women in the United Kingdom are victims of intimate partner violence during their lifetime (World Health Organisation, 2013); U.N., 2016). In Nigeria, the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS, 2018) revealed that about 31 per cent of all women, which is almost one-third of all Nigerian women, are victims of IPV. This number is quite significant because women make up nearly 50%, half of the nation's population.

The 2018 NDHS report published in 2019 revealed that almost 1 in every 3 (that is, 33% of women in Nigeria) between the ages of 15 to 49 experienced physical violence in the 12 months preceding the survey, indicating an increase from the results of earlier surveys by the NDHS in 2008 and 2013, which was an estimated 28%. The 2013 report revealed an 11% prevalence of physical violence, a decrease from the 15% reported in 2008; the prevalence increased from 11% to 14% by 2018. The occurrence of sexual violence in Nigeria is estimated at 9% among women between the ages of 15 to 49, with only 4% reporting experience in the 12 months before the NDHS survey (NPC, 2019). The overall prevalence of physical, sexual and or emotional violence committed by a current partner or the most recent partner revealed that 36% of ever-married women between 15 and 49 in Nigeria were affected. 30% experienced the said violence just within 12 months preceding the survey (NDHS, 2018).

According to Benebo, Schumann & Vaezghasemi, 2018, studies from Nigeria on intimate partner violence prevalence show a range of 31 to 61% for psychological and or emotional violence, 20 to 31% for sexual 7 to 31% for physical violence. These studies though conducted in different parts of the country, showed a widespread of IPV occurrences with about 42% in the North (Tanimu, Yohanna & Omeiza, 2016), 29% prevalence in the South-west (Okenwa, Lawoko & Jansson, 2009), 78.8% in the South-east and 41% in the South-south (Itimi, Dienye & Gbeneol, 2014).

Men are not left out, as reports have also shown a disturbing increase in the number of male survivors of intimate partner violence (U.K Guardian, 2010; Dutton & White, 2013). For instance, by the end of 2009, about 4,266 women were prosecuted for perpetrating intimate partner violence in the United Kingdom compared to 1,575 prosecuted in 2005. About 40% of intimate partner violence victims between 2004 and 2005 and 2008 to 2009 were males in the U.K, 43.4% of victims of partner abuse were males in 2006 to 2007 (British Crime Survey and Home Office Statistical Bulletin, 2010). As many as 3.2 million men are victims of intimate partner assault in the United States (Omilusi, 2017). IPV is not limited to physical injuries alone. As aptly noted by Makinde, Odimegwu & Abdulmalik (2016), females are guilty of IPV through acts of jealousy, excessive possessiveness, harassment with constant accusations of infidelity, threat to hurt or kill him, usage of abusive and belittling words, intimidation with guns, bottles, knives, destruction of personal items and others. Statistics for the prevalence of IPV against men in Nigeria is lacking; many cases of violence against men go unreported because victims often face social stigma and are made to feel emasculated and weak (Omilusi, 2017). According to Cullen (2020) estimates on the prevalence of intimate partner violence is widely underreported in Nigeria due to the method of survey used to measure its occurrence. Up to 39% or higher are not reported because of the face-to-face approach, which sees survivors shying away from sharing their lived experiences.

Intimate partner violence cuts across all races, cultures, religions, ages, classes, statuses/positions and sexes in most nations of the world. Intimate partner violence describes some form of abusive behaviour by one individual on another in a relationship; such behaviour may be physical, psychological, verbal, and sexual (Troisi, 2018). The initial view or traditional perspective of violence in a relationship-focused marriage relationship where the husband was the abuser and the wife the victim and the abusive behaviour existed within a domestic relationship (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013).

In 2014, Lagos State established within its police force the family support unit (FSU), which caters to cases of IPV. This followed the poor enforcement recorded after the 2007 Lagos State Domestic Violence bill. Despite these provisions, Lagos state has continued to have a high reportage of IPV. This intervention will ensure the provision of justice and protection for every member of the society through laid down processes for conviction, punishment and rehabilitation of the guilty (Dada, Dosunmu&Oyededeji, 2015; Messing, Ward-Lasher, Thaller, & Bagwell-Gray, 2015). With growing international and national awareness of the consequences of intimate partner violence, using the law to respond to the problem gained recognition. Most countries resorted to using or applying criminal assault laws, as there were no pre-existing laws to tackle intimate partner violence cases.

