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Domestic violence and victimization of men in Ivorian society

Jean-Claude N'GUIA

Université Jean Lorougnon Guédé de Daloa, Côte d'Ivoire

Corresponding Author: Jean-Claude N'GUIA

Abstract

The best-known and most denounced form of domestic violence is that perpetrated against women. However, the parallel phenomenon of domestic violence against men in Ivorian society is poorly known or misunderstood. The reality of violence against men in the home persists, and it is a major social problem in Côte d'Ivoire. This study, therefore, focuses on the other side of the domestic violence problem concerning men. It will attempt to shed light on this taboo, complex and unknown phenomenon. For the

purposes of this study on women's violence against men, all voluntary or involuntary acts affecting a man's life or his physical and mental integrity are addressed. Through a qualitative approach, this article will highlight the different realities faced by men affected by domestic violence, through a global analysis that integrates not only personal and interpersonal factors but also social and structural factors, in particular oppressive societies linked to gender or other identity markers.

Keywords: Victimisation, Violence, Man, Woman, Spouse, Cote D'ivoire

1. Introduction

Most of the literature on violence deals with situations where the abuser is male and the victim is female. At the United Nations, the issue of violence against women is high on the list of priorities for action and gross human rights violations. A United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted by the General Assembly in 1993, and its provisions have been incorporated into the domestic law of several countries through specific laws on violence against women.

Admitting that he is a battered man or a victim of domestic violence is particularly difficult for a man because it undermines his identity as the strong and protective man that Ivorian society has given him. In the beginning, like any person confronted with a problem that deeply disturbs him, male victims of domestic violence tend to avoid this reality. In M. P. Johnson's (2008; 2013, pp. 15-32.)^[5, 6] theoretical model of domestic violence, three correspond to the reality of Ivorian society. These include:

- Intimate terrorism, which defines violence as the logic of power and control of one spouse over the other;
- Resistance to violence refers to violence inflicted by victims to resist or protect themselves from coercive control;
- In the dynamics of marital conflict, one or both spouses are more or less likely to engage in situational violence.

The presence of coercive control clearly characterizes the first two types, while the third type is less so. For E. Stark (2013, pp. 33-52.)^[10], coercive control includes physical aggression, but it is primarily psychological in nature and includes two broad categories of strategies:

- Coercion corresponding to aggression, intimidation, harassment, threats, and humiliation;
- Potential control, isolation, deprivation, apathy, exploitation, imposition of rules, and use of children (P. Romito, 2011, pp. 87-105; E. Stark, 2013, OPC)^[9, 10].

This notion allows us to look beyond violence alone. Firstly, focusing only on uncontrollable acts of violence contributes to increasing the tolerance of victims and other social actors (workers, judges) for acts of violence that are considered 'acceptable'.

Moreover, women victims of post-separation emotional abuse rarely condemn the violence (P. Romito, 2011, OPC)^[9] because they fear not being believed or being accused of alienating their parents (H. Johnson and M. Dawson, 2011; P. Romito, 2011, OPC)^[7, 9]. Secondly, the tendency to assess the severity of domestic violence by focusing primarily on acts of severe physical violence leads to a timeless reading of the problem, which does not take into account or minimize the severity of the violence when the victim presents no apparent harm but does so subject to compulsory time control (E. Stark, 2013, OPC)^[10]. However, coercive control is considered the most pernicious type of violence, as it further develops violent escalation after division, death threats, and coercive behaviors (J. A. Beck and C. Raghavon, 2010^[1], cited in E. Stark, 2013, pp. 555-565.^[10]).

Coercive control, including stalking, is a factor associated with the risk of spousal homicide in divorce (J. C. Campbell *et al.*, 2007, pp. 246-269; M. Dubé and C. Drouin, 2013; S. Léveillé and J. Lefebvre, 2010; D. L. Wilkinson and S. J. Hamerschlag, 2005, pp. 333-361) [2, 3, 8, 11]. This understanding of domestic violence for men needs to be contextualized by reference to the social sciences. Male and female identities are historical and social because they can only be understood through the study of society. In the Ivorian collective imagination, it seems that only women can be victims of violence. It is true that there are abused women, and this must obviously be dealt with, but men who are subjected to domestic violence are not immune, and Ivorian society is slow to recognize this.

