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OVERVIEW OF COUNSELLING APPROACHES TO STEM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG INTIMATE PARTNERS

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Abstract

Domestic violence disrupts individual lives and fractures communities, jeopardizing societal peace. This research explores the effectiveness of various counselling approaches in mitigating domestic violence and fostering community peace. The paper delves into the prevalent types of domestic violence and their impact on individuals, families, and the wider social fabric. Besides, the paper identified - Physical abuse, Emotional abuse, Verbal abuse, Sexual abuse, Intimate Partners Violence (IPV) and Economic abuse as most prevalent examples of domestic violence. It then critically examines a range of counselling approaches, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and couples therapy. The analysis considers the strengths and limitations of each approach in addressing the root causes of domestic violence, empowering victims, and facilitating healthy behavioural patterns within relationships. Furthermore, the research explores the potential of these counselling approaches to foster community peace. It examines how effectively interventions can transform societal attitudes towards violence, promote healthy relationship models, and empower families and communities to identify and address

domestic violence. The research employs a critical review methodology, drawing on scholarly literature, relevant data, and case studies to evaluate the efficacy of counselling approaches in curbing domestic violence and fostering community peace. The findings contributed valuable insights for policymakers, social workers, and mental health professionals working to create safer and more peaceful families and communities.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Counselling Approaches, Community Peace, Social Work, Mental Health, Intimate Partners Violence

Introduction

Domestic violence among families casts a long shadow, disrupting individual lives, fracturing families, and jeopardizing the very fabric of peaceful communities. Its effects ripple outwards, creating a climate of fear and insecurity that undermines social cohesion. While legal frameworks and law enforcement play a crucial role in deterring violence, a critical component in addressing domestic violence and fostering community peace lies in the realm of counselling interventions. This paper explores the multifaceted relationship between counselling approaches, domestic violence, and community peace. It delves into the prevalent forms of domestic violence and their impact on individuals and society. Following this, the paper critically examines a range of counselling approaches used to address domestic violence, analyzing their strengths and limitations. Finally, it explores the potential of these approaches to cultivate a more peaceful social environment. It's important to note that domestic violence can take many forms and can be a combination of the types mentioned. Additionally, domestic violence can occur in any type of relationship, regardless of gender, age, or socioeconomic status.

Domestic Peace

Peace, in its various forms, is essential for the well-being of individuals and societies. Domestic peace, which involves the absence of violence and the presence of mutual respect within a household, serves as the foundation for community peace. Domestic peace is the state of harmony, respect, and non-violence within a family or household. Domestic peace is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the absence of violence, as well as the presence of positive relationships and a supportive environment within the home. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high

likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation". It is a crucial aspect of individual well-being and serves as the first line of defense against broader social conflicts. Domestic peace also, refers to the harmonious and non-violent coexistence of individuals within a household. It is characterized by mutual respect, effective communication, and the ability to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. The family unit is the basic building block of society, and the peace within this unit profoundly impacts the peace of the larger community and society at large. Domestic peace is therefore integral to achieving broader societal peace. Peace meaning not only the lack of violent conflicts but also the presence of justice and equity, respect for rights and the Earth. Peace is an essential element for the realisation of all human rights. It is also a product of human rights and is increasingly being recognised as a human right itself, as an emerging right or part of the so-called solidarity rights (Maketo, 2019). Domestic peace therefore means tranquility and mutual respect within a household, where all members coexist without violence or fear. It is not just the absence of conflict but also the presence of positive interactions, love, care, and a sense of security among family members.

Domestic peace is fundamental to the mental, emotional, and physical well-being of individuals. A peaceful home environment fosters a sense of security, love, and belonging, which are essential for healthy development. Children raised in peaceful homes are more likely to develop positive social skills, emotional stability, and resilience against adversity. Exposure to domestic violence can indeed have severe consequences on individuals, particularly children. According to recent studies, domestic violence exposure can lead to various negative outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and aggressive behavior (WHO Violence Prevention Unit, 2 September, 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) also climaxes the reflective effect of domestic violence on women's physical, mental, and reproductive health. Globally, about 1 in 3 women have experienced physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime (WHO on Violence Against Women). According to American Psychological Association, September 14, 2023), intimate partner violence occurs across age, ethnic, gender, and economic lines, among persons with disabilities, and among both heterosexual and same-sex couples.