Statement of the problem

The experience of Intimate partner violence comes with several severe effects on the health and well-being of victims in the short and long term (Reale et al., 2017). Some victims suffer physical injuries immediately after an attack, and others suffer emotional and verbal abuse leading to depression and suicidal thoughts (Alokan, 2013; Stubbs & Szoeki, 2022). These consequences continue even after the relationship between the victim and the abuser might have been over. The psychological results of violence are sometimes as intense as the physical effects; leading to the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms, with mild to severe anxiety, which has been found common among victims; with a substantial majority at a higher risk than average of suffering from strokes, heart diseases, asthma, and the abuse of psychoactive substances (Brooks et al., 2017).

These consequences, however, does not stop with the victims; children who witness intimate partner violence may experience lifelong effects ranging from poor performance in school to early death (Oluremi, 2015). Others grow up to repeat the same abusive behaviour in their adult relationships. This was further corroborated by Izaguirre & Cater (2018), that witnessing intimate partner violence (IPV) has damaging effects on children's welfare and development. Because children's understanding of IPV increases the risk of their developing negative future outcomes. The government also bears the cost of police services, costs imposed on the prison, detention, prosecution, and courts; provision of housing and shelter for victims, social services like enlightenment programmes on prevention and advocacy for IPV, vocational training, special training for the police, health care providers, judiciary, and the media who will be investigating, prosecuting, treating and reporting cases of IPV (Patterson & Swan, 2019). Furthermore, the funds invested in dealing with this menace can be channeled to providing social services and essential infrastructures that the Nigerian people earnestly desire to better their quality of life.

The violence of any form is a crime and requires the attention and intervention of society and the criminal justice system. A country's Law is put in place for the benefit of the citizens, and when such citizens cannot rely on the Law to protect and get them justice, then it is bothersome and worrisome. The menace of intimate partner violence remains of significant importance, with police and legal response becoming essential in addressing the issue. It is imperative to recognise the continuous difficulties that are encountered when dealing with this type of violence. Victims' reluctance to report abuse indicates that a significant number of these crime goes unreported, even though it is visible in the routine work of the police, social services, and casualty departments (Walklate et al., 2018). Many nations now respond to cases of intimate partner violence as a health and social problem that requires a legal solution. In times past, there was a significant reluctance in addressing this problem because the government, through agencies within the criminal justice system, saw interference as meddling into private family matters. In instances where it was given any form of attention, it was categorised as a family law matter.

Most countries resorted to using or applying criminal assault laws as there were no pre-existing laws to tackle or address cases of intimate partner violence. The Nigerian Criminal Law has not made provision for violence within intimate relationships. Instead, there is a general law (VAPP Act, 2015) against perpetrating violence, and perpetrators get away with intimate partner violence because of the lack of clear-cut legal provision that directly addresses such behaviour. The role of criminal justice agencies such as the police and courts in addressing the growing incidence of IPV and the challenges being faced by these institutions in the enforcement of the provisions of the Law dealing with IPV in Lagos, Nigeria, needed to be investigated appropriately to chart a better way forward in addressing issues of IPV in our society. The need to address these concerns has motivated this study, which set out to investigate the role and strategies of criminal justice institutions in tackling the issues of intimate partner violence in Nigeria, using Lagos State as the focus.

Understanding Intimate Partner Violence in Nigeria

IPV in Nigeria has remained a pervasive human rights issue with significant implications for victims especially women. Despite governmental efforts such as the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act, its effectiveness has remained low due to factors like the social stigma associated with the experience of IPV, the traditional and cultural views of such matters as private and family affairs, the dependence of women on men as breadwinners and so on. The 2015 Nigerian Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) however broadened its definition of domestic violence to include: spouses, former spouses, engaged persons, individuals dating or in established relationships, parents of a child, and members of the same family residents within the same household. Thus victims of intimate partner violence fall within this definition. This bill also provides punishment for different forms of violence, which serve as a reference point for the judicial system when prosecuting IPV perpetrators. For instance, according to section 19 subsection 1 of the Violence Against Persons Acts 2015, anyone who assaults his or her spouse is guilty of a crime and is liable, on conviction, to face a maximum prison sentence not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding #200,000, or both.