Coercive control, particularly stalking, is a factor associated with the dangers of spousal or family homicide in divorce (J. C. Campbell *et al.*, 2007, OPC; M. Dubé and C. Drouin, 2013; S. Léveillé and J. Lefebvre, 2010; D. L. Wilkinson and S. J. Hamerschlag, 2005) [2, 4, 8, 11].

The understanding of this issue of domestic violence against men must be situated in the current context with reference to the social sciences. Male and female identities are historical and social, as they can only be understood through the study of society. In the Ivorian collective imagination, only women seem to be victims of violence. It is true that women who are victims of violence do exist and this problem must obviously be dealt with, but men who are victims of domestic violence are not spared and Ivorian society is slow to become aware of this. The organization of Ivorian society is based on social relations between the sexes, in which men are perceived as dominant rather than as victims. Ivorian society is built on the stereotype of the weak and defenseless woman and the strong man who must protect her. In general, men and women perceive violence differently. For example, a small child or a man who is a bit of a fighter is the norm, *hais* 'a boy'. A little girl or a woman who struggles with the label "failed girl". Among other things, the human role is to be responsible, courageous, admirable, in control of the situation, and to suffer the pain of being punished and sanctioned. Moreover, in Côte d'Ivoire, the collective imagination functions in a bipolar manner, conditioned by the notion of good and evil.

It, therefore, seems quite normal to have a victim, the woman, and a culprit, the man. It is a human problem, not a gendered one. Violence, therefore, seems to be a social phenomenon whose causes are rather socio-economic. Men who are victims of domestic violence find it difficult to accept their new identity as victims and society has difficulty recognizing them as such. It is only recently that society has had a right to look at the intimate sphere and in particular at domestic violence. Previously, what happened there was the couple's business; it was a matter of their private life and the problems encountered had to be resolved by themselves. Today, the problem of domestic violence is a public matter, recognized and punished by law. But for many, it still means interfering in the private life of the couple and passing judgment on their relationship.

The ignorance and negligence of violence inflicted on men are obvious. We must never forget that men can also be victims of violence. For the purposes of the national survey on violence against men by women, it is a question of providing evidence of the existence of this phenomenon in Ivorian society. In order to understand this taboo, we will go back to the roots of male-female relations in Ivorian

society's brief history. We will then discuss the characteristics of domestic violence specifically directed toward men and its consequences. Our work consisted of meeting actors who are closely or remotely involved in our problem in order to better understand it in its globality and complexity. We also looked at the existing networks, their roles, their goals, and their limits. In this perspective, we consulted various members of the community, whether they were health or social professionals, associations, or simple inhabitants.

2. Reasons why women do not report violence against men

2.1 Male-female relationships

The characteristic of the different types of domestic violence against men seems to focus on the places of male achievement in the public and private domain. In contrast to domestic violence against women which takes place mainly within the family, where women play the role of housewife, violence against men can move outside the home, into the public sphere, the environment of their social role. This attack on the public sphere obviously has repercussions in the private sphere.

In the public sphere, the woman seeks to reduce her husband's social ties as much as possible in order to isolate him completely, which feeds his suffering, since as Karl Marx said, "man is social or he is not". This social isolation protects and maintains the violent relationship in the couple. On the other hand, a man's work plays a very important role in his development. It gives him the opportunity to fulfill himself in a sphere other than that of the couple. The wife is aware of this and will infiltrate this environment, risking the man's professional identity and his place at work. This violence can be indirect, by denigrating his skills. Faced with this situation, the man is often obliged to reveal his life as a couple so as not to lose his professional credibility. He finds himself managing his marital role and his professional role at the same time, which is conflicting. By seeking to weaken the man's professional role, the woman is also jeopardizing her husband's position as head of the family and his authority. The private sphere is also affected by this. The attacks in the private sphere are directed at the various roles that the man occupies within the family. The role of lover, for example, is where the woman may refuse to have sex, which for some men is the greatest possible dishonor and frustration. These unfulfilling sexual relationships contribute to the lowering of the man's self-esteem as the woman questions his seductive power and virility. The role of the partner is also affected. The woman no longer recognizes and respects her partner, to the point of using him as her 'handyman'. For example, she entrusts him with household chores, underlining his incompetence with criticism and blame.