The effects of domestic peace extend beyond the household. Peaceful homes contribute to the formation of peaceful communities. Individuals who experience domestic peace are more likely to engage positively with others, participate in community activities, and contribute to social

harmony. The stability of households is therefore critical for the overall peace and stability of communities and nations. Several factors contribute to the achievement and maintenance of domestic peace, effective communication, emotional support, economic stability, and shared responsibilities. Moreover, domestic peace can be challenged by several factors such as domestic violence, substance abuse, economic hardship and cultural and societal norms. Therefore, by promoting effective communication, providing emotional and economic support, and strengthening legal protections, societies can foster environments where domestic peace can thrive, leading to healthier, more stable communities.

Community Peace

Community peace is the bedrock of a stable and prosperous society. It transcends the absence of conflict, encompassing the presence of justice, equality, and harmonious relationships among community members. This concept is critical in diverse societies where different ethnic, religious, and social groups coexist. Understanding community peace requires a multidimensional approach, considering the social, economic, political, and cultural factors that influence peacebuilding efforts. Community peace can be defined as a state of mutual harmony, respect, and cooperation among members of a community, characterized by the absence of violent conflict and the presence of conditions that allow all individuals to thrive. According to Mike J. Marketho (2019) in reviewing the work of Lederach (1997), peace is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of conditions that ensure the well-being of individuals and communities. This definition highlights the proactive nature of peace, emphasizing the need for positive relationships and social justice. The significance of community peace cannot be overstated. It forms the foundation for sustainable development, social cohesion, and the overall well-being of a society. As Pathak, B. (2024) in his review of Galtung (1969) work posits, peace at the community level is a prerequisite for national and global peace. A peaceful community enables individuals to pursue their aspirations, contribute to the common good, and resolve conflicts through non-violent means. Achieving community peace requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of conflict (which includes domestic violence) and promotes social justice. Community peace is a dynamic and ongoing process that requires the collective efforts of all stakeholders. It is not just the absence of conflict but the presence of conditions that foster harmony, equality, and justice. For communities to thrive, peace must be actively pursued and maintained through dialogue,

education, economic empowerment, and respect for diversity. As societies become increasingly interconnected, the importance of community peace as a foundation for global stability cannot be overlooked.

Understanding Domestic violence

Domestic violence encompasses a spectrum of abusive behaviors within intimate partner relationships. It can manifest physically, emotionally, verbally, sexually, and financially. This violence can be episodic or chronic, leaving victims feeling isolated, powerless, and constantly on edge (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2023). The impact of domestic violence extends beyond the immediate victims, affecting children, extended families, and the wider community (Hutton & Stark, 2017). It breeds a climate of fear and insecurity, hindering social trust and cooperation (Felson & Messner, 2018). Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. It is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behavior that is only a fraction of a systematic pattern of dominance and control (National Domestic Violence Hotline. (2012).

Domestic violence among Intimate partner

Domestic violence is a universal issue that affects societies worldwide, with Nigeria being no exception. This menace has been a common phenomenon affecting Nigeria and has exhibited an increment in occurrence over the decades. In his report, (Ogundare, 2023) observed that domestic violence is a major public health problem that affects millions of people and often results in physical and emotional injuries and deaths and that nations around the world have risen to this challenge by putting in place legislation to champion the fight against domestic violence which includes policy formulations, planning, awareness, justice for victims, and prosecution of persecutors. This silent pandemic continues to erode the social fabric of Nigeria, hindering progress and leaving countless individuals, particularly women and children, traumatised and suffering. According to a 2019 survey by the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, 30% of Nigerian women aged 15-49 have experienced physical violence, while a shocking 68% have encountered emotional, economic, or sexual abuse. These figures are undoubtedly underreported, as survivors often face various barriers in seeking help, including cultural stigmas, fear of retribution, and a lack of trust in the legal system. Causes of domestic violence in Nigeria are deeply rooted in multiple factors, including gender inequality, harmful cultural practices, poverty,

and lack of education (Efefairoro, 2023). According to the report of Mbilinyi *et al* (2023), Intimate partner violence (IPV) affects a substantial proportion of individuals in the United States. One-third of women living in the U.S. (36.4%, 43.6 million) have endured sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking perpetrated by an intimate partner (National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey, Smith *et al.,* 2018), with preliminary evidence of rates increasing by 12–20% in recent years due to stay-at-home orders required by the COVID-19 pandemic (Bourgault *et al*., 2021; Kofman & Garfin, 2020; Kourti *et al*., 2021). Intimate Partner Violence adversely affects the victim's health and well-being (Bacchus *et al*., 2018; Campbell *et al*., 2018; Laskey *et al*., 2019; Spencer *et al*., 2019; Stubbs & Szoeke, 2021), the abuser's well-being and legal status, as well as children's well-being, growth, and parental attachment.