To curb the menace of IPV, some states in Nigeria enacted specific laws to protect victims and would-be victims. These states are Lagos, Ekiti, Cross-River and Ebonyi. Lagos state protects against Domestic Violence law; Cross-River has the Domestic Violence and Maltreatment of Widows (prohibition) Law; the Gender-based Violence (prohibition) Law by Ekiti State and the Ebonyi State Protection against Domestic Violence and Related Matters Law. It is important to note that these laws focus mainly on women, even though there are also quite a number of male victims of IPV. This shows that most societies see IPV as a female-based form of violence, but in reality, it affects both men and women. Furthermore, of the thirty-six states in Nigeria, only about 11% have put in place appropriate means of dealing with incidences of IPV (Bryon, 2018). This could lend credence to the high prevalence rate sometimes reported by the media and researchers.

With the inadequacies of the gender-based laws and the continuous surge in the number of IPV victims in Lagos state, the state government passed into law a bill that precisely addressed actions that constitute violence within intimate relationships. The law prohibits the perpetration of specific acts or behaviours. Accordingly, the following acts are prohibited against any person: physical violence, sexual abuse or exploitations such as rape, incest and other forms of sexual assaults, starvation, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, financial deprivation and exploitation, denial of access to primary education, intimidation, harassment, stalking, dangerous attacks with poisonous or harmful substances such as acid, arson, forced entry into a complainant's home, especially when the partners no longer share the same accommodation, any form of controlling behaviour that may cause imminent harm to the safety, health or well-being of the complainant and deprivation.

According to this statute, intimate partners are individuals in a domestic relationship where:

1. They are or were married to each other according to the law, custom or religion or
2. They live or lived together in a relationship like marriage, although they are not or were not married to each other.
3. They are or were in an engagement, dating or customary relationship, including an actual or perceived romantic, intimate or sexual relationship of any duration.

Unlike the Nigerian criminal law, the Lagos state protection against domestic violence law made provisions for temporary reliefs for complainants of IPV. These provisions include:

- Emergency monetary relief is the compensation for monetary losses suffered by a complainant, such as loss of earnings, medical expenses, relocation or accommodation expenses.
- The provision of application for a protective order.
- Third-party reporting of IPV incidences as long as the victim consents, third party report may, however, be considered if the victim is unconscious or due to injuries sustained is unable to give verbal approval.
- Clear definitions as to what constitutes each form of a violent act.

However, the punishment ascribed to perpetrating IPV is not stiffer than what obtains in the criminal code. Section 15 (a), (b) of the Act states that any person who contravenes any prohibition imposed in section 7 (which defines the actions considered as 'violent' shall be guilty of an offence and is liable upon conviction to a fine of N100, 000 (One hundred thousand naira only) or imprisonment for a period not longer than five years or to both fine and imprisonment.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted the social-ecological theory which explains the roles played by different actors within a system, leading to specific outcomes. The social ecology theory is a framework for analysing the complex and interconnected impacts of human and environmental influences on behavior. Urie Bronfenbrenner first proposed it as a conceptual model for explaining human development in the 1970s, and it was later codified as a theory in the 1980s (Kilanowski, 2017). Individuals are immersed in society, according to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model, and human behavior is influenced by the physical and social surroundings.

In its most basic form, the theory's central concept is that one thing influences another. The theory's central concept is that one occurrence influences another, and that existence does not take place in a vacuum; rather, systems are flexible and, paradoxical, maintain their own authenticity while responding to the inevitable changes that happen around them. Everything from heredity to the political environment can influence individual and collective behavior. Social ecology is a framework or collection of underlying assumptions for understanding the changing interdependencies among various personal and environmental factors. It is derived from natural ecosystems, which are typified as a network of interactions among organisms and between organisms and their environment.

The social, structural, and cultural backgrounds of people-environment interactions are all taken into account in social ecology. This viewpoint stresses the ambiguity of human circumstances' various dimensions (physical environment, social and cultural environment, individual qualities), numerous levels (individuals, groups, and organizations), and the

cumulative impact of events through time to characterize mutual and complex person-environment interactions, social ecology combines concepts from dynamic systems such as interdependence and homeostasis. Individuals play an important role in ecological processes.

This perspective is based on evidence that not a single factor can be held responsible for why some individuals are at a higher risk of experiencing intimate partner violence and others are not. The ecological framework views intimate partner violence as resulting from the interaction of several factors at four levels, namely individual level, relationship level, community level and society level.