In our society, work allows the man to breathe and decompress when he comes home. The woman usually does a lot of the housework. Reversing these roles diminishes the value of the man's work, interest, and consideration. The man, therefore, feels humiliated and not valued. Some women even go so far as to make their husbands hit them so that they can position themselves as victims in the eyes of society. As a result, the man becomes his own danger and fears his behavior. Finally, the father's role is extremely weakened in these conflictual relationships. The man very often stays in the family world because of the children, for

fear of losing them if he leaves. Most of the time, the woman tries to destroy the father-child relationship and cut the emotional ties. This is enormous suffering for these fathers who always feel powerless and as if they have been "amputated" from their role.

As we have just seen, this violence, whatever it may be, is aimed at attacking and demolishing men in the roles they play in society and the family. There is specific violence for each role that man occupies. He is a social being and domestic violence is not limited to the private sphere, but also aims at destabilizing his professional identity and social environment. Society has its share of responsibility, as man is subjected to mockery and disbelief. Due to social representations "being beaten invalidates the man in his belonging to the social category "man", which never happens when the woman is a victim of the man, her social status of "woman" not being affected".

2.2 Male victims of domestic violence

The accumulation of suffering is favored by a set of means that the man puts in place, not as a decided and reflected strategy but rather in an unconscious or partially conscious way to escape the recognition of this reality. Denial is one of the avoidance strategies.

Like any person confronted with a problem that deeply disturbs him, the male victim of domestic violence tends to avoid this reality. By over-investing in areas outside the couple (in particular the professional sphere), he escapes the confrontation of this reality. This also allows him to be respected, valued, and recognized in his work when he is no longer respected by his partner. In other cases, the man minimizes or trivializes the seriousness of the violence committed by his wife.

There is a further step to be taken from self-recognition to public identification as a male victim of domestic violence. Above all, it is the weight of shame that seals the silence and isolation of these men, like a layer of concrete. Indeed, a man who shows himself to be weak and abused by his wife is immediately stigmatized. Their shame is therefore the result of the contradiction between what they need to be in order to be socially recognized and the identity that is attributed to them. It damages their self-esteem and makes them more vulnerable.

The man's feelings for his wife complicate the situation. He is faced with a conflict of loyalties: breaking the silence to get out of his condition also means betraying a dear and loved person. Moreover, guilt plays a role in this silence. The man has the impression that he is also "to blame" for not having been able to set limits.

When the man is also a father, the relationship with the children is an additional issue that pushes the partner to continue the marital relationship. Even if declaring oneself a battered man does not necessarily imply divorce, it opens the door to this solution. At present, in these situations, the father's voice is difficult to hear in the face of the mother. This consideration is all the more important because the father's voice is not heard. This consideration is all the more important if the woman is psychologically abusive towards the man by manipulating the opinion of others towards him, by accusing him of beating, her, or committing pedophile acts towards their children.

3. Characteristics of the types and origins of violence against men by women

3.1 Origins of violence against men

The immediate causes identified are social, economic, and moral. They include jealousy, malice, dishonesty, the impulsive nature of women, poverty, lack of dialogue and education, the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure and material goods, alcoholism and the use of drugs and narcotics, and the desire for domination or female leadership. Another particular cause is the failure of the man to respect his commitments to the woman, especially the duty of fidelity. The exogenous causes are due to the desire of women to assert themselves in society by all means, in the political context of the overflowing promotion of women and the women's movement, which has taken on an extraordinary ascendancy within Ivorian society.

3.2 Characteristics of violence against men

Violence against men occurs in all walks of life. In public places, workplaces, places of entertainment, the streets, schools, churches, homes, and neighborhoods. It is accentuated during periods of crisis, particularly the loss of a husband's job, at the end of the year, and during periods of celebration. The violence recorded among the population studied takes several forms and is sometimes combined with each other.

- Verbal violence: this includes loud voices, shouting and screaming, and gossip. It is also a soft voice used to make threats, insults, or sarcasm. The language may be vulgar and abusive, and the words may express mockery or criticism with the intention of hurting the person targeted.

- Physical violence is expressed by punching, kicking, slapping, hitting with a club, mortar or pot... any physical coercion of one person on another, any physical abuse with the aim of control, such as shaking, confining, smashing against a wall, burning.

It is the most visible form of violence. It is manifested by gestures and leaves visible traces. There are two forms of physical violence: minor and severe. Actions such as shoving, pushing, grabbing, or slapping, which are unlikely to cause significant pain or injury, belong to the first form of violence. Severe forms are those assaults that have a high risk of causing serious injury or pain: choking, kicking, hitting with an object, beating, or using a knife or gun.

