

5

The Violence of Power: Power Relations and Women's Experience of Violence

Violence against women involves the physical and verbal (both subtle and overt) coercion of women of all age groups, ethnic/racial backgrounds, religious persuasions, and socio-economic background. Violence against women is the profane treatment of women and total disrespect for them. It is a reflection of the inferior social position of women and the outrage that men feel towards them. Physical and verbal coercion of women have adverse implications on women's physical, psychological, emotional and economic well-being. It affects women's reproductive rights, their progress (both at work and in institutions of learning) and their ability to function fully as citizens. Although many well-meaning scholars, activists and religious leaders are comfortable with the psychological model of explanation of the abuse of women, violence against women is actually an inevitable consequence of the unequal relations of power between men and women in many societies.

Freire (1993), Foucault (1980) and Hooks (1984) offer illuminating views of the relationship between power and violence. Hooks (1984) captured the relationship between power and violence as follows:

The Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority is ... the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated' (p. 118).

Foucault compels us to take a deep and broad view of power. Mejiuni and Obilade (2004) observed that Foucault alerts us to the fact that individuals see power in terms of apparatus of state alone; and so, they think an analysis of power that does not focus on economic issues is unimportant, and individuals also believe that 'they' do not exercise power, 'others' do. Foucault believed that power is 'present in the smallest, apparently most inconsequential human

interactions' (Brookfield 2001:7), and it is exercised through the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology and so on.

Violence against women is therefore both a means by which men preserve their power, and a habit. In this respect, Hooks stated that whatever group is in power would likely use coercive authority to maintain that power if it is challenged or threatened. It is therefore not surprising that when women put up resistance to their oppression and domination by men, men visit violence on them to maintain their authority and their dominant position. Freire (1993), also stated that 'violence is initiated by those who oppress, exploit, fail to recognize others as persons – not by those who are oppressed, exploited and unrecognized' (p. 55). It is for the reason of maintaining dominance over others that victims of violence who have, through their own oppression, imbibed the view that the powerful need to maintain their authority over the powerless through coercion, also mete out violence to others less powerful than they are.

Violence becomes a habit when the powerless do not resist violence in a productive way because of a variety of reasons. And although macabre, the powerful then enjoy meting out violence to the powerless, especially where the environment is conducive – for instance, where the culture of silence and the culture of impunity are pervasive. This explains why men hit, rape, sexually harass and exploit women who are 'gentle', 'meek', 'good' and 'feminine', and also socially, economically, culturally and politically less powerful than they are. This is also the reason why men mete out violence to babies, children and mentally retarded persons who trust them and or who do not have the capacity to object to their violation. Foucault (1980) hypothesized that resistance to power is to be found at the point where power relations are exercised. He said:

There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised: resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power. It exists all the more by being in the same place as power; hence, like power, resistance is multiple and can be integrated in global strategies (p. 142).

Unfortunately, violence against women as a means of preserving men's power and as a habit continues to thrive in the context of a distorted view of God and God's will, and an unfair and inequitable insistence on adherence to what we have been told are God's injunctions. According to Freire (1993:61), 'under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed see their suffering as the will of God' (because they are often told that it is the will of God), and Freire added 'as if God were the creator of this "organised disorder"'.

In the analysis of data that follows, most of the observations that have been made in the preceding paragraphs would come alive.

Women's Personal Experience of Violence, and or Knowledge of Others' Experience of Violence

Women were asked to indicate whether they or someone known to them had been a victim of violence. About a quarter, that is, twenty-three out of eighty-six literate women in formal work and female students, and about half, that is forty out of ninety-three semi-literate women in the informal economy and female apprentices indicated that they had been victims of violence (rape, battery and sexual harassment) or they knew somebody who had experienced violence. From the information in Table 5.1, more women in Lokoja than in Ibadan indicated that they had been victims of violence, or knew someone who had been a victim. Female students in Ibadan and Lokoja appear to be the group that had limited experience of violence, and limited knowledge of other's experience of violence.

