

Challenges Facing Women and Girls who have Opted to use Education as a Tool for Fighting Psycho-Social Violence

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Abstract

Review Article

While society has made strides in combating violence against women and girls over the years, there are still areas that need to be addressed especially with the forms of violence mutating from what has been common, i.e., physical. Stakeholders and especially in the academia have identified religion, patriarchy system, cultural and economic dependence as the main agents of violence against women. With these most scholars are of the view that women and girls need education so that they can fight these institutions as well as getting economic independence. Today, most women and girls have used education to redefine themselves, liberate themselves from oppressive institutions and assert themselves in different spheres of life. Though a large number of women have attained this status, the above mentioned institutions are now fighting back with different forms of violence that have left women broken psychologically and emotionally. Many women are frustrated by the same institutions that they have found themselves in, be it educational, religious, and legislative and even the family. While some women and girls who have acquired education face little or no violence at all, there is evidence that a large number of women and girls face some form of emotional and psychological violence due to their educational status and opportunities coming their way through the education they have acquired. This paper will try to look into how far education has been a tool of liberation and how much tools of oppression have found ways of using it to oppress women and girls. The paper will also try to come up with ways of overcoming this new challenge that nevertheless had not been foreseen. Accounts from women and girls who have undergone this form of violence will be used well as literature reviews from texts such as novels, short stories, plays, journals that have documented similar events and documentations from previous seminars on the same.

Keywords: society, Stakeholders, violence, women, education.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses violence against women and girls in their quest for their attainment of the basic human rights. It will deal specifically with how women and girls are using education to fight psychological violence, impediments, way forward and recommendations as well as a conclusion.

Education and psychological violence against women and girls

Women and girls all over the world regardless of their age, education or income are subjected to some form of violence [1]. Experiences show that these abuses can lead to physical, mental and emotional health problems. Though attitudes towards violence against girls and women are changing, the form of violence being experienced today is also mutating and taking different forms.

Most scholars, gender based groups have advocated for education as a tool that can be used in fighting gender based violence. Initially, most research done suggested that women and girls have suffered a lot through patriarchy systems, religion as well as crooked legislation. However today, with most women having acquired education and the levels of awareness having multiplied, psychological violence has been on the rise, especially among women who have acquired higher education [2].

Women and girls have therefore found themselves on the receiving end of this kind of violence and that married women or those in relationships have suffered most [2]. These findings also add that some of these women suffer from psychological and emotional abuse from relatives and close family members.

Cases of this form of violence have increased while cases of physical violence drop as a result of

increased awareness as well as the knowledge of those who perpetrate that violence that they may face prosecution or they would be frowned at, hence the option of psychological violence [3]. At the same time, most of these women have acquired economic dependence hence they are more likely to meet their needs and not be held at ransom by economic dependence [4]. Kremer and Sarychev [5] argue that education has become an impediment in liberation of women. That once women attain education, they are more likely to remain in abusive environments as they feel that a time will come when all will be done with, or alternatively, they will stay in such conditions, analyzing situations, seeking guidance and sometimes, because of their success in academics and economic independence, they opt to remain in such situations to save their faces, especially when they are unable to shake off cultural habits.

Bowles and Gintis [6], while giving the example of the USA adds that, "U.S. education reinforces the class structure by training citizens to obey authority within the hierarchical modern corporation." According to Bowles and Gintis, education is an impediment as it forces individuals to obey author that includes the patriarchy system.

In the words of Peter Adamson [7], "Education erodes resignation and substitutes for it a degree of confidence, an awareness of choice, a belief that decisions can be made, circumstances changed and life improved". According to Peter Adamson, education is a liberating tool that can be used in the fight against psychological violence across the globe.

According to the UN, Psychological violence includes a range of behaviors that encompasses acts of emotional abuse and controlling behavior. Examples of behaviors that fall within the definition of psychological violence include emotional abuse and controlling behavior [2]. The same UN report says that there is Emotional abuse, where insults are used to make a woman or a girl feel bad, humiliated and belittled before others, deliberately scaring or intimidating her, threatening to hurt her or others she cares about.

There is also the controlling behavior whereby there is isolation of a woman by preventing her from seeing family or friends, monitoring her whereabouts and social interactions, ignoring her or treating her indifferently, getting angry if she speaks with other men, making unwarranted accusations of infidelity, controlling her access to health care, education or the labour market [2].

According to the [8], psychological abuse includes any act intended to denigrate, isolate, or dominate a partner. Emotional abuse is intended to control victims by limiting resources and social contacts; creating actual and emotional dependence; and

reducing victims' sense of self-worth, competence, and value.