Evidence from the study shows that intimate relationship violence is clustered rather than distributed randomly. In other words, place of residence may account for some of the diversity in IPV risk. In societies that have more lenient views toward domestic or intimate partner violence, the rate of IPV exposure is higher. Individual level risk variables appear to have no effect on the effect of neighborhood on IPV and related attitudes. Individual level risk and protective factors linked with IPV may be influenced or modified by place of residence. Acceptance of cruelty in the community may even mute the protective effect of the criminal justice institutions.

Data collection and Analysis

The paper adopted a qualitative research approach using in-depth interviews to explore the strategies utilized by the Family support unit of the Police in addressing intimate partner violence in Lagos State. This paper was exclusively based on extracted data from the 8 in-depth interviews among Police officers, officials of DSVRT and the Lagos State Judiciary. The 8 IDI respondents were purposively selected and saturation was reached by the 7th and 8th interview. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants for the study; this non-probability sampling method is ideal for qualitative research as it allows the researcher to deliberately select participants who are "information-rich" and possess specific experiences or knowledge relevant to the research question (s). Responses from the interview were transcribed and textual data analysed using systematic content analytic procedure. This method involved identifying, interpreting, and reporting recurring patterns within the data. The analysis followed several key steps: first, the researcher familiarised with the data by transcribing the audio recordings and reading through. Next, initial codes were generated to capture important points relevant to the research questions. These codes were then organised into broader themes and sub-themes. The themes were reviewed to ensure they accurately represented the entire data set, after which they were clearly defined and named. Finally, the findings were written up, weaving the themes into a coherent narrative supported by direct quotes and evidence from the interviews. Thus the analysis was able to identify the strategies utilized by the police when they receive complaints of IPV experience.

Ethical issues are matters of supreme importance in social sciences. In maintaining ethical research standards, the researcher sought for and obtained due approval from the appropriate Ethical Review Board.

Results and Discussion

Following analysis of the indepth interviews, the emergent strategies are:

Referral of survivors to the appropriate Organisation.

When survivors of intimate partner violence report incidences of violence to the Police, their reports are taken by the Family Support Units within the Lagos Police Stations; these units are located in only 12 (twelve) police stations across the State. The victims are then referred to the Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT) office in Alausa, Ikeja. According to the Gender Unit, when asked about the strategies they employ, the Head of Unit stated that: We partner with many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), so they report through them. Through referrals from different stakeholders, it could be from the health sector, from school, from DSVRT, NGOs anywhere, we synergise and work together to achieve success. Walk-in clients are redirected to DSVRT to collect a referral, so we partner with each other(**Respondent 1, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja**)

These stakeholders are DSVRT, NGOs that advocate for survivors of violence, the health sector, and schools. Verbal complaints from walk-in-clients are often not entertained. This is because violence between intimate partners is mostly regarded as a civil matter; thus, walk-in clients are redirected to DSVRT. The DSVRT reiterated and corroborated the information from the Police that:

There are 12 Family Support Units within different police stations across the State. They are basically a more oriented police force, in some areas in Lagos, where we refer survivors. They are the people we train to handle these cases. (**Respondent 2, DSVRT office, Alausa-Ikeja**)

Due to the sensitive nature of intimate partner violence, there is the need for victims to feel safe while seeking help. Because many victims of intimate partner violence blame themselves and sometimes feel too embarrassed to disclose their experience, having easy access to an empathic police officer will further encourage help-seeking.

Mediating and Negotiating between intimate partners

After a victim's initial report, a letter of invitation is written by the DSVRT to the accused, booking an appointment. When such accused persons honour the invite, they are expected to refute or confirm the allegations levelled against them. A meeting is scheduled for both partners, and their conflict is constructively discussed in a bid to end such conflict. For mediation to be effective, the accused must agree that the violence occurred and he or she is ready to desist from future abusive behaviour(s). A lawyer at the state office had this to say:

We employ the use of mediation because there are cases where survivors say they do not want police “wahala” (police involvement), “he is my husband I do not want him to be charged to court,” so we call the alleged perpetrator to the office, in order to hear his side of the issue, and then we attempt to bring about reconciliation between such partners. **(Respondent 2, DSVRT office, Alausa-Ikeja)**

Similar to the response of the Lawyer, one Family Support Unit police reported that:

In some instances, we apply ADR, we try and talk to both parties to resolve the issue. The perpetrator is made to write an undertaking that such acts will stop. **(Respondent 4, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja)**

There are, however, instances where victims say they do not want police involvement or their abusers to be charged to court; hence the NGO adopts Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR). It was observed that although victims want the violent episodes to stop, they would rather not prosecute their abusers. With this in mind officials with DSVRT, ProjectAlert, FSU and the state Judiciary adopted the use of mediation.