Female respondents reported violence as follows: battery by husbands; battery by strangers; battery by a soldier and a mob. Rape by: armed robbers; gang of boys led by a boyfriend; and the driver of the victim's father. The women did not indicate the perpetrators of sexual harassment. The women reported consequences such as: ridicule; hatred of everybody by victim; relocation by victim because of shame; injuries; loss of pregnancy; death; attempted suicide; and perpetuation of further violence which took the form of retaliation by women in the community who beat the husband of a woman who died as a result of battery to pulp and burnt his property.

The Reaction of Victims of Violence to their Experience

According to some literate respondents, the rape victims reported to the police, and in one case, the assailant paid compensation to the victim. Another victim told her parents who reported to the police and got the assailants arrested. Five literate women indicated that the women kept quiet and were resigned to fate. Two of this category of women also reported that the victims relocated. One female student said the victim hated people, felt sorry for herself, although she later forgave all, and thought her experience was a lesson she had to learn. Two semi-literate women said a girl attempted suicide, while a ten-year-old victim of rape died.

A lot of the women, both literate and semi-literate indicated that they/the victims of battery by husbands/ partners reported to their parents/family, and the matter was settled. A number of women did nothing, and these included two literate women, while some women hit the men back, or fought them. Two women left their husbands, while a number of women moved out temporarily (and at times threatened divorce) and then the matter was settled. One semi-literate woman reported that a woman runs out of her home crying out for help when the husband hits her, while another reported that the woman simply cries when the husband hits her. Some of the semi-literate respondents indicated that

Table 5.1: Women's Personal Experience of Violence and or Knowledge of Others' Experience of Violence

	Yes				No				Total No. that Responded to the Question	Total No Sampled
	Ibadan		Lokoja		Ibadan		Lokoja			
	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage		
Literate Women In Formal Work	5	11.9	10	23.8	14	33.3	13	31.0	42	42
Female Students	3	6.8	5	11.4	19	43.2	17	38.6	44	46
Semi-literate Women In Informal Economy	10	17.9	14	25.0	14	25.0	18	32.1	56	56
Semi-literate Female Apprentices	4	10.8	12	32.4	17	46.0	4	10.8	37	39
Total	22	12.3	41	22.9	64	35.8	52	29.0	179	183

Key: Yes – means yes, I have been a victim of violence, and or, I know someone who had experienced violence.

No – means no, I have not been a victim of violence, and or, I do not know someone who had been a victim.

Source: Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by (or for) all four categories of female respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

the men begged them, or other people begged them and they made up. One woman would usually refuse to open the door to let the husband in when he was drunk, because once he got inside, he would beat her. An apprentice said she begged her boyfriend after he had hit her because she knew she had offended him.

As for women who had experienced violence perpetrated by persons who were not related to them, one woman reported that her mother hit back at the man who had hit her. A student reported to the authority of the institution and the offenders were punished. One woman did not do anything; she simply walked away from the place where she was assaulted; and yet another forgave the soldier who assaulted her after intervention by mediators.

The two literate women who reported that they had experienced sexual harassment said they did not do anything. One said it appeared normal that she was harassed and the other said she was told it was part of growing up.

Reactions of Others to Victims' Experience

Concerning rape, literate women reported that: some people were sympathetic, and encouraged victims to pull themselves together; the matter was kept within friends; and in some cases, some people threw peculiar looks at the victim and the accused. One semi-literate respondent said people cursed the man that raped a ten-year-old; another said a victim was ridiculed, and yet another said the girl's parents took her to the hospital. However, people asked the girl who was raped by her father's driver what she had gone to do in the man's room.

Concerning battery by husband/partner, literate women (in formal work settings alone) reported that: there was much bitterness directed at a husband; in another case there was apathy; and in yet another case it appeared normal. People supported the woman who moved from the husband who had been battering her; and some women were told that battery is part of marital secret. In some cases, women were said to have narrated their own experiences and then told victims to endure and be prayerful. In cases of assault by non-relations, the woman who hit back at a man got support from on-lookers, while people pleaded on behalf of the soldier who had assaulted a woman.