The convention's findings also assert that Emotional maltreatment can include verbal abuse, such as insults, unrelenting criticism, ridicule, name calling, discounting and discrediting; isolation of the victim; constant personal devaluation; stalking; public humiliation; control of social and family contacts; denial of access to finances or transportation; demonstration of extreme jealousy and possessiveness; the monitoring of behavior; accusations of infidelity; threats of harm to the victim's family, children, or friends; threats of abandonment or infidelity; and damage to or destruction of personal property.

Stalking is a common form of psychological intimidation, and is most often perpetrated by former or current intimate partners. Victims tend to feel their partner has nearly total control over them, greatly affecting their power in a relationship, hence, empowering the perpetrator and disempowering the victim. Victims often suffer from depression, putting them at increased risk of eating disorders, suicide and drug and alcohol abuse [9].

This has been heightened by the fact that social media has made such women and girls more vulnerable. Most of the time, people use social media such as facebook, twitter, instagram, viber, and blogs that nevertheless are populist to portray women and girls in bad light. Such messages and information that also include pictures if in public light may cause a lot of psychological torture that may result in the victim knowing that someone is privy to secret social life.

According to WHO [10], "Technology such as the internet and mobile phones, and its increased use by children and young people represent a significant medium through which [VAWG] is expressed and propagated. For example, the so-called 'sexting' can make it possible for a sexually explicit image to be shared with a large group of people (including peers), at the touch of a button. As stated in the Beijing Platform for Action 1995, "Images in the media of violence against women, as well as the use of women and girls as sex objects, including pornography, are factors contributing to the continued prevalence of such violence [VAWG], adversely influencing the community at large, in particular children and young people [11]."

This brings to the fore the aspect of legislation, many times hearsay gets into media and rumors spread but not a single person is held accountable, women and girls will tend to use the same avenue to dispel the lies but the damage withstands. At the same point, no one will believe a second account that is being presented by the victim. Crooked legislation put in place by no means helps little in assisting their case. Today many

women are likely to face more and more tribulations in the hands of bloggers, people they are with in relations as well as close associates because there is a likelihood that they might not face any prosecution or they may not be held accountable by any authority. This fear runs through many women and hence psychological torture.

Such women will have their communications monitored, maybe through inferiority complex or otherwise. For example, observation of phone data, messages and calls, and for the affluent, there have been cases of women and girls being stalked by private detectives who will be out to find out the women's associates and their nature. In fact the real fear is the contact of the said victim and those from the outside world.

A report by the World Health Organization says that; "Undermining an individual's sense of self esteem can have serious mental and physical health consequences and has been identified as a major reason for suicide. For some women, the incessant insults and tyrannies which constitute emotional abuse which may be more painful than the physical attacks because they effectively undermine women's security and self-confidence" [12].

The reason why this paper has centered on psychological violence is that it is the most practiced, less researched on and can take a lifetime, that is, a person can be abused for as long as possible without detection or deterrence from the concerned authorities. This paper will look into accounts of how girls and women are abused psychologically and way forward.

The issue of psychological violence has been documented both from researches as well as by literary artists who try to bring to fore this form of violence without necessarily mentioning or using people's names [2].

According to this report, psychological violence is more prevalent in women and girls aged between 15-49 years. Perhaps this is because these women are often in relationships and are prime for abuse by those close to them or those in their lives. The report carried across the world shows that Africa and Asia have the highest of cases that psychological violence has been reported. For example, the report on Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Tanzania, Egypt and Comoros show the violence prevalence stood at 40, 35, 33, 10 and 5% respectively. Here at home (Kenya), this form of violence stood at 30%. However, there are other places like the Comoros where the figures were not given. This is because the respondents did not understand what this form of violence is ICF International, 2014 [2].

From this figures it is evident that there is a lot of emotional anguish that the report suggests may lead

to untold sufferings from those who go through such. This is compounded by the fact that violence like beating of wives has dropped due to continued awareness and new forms of torturing women and girls have developed. Girls who are younger also face psychological violence especially in schools. Most of them face the prospects of being sexually abused; they are tortured because they are often torn between giving in and reporting people they respect so much. In this regard, some drop out of school or do not perform very well as they lack concentration and focus in their studies.

Shelah S. Bloom [13] says that the age bracket is so secretive and it is difficult to obtain information from them for fear of retribution especially if the information touches on someone who might reattribute them, they always feel at risk so they suffer psychologically. According to Bloom, in the US for example many girls tend to tell of their abuse many years later. Most of them mention of such abuse after they acquire so much independence. In other instances, they suffer these consequences for the whole of their lives.