Issuance of protective order to Complainants

Protective orders are legal measures aimed at reducing the risk of future harm from a person who has been determined to be a threat to another. Survivors who fear that their abusers may attack them for reporting may apply for an interim order. As mentioned earlier, the Police are willing to support victims by providing prompt police reports to all those who had earlier reported IPV experience. In addition, with the issuance of a protective order, it appears that a sense of fear is created in the abusers, making them refrain from further violent acts. When asked what is done to protect victims after a report or during an investigation, the Police responded that:

Most times, once we arrest the offender, the victim is safe, but you know, sometimes the family members might want to go and harass the victim, so we make sure an undertaking is signed, such that if any harm comes to the victim the accused will not be released or the persons who bail him, that is his sureties will be arrested. **(Respondent 1, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja)**

Another officer, however, had a varying response, she said:

Once a perpetrator gets to our office, he stays in the cell pending the time we carry out our investigation if it takes one week or two weeks he needs to stay here in detention, once he is charged to court, we transfer such to kirikiri for however long it takes to charge him/her to court, this prevents the alleged perpetrator from contacting the victim or the victim's family. **(Respondent 5, Family Support Unit, Ikotun police station, Alimosho LGA).**

Victims are often advised to send an interim protective order application while seeking further help or while investigations are on-going. The interim protective order is for eight (8) days in the first instance. A victim may go to court on his or her own to apply for an interim order, and this will be granted without the presentation of any evidence, just based on the countenance and disposition of the said victim. Because the interim order seeks to protect, the victim is expected within eight days to show why the interim order should be made permanent by providing evidence to support his or her claim. When the abuser does not follow the terms of the order from the court, such individuals are arrested for contempt of court.

Provision of Economic Empowerment to victims that require Financial Assistance.

Many IPV victims do not seek their abusive partner's prosecution because of financial dependence on such a partner. This birthed the creation of a trust fund in Lagos State for IPV victims who cannot fend for themselves, because they

are financially dependent on their abusers. They are enrolled in various programmes that will lead to their financial independence. The DSVRT Director had this to say on the role of empowerment for survivors:

In 2017, we tried to ascertain the factors that hinders survivors from moving on. Majority of them said they were not empowered, they are financially dependent on their abusers, so we communicated this to the government, you know it is great for us to go to the market and campaign that survivors should leave abusive relationships, ok if they leave and stay in the shelter for a say 3 months, what happens afterwards? So we felt that they was a need for us to have an empowerment programme, the ministry of Women Affairs have an empowerment programmes for women generally, but we felt we should have a bespoke, something tailored towards survivors of IPV. **(Respondent 6, DSVRT office, Alausa-Ikeja)**

Unlike physical and sometimes sexual violence where the survivors are able to go to court with police reports, scars, witnesses and hospital records, the issue of economic abuse is sometimes quite tricky. Being married under the Nigerian marriage Act does not state that the man must maintain his wife, and so to prove economic abuse, there must have been a contract that was signed at the initial instance of the marriage in order for the man to be economically responsible for his wife.

Relocation of Survivors to shelters or residential accommodation.

Sometimes the victims have no safe place to return to once the prosecution of their abusers start, such survivors are referred to Family Social Services for cases of maintenance and access for children. Available shelters often accommodate survivors for three months. Funds are also given to survivors to get accommodation while transitioning.

Public Education and Strata Sensitization

The Police, DSVRT, and other NGOs organise awareness programmes where flyers are distributed to citizens. They also organise walks with the State Government, advocating against violence. The Police had this to say:

we do have awareness programs, the gender office from Abuja sent flyers, but we are out of flyers at the moment. Due to the centralisation of the police force, we work from Abuja, i.e. anything we want to do we need to get approval from Abuja, here in Lagos we do the little we can do. We have posters with our numbers on it for easy access to us. We go on walks with the state government, advocating against violence. we work with other FSUs (Family Support Unit) **(Respondent 1, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja)**

There are programmes specially designed for children, secondary school students, and higher institutions. There are also programmes for parents, involving the parent-teachers forum. There are programmes for religious institutions and leaders, because the religious institutions most times serve as first responders and there are also programmes for community leaders (powered by DSVRT).