Semi-literate women indicated that whenever they reported to the families/parents of their husbands that their husbands had hit them, they would usually intervene and settle the problem. A particular respondent said she almost fought a husband who had beaten his wife, and another woman said in the case she had cited, the woman was stubborn. One woman said while some people advised her to leave the man, others told her to endure. Another indicated that although her father had told her to go back to her husband, she did not go until the husband came to beg her and her family. Other women reported that people: begged the husband and advised the wife; separated them during the altercation and advised them, especially the woman; advised the woman to submit to the husband as ordained by the Bible; begged the man because the woman is always at fault; and, advised the woman to run away whenever the man is feeling

provoked. In the case of battery by husband that resulted in death, the women in the community beat and almost killed the perpetrator, the husband, and they burnt his property. Three women reported that: ‘people advised that I should not go back to him’; ‘they felt bad and begged me’ and, ‘they do not like the way he beats me’.

Semi-literate apprentices reported that people: encouraged the woman to fight the man; felt pity for the woman, but were wary because whenever they offered her some advice, she would usually tell the man once they have reconciled; people looked on; and in another case, the talk was that she ought not to have married when she did, and that at any rate, the man is not right for her. In one case, the woman’s neighbours actually advised that she should not open the door for the husband whenever he comes home drunk. Three women reported that: ‘they thought he behaved badly’; ‘I was unable to intervene because they are older than I am, although my parents intervened’ and, ‘no one knew he had hit me’.

In Box 5.1, we take details of some of the responses of literate and semi-literate women to their experiences and or knowledge of others’ experience of violence; how women responded to their ordeals; how others responded to the women’s experience; and, respondents’ own explanations for the reasons others reacted the way they did.

Box 5.1: Women Cite their Personal Experience of Violence, Others’ Experience of Violence, Reactions to those Experiences and the Explanations that were Proffered

Literate Women Said

She reported the incident to her parents and the crisis was settled although she spent three days in the hospital after her husband beat her. People were raining abuses on the husband. They all reacted bitterly but since what God has joined together, they can not put asunder ... – Abosede

I have been beaten, and I know several women who have experienced all stated above. I did not do anything. People’s response was that of apathy. They believed it was normal for a stubborn woman to be beaten by her husband or boyfriend, and a victim of rape and sexual harassment asked for it by the way she dressed, spoke or behaved – Aanwo

Yes, I’ve been beaten and sexually harassed. I braced up to the challenge. I strengthened my resolve that I am an individual with equal rights and that I would not be a weakling. For other people, it was like it is the usual thing to be beaten or

I have not been subjected to the experience but I know a mature girl who was raped by armed robbers. She was hospitalized for two days. After she left the hospital, she requested that she should be allowed to leave the town for another place. She was just not comfortable around her environment again. She cried so much because she said she had experienced horror. People comforted her. She was a Christian and so she had Christian friends around her. The attitude of other people was positive because she was not mocked and nobody exaggerated the situation. They just encouraged her – Esther

Yes, I know a lot of women whose husbands have turned them to their boxing partners. Well, women are not angels, they have their shortcomings too, but that does not mean men should beat them. Most people narrate their own experiences and advice the women to endure and be prayerful. They give the advice, perhaps because they have had similar experiences – Theresa

Yes, I've been sexually harassed. I could not report to anyone because it was a shame telling anyone, even your mother. The blame will always be that of the woman. Others were not happy, but they said it was part of growing up. The society does not attach much importance to sexual harassment. They see it as normal, provided you didn't yield – Adedigba

Semi-literate Women Said

I've have been beaten before. I have heard of a rape victim before too. When my husband raised his fist and it pained me, I retaliated even though I was not as powerful as he was. When members of his family were trying to settle the problem, it was clear from their utterances that they were reacting negatively to me – Rukayat