Most common domestic violence

Physical Abuse – this includes hitting - punching, striking with a fist or object; slapping - striking with an open hand; pushing - using physical force to move someone; choking - restricting airflow by compressing the neck; restraining - holding someone against their will

Physical abuse can cause physical harm, injury, and even death. It can also lead to emotional trauma, fear, and anxiety.

Emotional Abuse - Name-calling: using derogatory terms or insults**;** belittling - making someone feel inferior or worthless**;** humiliation - embarrassing or degrading someone**; t**hreats - intimidating or threatening harm**.** Emotional abuse has been observed to erode a person's self-esteem, confidence, and sense of identity. It can lead to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Verbal Abuse – Yelling - loud, aggressive speech**; s**creaming - loud, high-pitched speech**;** using derogatory language - using offensive or demeaning words**; v**erbal abuse can be just as harmful as physical abuse, causing emotional distress, anxiety, and fear.

Sexual Abuse - Forced sexual activity - non-consensual sexual acts**;** sexual coercion - pressuring or manipulating someone into sexual acts**;** sexual assault - non-consensual touching or penetration**.** Sexual abuse can cause physical harm, emotional trauma, and long-term psychological damage.

Economic Abuse - controlling access to finances - restricting access to money or resources**;** controlling employment: limiting job opportunities or career advancement**;** controlling education: restricting access to education or personal development

Economic abuse can limit a person's independence, autonomy, and financial security. It can lead to feelings of trappedness and hopelessness.

It has been observed that domestic violence is a pattern of behaviour used to exert power and control over a partner. Hence, it is advisable that those experiencing domestic violence, should seek help and support.

The nexus between domestic violence and community peace

The nexus between domestic violence and community peace is complex and bidirectional:

- Domestic violence can disrupt community peace in the following ways: spills over into public spaces, affecting community dynamics; creates fear, anxiety, and mistrust among community members; can lead to community conflict and violence; undermines community cohesion and social bonds; can perpetuate cycles of violence and trauma.
- Fostering community peace can prevent domestic violence in the following ways: strong social bonds and support networks can reduce isolation and vulnerability; community norms and values that promote respect and equality can discourage domestic violence; access to community resources and services can support survivors and hold perpetrators accountable; community-based initiatives can promote healthy relationships and conflict resolution skills
- Moreover, community peace can be rebuilt after domestic violence: community-based initiatives can provide support and resources for survivors; community engagement and participation can help rebuild trust and social cohesion; community-based accountability mechanisms can address perpetrator behaviour and promote justice; community-led restorative justice approaches can facilitate healing and reparation.

The authors observed that by recognizing the nexus between domestic violence and community peace, it is possible to work towards creating safer, more supportive communities for all. This will in turn aid in achieving the SDG 16 – "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive Institutions at all levels". In particular, SDG 16.1 says "Reduce violence everywhere' - significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere".

Counselling Approaches for Domestic Violence

There is no single, definitive approach to counselling for domestic violence. Effective interventions often utilize a combination of strategies tailored to the specific needs of the victim and their situation (Davies & Lowe, 2008). Some of the most prevalent counselling approaches include:

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Cognitive Behavioural Therapy focuses on identifying and modifying negative thought patterns and behaviors associated with abusive relationships (Beck, 1995). Victims learn to recognize and challenge distorted thinking that fuels self-blame or minimizes the abuse (Foa et al., 2009). Additionally, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy equips victims with coping skills to manage stress and emotions effectively, reducing vulnerability to abuse (Foa et al., 2009).

Psychodynamic Therapy: This approach delves deeper, exploring the underlying psychological factors that may contribute to the abusive dynamic (Davies & Lowe, 2008). By examining past experiences and attachment styles, victims can gain a better understanding of their vulnerabilities and develop healthier relationship patterns (Davies & Lowe, 2008).

Trauma-Focused Therapy: Domestic violence is a deeply traumatic experience, and trauma-focused therapy can be vital in helping victims heal and move forward. Techniques such as Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) can help victims process traumatic memories and reduce their emotional impact (Shapiro, 2018).

Couples Therapy: In certain cases, couples therapy, when conducted by a qualified professional with expertise in domestic violence, can be a valuable tool. However, it is crucial to ensure victim safety and avoid placing blame on the victim (Stith et al., 2009). This therapy can be used to help a non-abusive partner understand the dynamics of abuse and develop healthier communication and conflict resolution skills (Stith et al., 2009).

Strengths and Limitations of Counselling Approaches

Each counselling approach possesses unique strengths and limitations in addressing domestic violence. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy's focus on practical coping mechanisms empowers victims to manage their immediate safety and navigate the aftermath of abuse (Foa et al., 2009). Psychodynamic therapy offers valuable insights into the root causes of abusive patterns, fostering long-term healing (Davies & Lowe, 2008). Trauma-focused therapy is crucial for addressing the psychological impact of abuse and promoting post-traumatic growth (Shapiro, 2018).