Investigation and evidence gathering after receiving complaints

Investigation is started immediately by the Police in cases where victims are interested in the prosecution of their abusers. The officers can ascertain if the survivor is being truthful through training on detecting lies that they had earlier received. In their words:

When the victim comes to the station, he or she is asked to give statement on what happened, because we want to know what led to the misunderstanding. Once the statement has been taken, we ask for the phone number and address of the husband so we can hear from him. If we call him and he denies it, there is nothing we can do, but if he says something happened, we tell him to come to the station to also give his own statement. Sometimes it is family members of neighbours that come to report. For the cases that we are able to establish that violence really happened, we can arrest and detain the abuser, but we tell them to go to the domestic and sexual violence response office in Alausa. Our office in Ikeja is also informed if the case is more than we can handle **(Respondent 3, Family Support Unit, Igbogbo Police station, Ikorodu)**

Furthermore, when gathering evidence, it does not necessarily mean physical bruises, evidence can be witnesses. A police officer responded that:

The only evidence we might be able to get is usually physical, maybe fresh bruises on the victim and then report from neighbours who are willing to give witness testimony. For sexual assault we refer them to the hospitals we work with, so they can carry out their investigation and we then use their results as evidence. We don't have any equipment oh.

Sometimes we use of mobile phones to snap pictures(**Respondent 4, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja**)

For other forms of abuse or violence that are not physical, a referral to the counsellors or psychologists is recommended. The psychologists will generate a report, which is then presented as in the court evidence.

Training and re-training of staff working IPV cases.

Both police officers and officials within partnering organisations receive and give training usually on intimate partner Violence, Child Abuse and Gender-based violence. For instance, the Police reported that:

Immediately we started the unit, we went for a training at the Headquarters in Abuja. We were trained on how to handle victims who come in to report domestic violence and sexual assault. After the initial training we also attend other trainings periodically, for example DSVRT and WARIF usually have programmes for us (**Respondent 1, Gender Unit, Ikeja Police Command, Ikeja**).

Several trainings are also organised across the country yearly. The United Nations is presently on board with the State Government to ensure better training of agencies within the criminal justice system. Another respondent had this to say:

We have been trying to push for international exposure to see what is obtainable abroad but we have not been able to do that yet. Hopefully this year we will be able to, but so far, it is more of what we see and study online and then locally(**Respondent 6, DSVRT office, Alausa, Ikeja**)

Examples of trainings taken so far are; case management trainings, child protection trainings, safe guarding trainings, best practices for engaging survivors and child interviewing.

Being able to easily access help through these agencies especially the law enforcement showed that the victims of intimate partner violence within the State did not have to take law into their hands in the process of trying to defend themselves. Additionally, it reinforces one of the key responsibilities of the Nigeria Police force which is the protection of lives and properties. This further lends credence to the popular police slogan “The Police is your friend”. Certainty and assurance of timely help does not only connote reliability and effectiveness of the criminal justice agencies, it also serves as a pointer to would-be victims that a way of escape and justice awaits them. The presence of a mutual relationship between the police and citizens can be achieved through victims (citizens) satisfaction with their interaction with the criminal justice system. The researcher observed that being able to get help from various quarters (not necessarily from the police) but agencies such as NGOs and the DSVRT gave IPV survivors a sense of safety and assurance that their predicament would soon be over. Bryon, 2018 also opined that survivors of intimate partner violence are sometimes more concerned about the opinions of others and would rather stay with abusers if their safety is somewhat guaranteed. This guaranty may be obtained through the police, who mandates the perpetrator to sign an undertaken to desist from all forms of harmful behaviours that constitute IPV.

There are several procedures that persons having a dispute may choose. Communication can be systematically facilitated in order for the parties to take responsibility for resolving their dispute. Methods of alternative dispute resolution (out of court dispute resolution; extrajudicial dispute resolution) are used to assist individuals and legal entities with various levels of conflict resolution(Csilla, 2019).Many survivors of intimate partner violence were moderately satisfied with the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution by the police, however, many more felt it was an imposition(Sitsofe Morhe, 2021). Also,(Rossi, Holtzworth-Munroe, Applegate and Beck(2020) argued that the outcome of mediation between couples experiencing intimate partner violence is dependent on their IPV typology. Such typologies had earlier been identified and categorized by Micheal Johnson in 2008 into Coercive controlling violence; Violent resistance; Situational Couple Violence; Seperation instigated violence and mutual violent control. This finding is also in consonance with Postmus, (2010); Postmus, Hahn, Plumber, McMahon and Zurlo(2013) who argued that many times the most important means of promoting economic empowerment is hinged on the existence of financial literacy programs. Financial literacy here refers to the increase in knowledge and skills required to make sound financial decisions and obtain resources. This knowledge leads to the economic self-efficacy which is the belief that one has the resources, alternatives and confidence to succeed.