One of our classmates was raped while we were young. My neighbor's husband hit her. We settled the problem between the husband and his wife. The cause was sex. Because the woman was not well cared for, she did not allow the husband to have sex with her and thus fighting ensued. I almost went as far as fighting the man. It was because I believed that women are much more important in the house, and they don't deserve to be beaten – Modinat

My apprentice was raped in Lagos. My husband beat me twice because I was stubborn. I went against his wish. I proved too stubborn thereby getting my husband angry to the extent that he slapped me. I therefore believe that some women deserve beating because of their behavior. I went to my father after the beating to report him but my father said that I should go back there. I went to stay with my friend in her house and after some days he came to beg me and my family; and so, I went back to him. Others' attitude to my husband was negative because they believed that it's not good to beat a woman and he was advised against it. They even went to the extent of telling him that there are effective ways of dealing with a woman which would not involve raising an arm –Toun

Yes, my sister's husband used to beat her regularly. She eventually moved out and even lost a child during the process of beating. People felt pity for her, because he kept inflicting wounds on her and she was suffering. And it wasn't as if she was at fault – Morenike

My husband used to beat me. I would run away, and he would come and beg me and then I go back. People advised me not to go back to him, but I went back because of my children – Adama

My neighbor's husband beats her. We usually beg the man and advice the woman because she is always at fault. She cries whenever he beats her. We don't make friends with her, because she is very troublesome. As her character be, na im no make us like am¹ – Nkechi

I know of a woman who was beaten to death by her husband and a young girl of less than 10 years that was raped. All the women in the community beat the man up to the point of death and destroyed his property. In cases like these, people keep to themselves because you will be seen as influencing the woman, if you offer pieces of advice – Caroline

Yes, my friend always beat the husband back when he beats her. I also know of a ten year old girl that was raped. The 10 year old girl died. She was raped by her cousin three times before it was discovered. She started emaciating, had protruding stomach, she had wounds on her private part, and was taken to the hospital, but she died. People swore for her cousin. They said "may it never be well with him" – Nwanneka.

Advice on Violence

In the paragraphs that follow, we will find the advice that women and men gave or would give to female victims of violence, irrespective of (for the women) whether they had themselves experienced violence or they knew someone who had experienced violence. The forms of violence against women that were specifically identified in this study are: rape, battery and sexual harassment. Two literate women in formal work advised that women who experience beating by persons other than their partners should: 'fight back in a decent and result-oriented way' and 'assess whether you are at fault, then organize retaliation'. On sexual harassment, two literate women said: 'women should not dress half-naked to avoid sexual harassment'; 'if decently dressed, rebuff the advance'; and two female students said: 'Pray that God should keep their eyes off you'; and 'seek legal attention'. Still on sexual harassment, a semi-literate woman said, 'a woman should not walk around in the dark, and should take care of herself'.

Some of the respondents were quite detailed and careful about their responses, and so they separated battery by husband from battery by other persons, and many gave more than an advice. A few gave several.

The responses vary, so were the reasons proffered for the advice given. The responses have therefore been categorized into ten different themes. In pulling the responses into the different categories, consideration was given, not only to the advice proffered by the respondent, but also to the reasons the respondent gave for offering that particular advice. The reasons given usually throw some light on the perspective/framework from which the respondent is reacting to the issue, and giving advice. By way of example, Abayomi, a male lawyer advised that a woman check herself if she is beaten. That appears ambiguous. He however added that she should contact a lawyer if raped or sexually harassed, but must be properly dressed to avoid rape and sexual harassment. The second part of his advice clarified his position, which is that improper dressing results in sexual abuse and violence. Although this is a contested position, someone else may take the same position as Abayomi, and consider that it is not just a correct position, but that it is important to give tips that will help girls prevent the abuses. A problem however arises if s/he then adds, as Abayomi did, that 'a properly dressed woman cannot be harassed or raped...' To the ambiguous statement that a woman should check herself if beaten, he clarified his position, when he said: 'women should not be beaten unjustly. Therefore parents, husband or mediator would determine and advise properly on the cause of being beaten'. So, while one would have been tempted to categorize his advice on rape as a critical comment, the reason he gave for the position he took shows that he was being judgemental, not critical. At any rate, objective questioning is not undertaken in isolation of the individual's values, prejudices and beliefs, and the normative ideologies of her/his context (McDonald, Cervero and Courtenay 1999).