According to Cook R [14], the sole purpose of psychological violence is to intimidate persecute, threaten and humiliate. He adds that women and girls who go through such forms of violence get mental breaks and can lead to suicide, to them it is like a blackmail incident and the only way they can get out of it is by ending their lives.

From a literary perspective for example, Imbuga in Aminata [15] has created a character Aminata, who, though successful and firm in her dealings has to endure torture from her ant Kezia who wonders how, after twelve years of marriage has only two children to show. She also has to content with ridicule from part of the society after she buys a coffin for her father, Pastor Ngoya. However Imbuga's character, Aminata does not break under the heavy weight of responsibility ahead of her unlike Ramatoulaye in Ba's so long a letter 1981 [16].

Ramatoulaye has to suffer psychological torture after her husband marries a second wife; the second wife has to share all she had with her after the death of her husband. However in this text, the author has created a character, Aissatou who offers a way out. She walks out of her marriage. In this regard, education is both a solution to her predicament and at the same time an instrument of oppression because some women and girls see it as the only way to solve things through reason, speaking out and waiting, which might be eternal. Ramatoulaye suffers this kind of abuse that only stops after her husband dies of heart failure. One weakness we see in Ramatoulaye is that she only seizes the opportunity after the death of her husband. One may

wonder why she did not speak up before or talk to her husband when he was still alive.

Psychologically, its double tragedy because things can no longer be reversed in both her aggrieved psychological endeavor as well as the loss of her husband. We see how religion as an agent isolates and dictates how women should conduct themselves. Though she is bereaved, there are no avenues that she might use to claim what is rightfully hers. She has to content with the situation at hand hence the torture. Through her education, she writes a letter to her friend Aissatou to confide in her. A letter is seen as a way of expressing herself or relieving her feelings, but is it enough? Does she expect replies? Will the replies be favorable? It is therefore not enough to say that women education is a liberating tool among women who have acquired it, however, it is a tool that helps highlight the plight of women and violence.

Ruganda [17] says characters like Aminata in Aminata are painted as moral degenerates by the society as they are seen as fighting them. Their intention is to disgrace them, like how Jumba does to Aminata. In the same line, her aunt Kezia says that aminata is a woman who has sold her womanhood and does not understand the purpose of marriage. However, unlike most of the violence perpetuated by women in relationships, Aminata enjoys the support of her husband who nevertheless helps her out of this torture.

This form of violence that discriminates women and girls is common because the women in question are still victims of cultural practices. For example women still bear the burden of having children and for example in African and Asian communities, women suffer more psychologically when value is attached to male children and it is difficult when a woman or girl, however successful she may be but professes to such cultures will nevertheless feel the pain and emotional breakdown that comes with such a situation. Bhatia [18] says that this discrimination was even transferred to the children, who in Bangladesh for example, girls were more malnourished because of their mothers and even missed proper Medicare as well as receive poor education.

Ramanamna [19] adds that women in the world undergo a lot of psychological tortures; they ponder how they would bear boy children. The emotional and psychological anguish would mortify as they ponder ways of getting the boy children by pondering how they would abort the girl child and even aftermath of the abortions. The fear of what might happen in the procurement of an abortion, if they would ever conceive again and if the conceived child would be a boy. In such a situation, most women suffer psychological violence, regardless of their educational status and economic status.

The same views can be found in Efuru [20], though she is a woman of noble birth, her inability to have children is frowned at in the community. This causes her a lot of psychological anguish and torture. She loses her previous charm and happiness because of the predicament of depression she finds herself in.

It is common to find a lot of research and literature on abuse directed at women and girls by men, spouses, institutions, societal norms as well as religion. These abuse reports and literature mostly feature physical abuse. There is however scant information on the issue of psychological abuse against women and girls. Lack of this information also leads to lack of information on the consequences of the same. There are little or no statistics on the same, however many women and girls, especially those who have acquired education have successfully waded of physical abuse and in its place there is psychological abuse.

Women and girls who have opted to use education as a tool for fighting violence against them tend to be at low risk of physical injury at the hands of their male partners, the most fruitful avenues to pursue in research exploring the effects of abuse against such women and girls are the psychological effects.

According to Follingstad, Wright, Lloyd, & Sebastian [21], Most of such women and girls suffer psychological consequences. Follingstad argues that, abused women normally show and experience fear and anxiety responses such as depression and stress. Stets & Straus [22] adds that such women and girls show psychosomatic symptoms and posttraumatic stress symptoms such as intrusive memories, psychogenic amnesia, sleep problems, eating problems, hyper vigilance to danger cues, exaggerated startle responses, irritability or anger responses and psychosomatic.