Dowling, Morgan, Hulme, Manning and Wong (2018) that the issuance of an interim and protective order are means employed by law enforcement and courts to protect survivors and intimate partner violence; and it is associated with a significant reduction in the prevalence of IPV, although they are most effective in cases where the alleged abuser has had no prior history of crime, violence or mental health issues. Similarly, Poynton, Starvou, Marriot and Fitzgerald(2016)

further corroborate the findings of this study on the use of protective orders as a strategy employed by agencies within the criminal justice system when addressing intimate partner violence.

According to the DSVRT Director, religious institutions serve as the gatekeepers most times, because by the time survivors seek formal or legal help, they would have sought the intervention of the church or the mosque, who would have tried resolving the conflict. These programmes are important especially for religious and community leaders in order to reinforce the fact that intimate partner violence is a criminal allegation, they need to know where their role stops and the role of government starts, and they are not to assume the role of the government. This approach by victims necessitates the education and special training for religious and community leaders so they do not strain the efforts put up by the various agencies within the criminal justice system.

Training of staff is important because it sets such staff apart from those who are not well trained, when addressing phenomenon (Nassazi, 2013). Training of police, especially those working the Gender and Family Support Unit within the various participating police stations has further improved the experiences of survivors of IPV within Lagos state.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concluded that the police have put in place several strategies to address the prevalence of intimate partner violence within Lagos State. Although several strategies were identified, not all of were utilized by victims. Strategies such as easy access to the police for reporting, provision of temporary welfare shelter for survivors, financial empowerment programmes and the use of third-party reporters provided victims some level satisfaction with regards to their interactions with agencies of the criminal justice system. However, for any strategy to be effective, it has to include both comprehensive and collaborative approaches. Problems like intimate partner violence cannot be resolved by a single one-way approach or measure. Strategies that will achieve high impact result should involve approaches that focused on (a) Survivor and potential survivors; or (b) offenders and potential offenders. Hence employing multiple strategies to both survivors and offenders will reduce the prevalence of intimate partner violence. it is also important to note that relying only on law enforcement to tackle this menace cannot be effective in reducing or solving IPV, giving consideration to others who share responsibility for IPV such as neighbors, family members, community leaders, clerics and so on, can help police, court, DSVRT and other NGOs better respond to tackling Intimate Partner Violence.

Thus, this paper recommends the following:

- i. The training of other stakeholders such as Religious and Community leaders should be given high priority as they sometimes serve as first contact for victims of IPV, such training should include courses on conflict resolution mechanisms.
- ii. There is the need to sensitize the public on the availability of formal and legal procedures to seek redress. Although the 2015 Violence against Persons Prohibition Act criminalises intimate partner violence, it was enacted by the National Assembly, Federal republic of Nigeria and was initially domicile only in Abuja, this law should be domesticated in all states within Nigeria.
- iii. More funds should be geared towards empowerment programs. Many survivors return to abusive relationships and households due to financial dependence on the abusers. Survivors, especially women who benefitted from the Lagos State Trust fund Empowerment for instance, have become self-reliant.
- iv. Other states in Nigeria should be encouraged to adopt the creation of Family Support Units/Gender desks within their Police Stations. Intimate partner violence is a menace that should be tackled with the collective efforts of all
- v. CJS officials should be mandated to get IPV-specific trainings on victim psychology, cultural sensitivity, use of risk assessment tools etc.

Limitation: Some challenges encountered in the course of carrying out this study include difficulty in booking appointments with the police, and the Lagos state Domestic and Sexual Violence team, these offices were busy and the researcher had to wait long hours before eventually gaining audience with the desired officials. Furthermore, limited funding restricted and limited the studies to only one state in Nigeria.

Further research: This research could be expanded to explore Predisposing factors influencing victims' satisfaction with Criminal Justice outcomes of intimate partner violence cases and also a comparative study among the various states in Nigeria.

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