Another example is appropriate here. Abimbola, a semi-literate woman said: 'I will preach to such person and advise her to pray for the person that beat her so that he can embrace Christ. I will do the same for a rape victim.' This appears like a very practical advice to give to a believer. However, when Abimbola gave the reasons she would offer the advice, her actual position became clear. She said: 'Because if the person is born again then she won't be living the type of life that got her to be raped. Because the way of life of a lady can contribute to her being raped or beaten though it's not like that in some cases'. Clearly, much of the time, while Abimbola is advising that a female victim of violence should pray, she would also be saying to herself – she's a bad person anyway, so she should just pray. On the surface, at least until one looked at the reasons she gave, her advice did not in any way show that she thought the woman brought the problem on herself. As a matter of fact, one got the impression she thought the assailant was wrong, and required prayers. This woman's response, rather than be categorized as practical, is judgemental.

The responses that we have put into the first category, Category A, represent advice that appears practical in cases of rape and battery by husband. For rape, medical checkup; proper/Christian counselling; psychological help; see qualified

medical doctor; take precautions to avoid further abuse; watch the people you move with on campus and report/talk to mother/relations/trusted friend, were the advice offered. Others are: report to organizations that protect human/women's rights; defend self physically, spiritually and intellectually; watch interactions with non-relations; report to social workers. In cases of battery, the advice was to: dialogue, then report to the police; have a means of livelihood; report to own/his family; move away from hot arguments; run, and give him a wide berth; and, do not marry through match-making.

In Category B are responses that show outrage, but still seek to offer practical advice, usually corresponding with the level of outrage felt by the respondent. They are: report to law enforcement agents/the appropriate authority; seek legal action/go to court; apprehend and send him to jail, and lock him up forever.

In Category C are responses that appear like they are practical advice but are, in reality, judgemental. Behind them lie the assumption (they are offered from the premise) that the woman caused or brought the problem on herself, then follows automatically, injunctions such as: accept what has come your way, and live by it; see Bible-believing man of God for deliverance and spiritual therapy, and report to pastor.

In Category D are responses that indicate/signify apathy, lethargy; fear and powerlessness: Keep mute/keep quiet; take it as part of life; forgive assailants and forget; keep it to yourself; see it as a learning experience; comfort yourself and change abode and be patient because of the children.

In Category E are responses that appeared critical but were, in fact, judgemental? Underlining a critical view or advice by some respondents is the thinking, for example, that a woman who has done wrong deserves to be beaten. Some of the responses are: Ask her what she did wrong; careful the way you dress; know what led to the abuse; turn a new leaf; cultivate decent and polite social relationship; dress normally like a good lady; should have comported herself better; must have been walking at night; it may be an affair gone sour and, 'did you arouse the sexual desire of a male by dressing wildly?'; she should take it like that if she deserves beating; woman should have good manners and should be of good behaviour; and, she must have wronged him.

In Category F, we find responses that seek to deconstruct talks about stigmatization and silence. Examples are: speak out and, women should not be embarrassed reporting to security agencies.

Category G contains responses that appear like they are practical tips for, especially, believers. In reality, however, such advice promotes magic consciousness; it is a form of escapism and may become fatalistic. Daniska, a male student, advised that women who have been beaten by their husbands should seek spiritual guidance from God to make the men change. He went further, 'because whatever situation one finds himself or herself, God placed him or her in that situation, and it is only God that can change things permanently'.