Follingstad *et al.*, [9] describes six components of psychosocial violence. They have identified verbal attacks which include name calling and harassment and even sometimes failure to be involved in any form of dialogue. Thus freezing any form of communication, whether positive or negative. They also mentioned social or financial discrimination, to some extent I agree with their view but in other instances, some women have acquired some form of independence save for those being held back by marriages where resources are pulled together then drawn from one pot for collective use.

Another aspect that they identified includes jealousy and possessiveness. This one comes from family and friends who see such women as a threat to their security. For example, men whose wives work would tend to see their colleagues as rivals and that she is prone to cheating due to various engagements, being away and the exposure to many people around her.

Stets & Straus [22] in a study carried out in the US, verbal threats of harm, abuse, or torture as well as threats to divorce, abandon, or have an affair and lastly damage to or destruction of personal property makes many girls and women in relationships have psychological abuse. According to their study, the abused women said that isolation and jealousy or possessiveness were frequent abuse modes but cited verbal attacks and threats as the worst form of emotional hence psychological abuse.

In the same breath some of the research available did not focus on women, for example, Follingstad *et al.*, [21] carried out a research on the effects of psychological abuse on men. True, men also suffer psychological abuse at the hands of the women but it is common sense that most of the world is patriarchal and most women suffer psychological abuse. This brings to fore the need of this research and the need to expand the existing knowledge on psychological torture against women.

According to Follingstad *et al.*, [21], there is a link between physical abuse and psychological abuse. They argue that someone who is physically abused experienced some form of psychological abuse. In their study where they compared effects of physical abuse and psychological abuse, they found out that physical abuse accounted for about 75% of men who experienced anger, while 40% felt emotionally hurt, 35% also said they experienced sadness.

Stets and Straus [22] says that the extent and severity of depression, stress and psychosomatic is directly proportional to the nature of abuse. They argue that victims who are severely abused will suffer severe psychological abuse compared to those who are slightly abused.

Effects of Psychosocial Violence against women and girls

While studies are scant on psychological abuse on women, there is evidence that emotionally abused women, sometimes experience depression, psychological distress, alcoholism, weight loss, fear and self-blame. According to [23], those in relationships such as marriages, the consequences lead to unhappy relationships, mistrust, depression, hopelessness, lack of satisfaction, panic disorders, low self-esteem and drug and/or alcohol abuse.

Craven further argues that though women and girls are psychologically abused, they tend to stay with the abuser. Craven adds that there is psychological dependence on the abuser. While many would tend to agree that in physical violence there is a great deal of some dependence, Craven says that there is abuse as a result of psychological torture that still draws the victim to that person. In psychological abuse, the victim thinks

that there are privileges she might lose such as status in society if separation occurs.

For this matter, the woman feels helpless and cannot walk away. Dutton & Painter [24], concurs by saying changing the environment often affects some women. This is what is experienced in *So Long a Letter* 1981 [16] where Ramatoulaye depends on the husband, though abusive, she thinks he is in his right place as the father of her children. In this regard, as long as he is around, to her everything is alright. She is feigning false confidence that the marriage is working but in real sense, she is suffering a lot emotionally.

Lupri [25] says that many of the women in question have the resources and economic power to walk away but they are unwilling. This, Lupri says can be as a result of commitments she has put herself into such as marriage. Lupri says most of the women and girls suffer psychological violence at the hands of their spouses but tend to stay because of the factors like marriage vows. He adds that some women love their husbands and spouses and would readily accept their apologies or just forgive them. They also tend to be introverted on these issues as this would embarrass themselves in the face of their peers and society if they talked ill of their husbands.

Unlike uneducated women and girls who would shout about their situations, these women would tend to remain quiet because of their status in society. Some of them have attained higher positions in the job, market and even in politics but would rather be quiet as they feel they are the faces of other women, especially when success is mentioned. Society which is highly patriarchal would easily frown at women who have attained so much in life yet they complain of “petty” issues in the family.

This to the victim would be a setback especially in line with her success. In Kenya for example, women in politics would not like the public to engage them on matters concerning marital. They would pretend all is well when they are being abused at the expense of their political careers. Flynn [26] says such women who are high achievers because of education, exposure, world view and influence, “may be unwilling to endure the snickers, innuendos and sarcasm that they would probably have to face if they filed a formal complaint”.