Story: "My wife beat me every day

Tall, well-built, cultured, and athletic, I don't really fit the profile of a man likely to be a victim of violence from a woman. Our story got off to a flying start. It was a perfect match for us. I thought I had finally found the rare pearl, the woman who would give me the string of children I had always dreamed of. So I was delighted when I found out that my partner was pregnant after six months of being together. I was convinced that this was the beginning of long-lasting happiness. But unfortunately, the idyllic image of a united family was soon shattered.

From one day to the next, my partner's behavior changed completely. I felt as if I had another person in front of me. The charming, smiling young woman I knew had given way to a stranger prone to mood swings. The birth of our son seemed to have changed her. Understanding that the first

few weeks with an infant are exhausting, I helped her as best I could, including getting up at night to take the child to bed for feedings.

After her three months of maternity leave, my partner returned to work with relief. I hoped that getting back to a normal rhythm would allow us to regain our early harmonious relationship. But the situation did not improve, the contrary. In the evenings, she was aggressive with me, making derogatory remarks and ordering me around as if I were her stooge. I was very disturbed by this change in attitude. Was I discovering her true personality?

I began to dread Friday nights, as I knew she would look for an excuse to escalate and end up in an argument. A tense weekend followed, with me trying to calm things down as best I could. The threats of separation became more and more frequent. I resisted, as I did not want to be separated from my son, who was barely one year old. My partner confidently said to me: "I am a woman, the law is on my side". And she knew very well what she was talking about, as she was employed in a law firm.

One day, in a fit of anger, my partner simply threw me out of the house. Before I could walk out the door, she kicked me. I was stunned. This physical violence was repeated several times. I was slapped and punched, but I never fought back. Because it is not in my education nor in my principles to violate a woman. Once, my partner threw herself at me and hit me in front of our child. I was very shocked that she dared to do that in front of him. It was out of the question for me that he should witness this kind of scene. I realized then that the separation was inevitable.

- Psychological or moral violence: it is belittling, denigrating, or diminishing the person. It is also manipulating, making the person lose self-confidence, and threatening, intimidating, and corrupting behavior. It is carried out in an underhand and insidious manner through gestures, postures, looks, and words with the aim of hurting, humiliating, or controlling the person emotionally.

- Sexual abuse: treating a person, regardless of age or sex, as a sexual object, forcing them to participate in sexual activities against their will, forcing them to watch pornographic material... It is intended to satisfy a sexual need against the person's will. Rape and incest are manifestations of this, as are sexual harassment and sexual slavery.

- Economic violence: is being prevented from having money or buying goods, being forced to beg for even the most basic things, having one's salary or any other form of income taken away. It is intended to increase the victim's dependence or to reinforce their status as inferior or irresponsible. In the workplace, it is the refusal of a promotion, or a holiday, threats of dismissal, and making the victim do extra work without pay.

- Ritual violence: these are rites, occult and mystical practices that tend to possess the spirit of man, to control and dominate his psychic activity. This is the case of bewitchment and witchcraft.

Story: "I bewitched my husband, but..."

I am a woman, a 38-year-old widow, and a mother of 3 children. A few years ago, I was legally married. At that time of my life, I was the happiest woman. My husband and

I were in love, we were doing well as a couple. Whenever my husband was away on a trip, he would call to check up on me every day.

But at some point, these habits changed. He didn't call me like before. Even when I call him, he says he is busy or "I will call you back". I didn't understand his attitude anymore. He would say the same thing every time, accusing me of being too suspicious, jealous, and selfish. I thought it was all my fault. So I optimized, telling myself that everything would be all right. But nothing did. My husband seemed increasingly distant from me. He was only interested in his work. And that's when I started to think about all the ways I could win my man back. Because I felt lost. The worst thing was that I wasn't getting anything from him like before. I wanted to do everything I could to get him back to me and back to the way he used to be. At first, I didn't believe in the stories of maraboutism myself. But things started to get worse.

So one day I decided to meet a fetishist to intervene in my home so that my man would come back to me. This mystic prescribed some things that I did. Indeed, it worked. After 2 or 3 months, my husband came back as I wanted him to. A real passion was born between us, to the point where we hardly ever left each other. He accepted all my requests. Since then, everything has been fine between us. Almost every day my husband wanted me.