In Category H, we find reactions of respondents who are just enraged by the problem of violence. Examples of the responses are: do not agree if he begs; retaliate; fight back; and, organize retaliation.

In Category I are responses that indicate that women should kowtow: be submissive to avoid being hurt; watch your bad attitude to men and be submissive; don't be stubborn; and, beg him.

In Category J are responses that urge women to end abusive relationships: leave him; move out; if battery is incessant, leave him, and divorce him.

In Category K are responses of persons who urged women to hang around abusive partners once there is mediation.

It is important to note that a few respondents gave advice that cut across some of the categories that have been highlighted above. Note the advice from Seun, a semi-literate woman:

Whatever he says, she should take it and beg him. A woman should have her work so that she does not have to ask a man for money. On rape, I will tell her sorry, and advise that she should take care of herself and go to the hospital and tell the doctor. They may tell her to go for test, so it won't result in pregnancy. I don't mind her aborting that kind of pregnancy. My view stem from my upbringing and my conviction on how to live well.

One is tempted to categorize Seun's first sentence as kowtowing. However, she follows up with a practical advice. We refer, once again, to Abayomi's response. Hence again to Abayomi's response, he recommends that she gets in touch with a lawyer, but must be properly dressed. Under the above categorization, we could place his responses under those that feel outrage but offer practical advice, and those that are critical and judgemental.

Five literate men advised that a woman who has been assaulted by persons other than her husband should: 'watch her behaviour'; 'check the cause' and, 'report to the police'. On sexual harassment, seven men advised that women should report to the police or the appropriate authority; for, according to them, it is a crime. Note that the reaction of literate men to sexual harassment is unanimous, and distinctly different from the reaction of literate women. Take these two responses by male students: 'There is every need for her to exercise her legal right over the embarrassment (harassment) so that the man reaps the punishment for his offence. Sexual harassment is a crime and, if not properly treated, it will then become a "trait" which will be inherited by some other men and become their everyday practice' and,

in such a case, it is difficult for such a female to share her experience with sympathizers. However, I advise that such female should pull herself together and take appropriate actions, such as reporting to the police or sharing with others that could assist.

Sexually harassing a female or beating, as the case may be, implies an abuse of right and an implication that she is inferior. My reason is solely based on the fact that her right has been abused, hence the need for her to take action.

What Possibilities/Potentials Does this Advice Have for Improving Women's Social Status?

We considered that it is important that we focus on advice that a woman receives after experiencing violence because it is part of her reality, or part of the construction of her reality. The ten categories of responses or advice indicated above were thus pulled into three views of how women should handle violence. I arrived at the three views by taking a look at the totality of the gains/results that an adherence to the advice will produce for: the individual woman who is the victim; the generality of women, all of whom are potential victims; the entire society, and the hope (possibility) that it holds for improving women's social status.

The first group comprises the category of responses that hold high probability of yielding gains for women. Those in this group are: A – Practical advice; B – Outraged but offers practical advice; F – Deconstructs talk about stigmatization and silence, and J – End abusive relationships. Some of the reasons that respondents gave for the advice are instructive, as they point to the gains that can accrue to women and society if their advice is followed. See Box 5.2 for some of the advice and the reasons the respondents gave for offering the advice. This set of advice, which holds high probability of yielding gains for women, liberating and empowering as it appears, is clearly not so straightforward and without problems. The advice that cases should go to the Police/Court and the appropriate authority assumes that: the Nigeria Police, the Judiciary and most male-headed institutions are efficient and not corrupt; the laws on rape and battery are straightforward and favour women (WARSHE 2004); and, that the Police, Magistrates/Judges and men in positions of authority in institutions do not hold views that consider that women are inferior to men, women are objects of desire, they cannot make up their minds and those that 'offend' their husbands should be 'corrected' by bullying.