Gregorash [27] says that many married women refuse to leave abusive marriages because of their children. He adds that because psychological abuse is relatively unrecognized, most of the time it is difficult for abused women to table evidence in court over the same. This is because it might be that she is the only person privy to the abuse, that even children have no idea if she is being abused. In this regard, she feels it might be hard for her to convince the courts that she is

abused and be granted the custody of the children. In this regard, they become psychologically attached to the abuser, in this regard, they face more challenges and the abuse might go on forever. Gregorash further says that most of the researches carried out indicate that women who have opted to use education as a tool for fighting violence have partially succeeded in wadding off physical abuse but are at risk of being hurt emotionally, become helpless, have anger, seek revenge, be sad, get shamed and humiliated, be depressed, have psychologically distressed and end up worse than the abuser.

Ways of countering psychological violence against women and girls

While education has seen the fall of cases of abuse against women and girls, it is evident that psycho-social violence is on the increase. This is partly because education has been distributed partially, that not all women have acquired education and secondly, because the agents of violence have not been addressed. Flynn [26] suggests that education should be evenly distributed. He says while awareness is being raised among girls and women, groups that perpetuate the violence are not involved.

The argument, which has been shared by many scholars, is that education should start at the family level where the stakeholders include women, men, adolescents and children. Then this education should be expanded to include the local community, where partnerships have to be developed with traditional elders, religious leaders, community-based groups, neighborhood associations, men's groups, local councils and village-level bodies. Civil societies that include professional groups, women's and men's groups, NGOs, the private sector, the media, academia and trade unions must be well informed so that they can deal with this type of violence that many women suffer innately. This education must also target the legislative arms and the judicial systems and other legal bodies so that they can as well understand psychological violence that doesn't manifest itself easily by any other person, except the recipient of the violence.

There are key areas of intervention that can assist in making women and girls suffer less psychological violence. These interventions include raising awareness in every section of the society at all times. Though this is costly and tedious, it is the best way of reaching very many people at the same time.

Cultural practices have heightened emotional torture among women and girls. This calls for the development of curricula that teach non-violence, conflict management, human rights and gender based issues so that it can be used in schools and colleges. This can be possible because, currently, more people are enrolling in schools and colleges hence the knowledge and intervention.

Most people do not understand that psychological violence, just like physical violence requires medical attention. In this regard, there is need for highly trained and even communal practitioners to be prepared so that they can deal with emotional violence. This will call on them to be able to detect, guide and offer counseling to girls and women who suffer psychological violence.

One of the problems facing women in the fight against violence is legislation. Poor legal frameworks or absence of such frameworks have led to many women suffering all forms of violence. There is evidence that women and girls do not get protection from law enforcement organs because there are loopholes in the legislation. For example, some of the laws put in place are overridden by religious and customary laws. Compounded by the fact that psychological torture is not easily identified and evidence of proof can be quite hectic. However if all understand symptoms of such violence, can be deduced and used as evidence then there could be progress.

Other impediments to justice include lack of criminalization where some acts are widely accepted in society though in its sense are violations. Burden of proof is also an impediment where some crimes cannot be justified. Having existing laws that are insufficient, conflicting and have no effect in practice. Some laws on domestic violence, for instance, conflict with other provisions and ultimately contradict their goals [28].

Denmark & Paludi [29], says that women and girls have become targets of violence that leads to psychological and emotional breakdown. They say most forms of abuse include; toxic personal relationships, worker-on-worker incidents, consumer/client abuse, and instances of criminal intent. However, the two suggest that Psychological approaches should be put in place to protect them. The United States Congress Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, 2003 recommends that employers should work towards the formation of workplace policy that protects women, developing a code of workplace behavior, enforcing policy, conducting staff trainings, publicizing procedures for investigating and dealing with complaints about gender-based violence, identifying community resources, developing safety plans, enhancing security systems and offering emergency finances [30]. These, they say would greatly reduce stress and emotional anguish hence dealing with psychological violence.

CONCLUSION

This paper has found out that indeed there is psychological and emotional violence towards girls and women. The paper has also identified religion, patriarchy system, cultural and economic dependence as the main agents of violence against women and girls. It has been found that religion is an impediment to women

and girls who have acquired education as most women adhere strictly to religious norms and vows. In the same breath, cultural practices that have stood for a long time still act as impediments that heighten this form of violence. It has been established that this violence occurs as most women and girls suffer under it but have to content with the situation because of such practices. For those who draw resources together, like those in marriage find it difficult to walk away because they are partly co- owners of what they hold hence continued torture.

The paper has concurred with earlier researchers that education can greatly reduce violence against women. However, among educated women and girls, it has been established that there is a reduction in cases of physical violence but little has been achieved on psychological violence. The paper proposes that education should be used as a tool to fight psychological violence but it should be spread across the board such that all stakeholders and institutions fight the vice. This is because many people, groups, individuals do not understand psychological violence and its manifestations.

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