In the beginning, I didn't really measure the consequences of this passion. I was subjected to my husband's attacks almost every day. He became insatiable in bed. And I was wondering how to fix things because I couldn't take it anymore. So here we were, in a new situation that I hadn't anticipated. Some nights I didn't feel like it, I didn't feel anything, but my husband wanted more. He became like an animal in my hands and I did with him what I wanted.

In the end, I went back to the fetishist to explain what I was experiencing. I asked him to 'break' the spell. That's when, against all odds, he made a terrible prediction. He told me: "I see you as a widow in a while. Your husband will die. He will have an illness that will take him away in less than two years. This disease will go from his head to his feet. He has been the victim of an evil spell cast by one of his own family members. But I can't tell you more. It was a shock. I came out of the consultation completely shattered. Then I decided to go and see another person in the hope that she would tell me the opposite. She gave me exactly the same prediction. Of course, I had not told him anything about what the other fetishist had explained to me.

- Assassinations: murder committed with premeditation, the result of a plan formed by the perpetrator prior to the action of taking the lives of the victims.

4. Consequences of violence against men

The health consequences of domestic violence against women and children are mainly known. To our knowledge, there is no scientific study that deals with the association between domestic violence against men and the occurrence of specific health problems. However, the specialists we met agree that domestic violence against men has consequences on their health which can be situated at different levels: physiological, psychological, and social.

Even if the consequences on the man's physical health are less likely to be life-threatening, the fact that women are more likely to use knives is no less serious. According to the

experience of professionals and testimonies, the physical signs that can be found are hematomas, including the "black eye", wounds, scratches, fractures, internal lesions, burns, and scalp detachment. Alcohol and other substance abuse are very common.

The psychological after-effects of blackmail, threats, domination, or harassment are much more important and take much longer to heal than the physical blows and injuries they have received. Many of these men go through a long period of depression. Anxiety, panic attacks, and sleep disorders may also be present. Some men, pushed to the limit and unable to ask for and find help, may attempt suicide.

The consequences identified among the populations surveyed are multiple. Hurt, anger, disability, paralysis, trauma, disappointment, shame, ruin, separation, death, abandonment of home, alcoholism, hatred of women, slavery of men, dislocation of the family unit, delinquency of children, sexual vagrancy, subordination of men over women. These degrading and cruel effects constitute serious violations of human rights that must be denounced, condemned, and fought, whatever the causes. The survey also shows links between violence against men by women and violence against women. Indeed, in most cases, 60% of verbal violence against men often leads to reactions from the latter which also infringe on women's rights. These consequences are limiting factors in the development of men and considerably reduce their life expectancy. Violence, shame, and taboo lead to withdrawal and loss of social ties. There may also be difficulties at work through absenteeism or a reduction in concentration in times of crisis. All of this has consequences for the social health of the individual, which can lead to unemployment or even job insecurity, thereby further weakening the health of the male victim of domestic violence.

5. Conclusion

Violence against men occurs in all areas of life. In public places, workplaces, places of entertainment, streets, homes, and communities. It is even more pronounced in times of crisis, especially when the spouse is unemployed, during the festive season, and during important events such as birthdays.

In terms of typology, a distinction is made between verbal violence, psychological or moral violence, and physical violence (sexual violence, beatings, and injuries, ritual violence, etc.) - which can lead to crimes -, economic violence, and various forms of demonstration. The violence recorded within the populations studied is therefore numerous and configured in which, sometimes, several forms are combined.

The immediate causes are social, economic, and moral. These forms of violence against men are linked to jealousy, dishonesty, the impulsive nature of women, poverty, lack of dialogue and education, and the unbridled search for pleasure and material goods. Other factors of this violence are alcoholism, drug use, the desire for domination, or female leadership. In addition, the failure of a man to respect his commitments to his partner, particularly the failure to observe fidelity, is the fundamental cause of violence. The exogenous causes are due to the desire of women to assert themselves in society by all means, in the political context of the overflowing promotion of women

and the women's movement and of misunderstood positive discrimination.

Conjugal violence against men then impacts in some cases their health: physiological, psychological, and social relations. These consequences are factors of non-fulfillment of the man reducing considerably his life expectancy. But the feeling of shame and the taboo lead to the development of a withdrawal reflex and a loss of social links for men.

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