However, all approaches have limitations. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, while effective in teaching coping skills, might not address the deeper emotional wounds inflicted by domestic violence (Foa et al., 2009). Psychodynamic therapy can be a lengthy process, requiring significant commitment from the victim (Davies & Lowe, 2008). Couples therapy, if not conducted with utmost caution, can be re-traumatizing for the victim and may not be appropriate in all situations (Stith *et al*., 2009).

Counselling and Family/Community Peace

The question remains: can counselling approaches truly be a panacea for family and community peace? The answer is complex and multifaceted. While these interventions cannot single-handedly eradicate domestic violence, they can contribute significantly to a more peaceful social fabric (Campbell & Swain, 2019). By empowering victims, fostering healthy relationship dynamics, and promoting a zero-tolerance attitude towards violence, counselling can create a ripple effect of positive change.

Effective counselling can:

1. **Empower victims:** Counselling equips victims with the tools and resources to leave abusive relationships and build safer lives (Davies & Lowe, 2009). This reduces the number of individuals living in fear and insecurity, contributing to a more peaceful community. Studies have shown a correlation between increased help-seeking behavior amongst victims and a decrease in overall community violence rates Shorey, R. C.*et al*, (2014).
2. **Reduce recidivism:** By addressing the underlying causes of violence, counselling can help prevent abusers from repeating their behavior (Hutton *et al*., 2009). This not only protects future victims within and outside the family unit, but also contributes to a safer environment for everyone. Programs that combine individual therapy for abusers with anger management and accountability measures have shown promising results in reducing recidivism rates Satyen, L. *et al* (2022).
3. **Shift Societal Attitudes:** As more individuals seek and benefit from counselling, it can normalize mental health support and challenge the stigma associated with seeking help (Norris & Sandberg, 2014). This fosters a culture of open communication and reduces tolerance for abusive behavior within society. Increased public awareness campaigns that

highlight the effectiveness of counselling for domestic violence can further encourage help-seeking behavior and challenge societal norms that condone violence.

Beyond Counselling: A Multifaceted Approach

While counselling offers a powerful tool for addressing domestic violence and promoting community peace, it is crucial to recognize that it is not a standalone solution. A multifaceted approach is necessary to tackle this complex issue effectively.

It may be expedient to strengthen legal frameworks and law enforcement to ensure safety and orderliness in the community. Clear and enforceable laws against domestic violence, coupled with a well-resourced and trained law enforcement system, are essential in deterring violence and holding perpetrators accountable, Satyen, L. *et al* (2022).

Provision of social support system may be necessary to savage the victim. Safe shelters, support groups, and access to affordable housing can provide crucial resources and a safety net for victims seeking to leave abusive relationships (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2023).

The necessity of early intervention and prevention cannot be overemphasised. Community-based programs that address healthy relationship dynamics, gender equality, and conflict resolution skills amongst youth can have a significant preventative impact on future domestic violence rates (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Domestic violence remains a pervasive societal issue with devastating consequences. However, counselling approaches offer a beacon of hope, empowering victims, fostering healthier relationships, and promoting a culture of non-violence. By integrating counselling interventions within a broader framework of legal, social, and preventative measures, communities can move closer to achieving the ideal of peace. Further research is necessary to explore the long-term efficacy of different counselling approaches within diverse cultural contexts. Additionally, continued efforts are required to ensure wider accessibility and affordability of counselling services for victims of domestic violence. By prioritizing mental health support and fostering a collaborative approach, we can work towards creating safer and more peaceful communities for

all. Promoting domestic peace and mitigating domestic violence requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of conflict and fosters a supportive, respectful household environment. Therefore, the writer recommends the following:

- **Counselling and Therapy:** Family counseling and therapy can help address underlying issues within the household, improve communication, and provide strategies for conflict resolution. These services are particularly important for families dealing with domestic violence, substance abuse, or significant stress.
- **Education and Awareness:** Educating individuals about the importance of domestic peace and providing them with the tools to achieve it is crucial. This can include education on conflict resolution, effective communication, and the impacts of domestic violence.
- **Economic Support Programmes:** Providing economic support to families in need can help alleviate financial stress and reduce the likelihood of conflict over resources. This can include access to affordable housing, healthcare, and job opportunities.
- **Legal Protections:** Strengthening legal protections against domestic violence and ensuring that victims have access to support services is critical. Putting laws that protect individuals from domestic abuse and provide recourse for those affected are essential for maintaining domestic peace.

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