Clearly also, when women speak openly about rape, they demystify the subject, and at some point in time, our society will have to accept that rapists should be the ones to hide their faces, not the victims, and concrete steps would be taken to make rapists hide their face. Just the same way, when wife batterers lose their wives through separation and divorce, many men will have to do a rethink about hitting their wives. However, given the way our society is presently configured, and the prevailing attitudes (many of which are reflected in some of the advice given to victims of violence in this study) women who speak openly about their experience of rape and those who leave/divorce abusive partners will still face the stigma of being 'rape victim' and 'divorcee'. In the

case of a divorced woman, she would probably also have to bear the burden of being sole breadwinner, given her new status. However, on balance, this view still appears to be the position/advice that can empower women to improve their social position in the long run.

The second group comprises the categories of responses that appear to give practical tips to believers, but can also promote magic consciousness (G); that show that respondents are enraged (H); and, those that urge women to hang around abusive relationships if there is mediation (K). We will find some of the details in Box 5.3. These sets of advice may or may not empower women in the long run depending on their usage. By way of example, the view that women should pray when they have been battered and that neighbours should preach to husband and wife who have been exchanging fisticuffs, can be used either to perpetuate violence or halt violence. This view can empower women, and can be used to further abuse women. Interestingly, two distinct usages of religion appeared to have emerged from the responses of women, especially semi-literate women and literate men. From the advice that some semi-literate women gave on violence, they appear to be encouraging the use of religion to perpetuate the status quo. Whereas, many men gave liberating views of religion, when they supported their views with religion, one is not sure that all the men who attributed their views to religion will never beat their wives/rape a woman. Many 'religious' leaders are known to be wife batterers and there have been reports of religious leaders that have raped women and children who trust them. It is also possible that women who advised other women to pray when they have experienced battery or rape will have difficulties abiding by the same injunction if they were the victims.

The advice that literate women who felt outraged by the problem of violence on women proffered, which is that women should respond to violence with violence, will probably give a few women immediate satisfaction and may also serve as deterrence to bullies in the short term, but it is not likely to enhance the social status of women in general in the long term because it may set off a cycle of violence. If one person organizes retaliation on a rapist or a person who committed assault or a wife batterer, she cannot be sure he would not try to organize bigger retaliation. Clearly, wife battery, assault and rape thrive in our society because of the culture of impunity, and in the context of patriarchy/sexism, classism (Weissman 2007) and seniority. There is no evidence to show that if we organize retaliation, that is, take the laws into our hands, sexism and patriarchy will cease to exist. We cannot then confidently say that we can empower women through retaliation when women have been sexually harassed, raped, assaulted, and battered either by their husbands/boyfriends or unknown persons.

Of course, women have to resist violence in an effective and productive way, but resistance cannot be through one method alone. Resistance can be getting: women and (men) to take a fresh look at religious injunctions; mothers

Box 5.2: Advice on Violence; Group A – Advice that Should Empower Women**Literate Women in Formal Work**

‘Leave the partner who is abusing her if he cannot be counseled to stop; because more often than not, abused women become murder victims’ – Adeola

‘They should speak out and report it as soon as they possibly can. Rape carries a penalty of life imprisonment and the more people are aware of this the better. The more ladies speak of their experiences, the more the issue of rape/sexual abuse will be demystified – Adetutu

‘Run for their lives and seek spiritual and medical cleansing. Never report to the Police as this would lead to more degradation and harassment. If a man hits a woman, then he can kill her one day; so, the best solution is to give him a wide berth. Reporting to the Police would only mean opening up wounds that may have healed since most times the sympathy is with the accused not the victim’

– Aanwo

‘They should fight back in as much a decent and result oriented way as possible. They should not keep quiet or else, more will come their way. Keeping quiet over such issues or not acting is rather a sign of weakness which encourage more even worse of such actions from those doing it to you and even other onlookers’

– Omolade

Female Students

‘They should go first and seek medical attention. They should not be afraid or embarrassed to seek redress from appropriate institution (legal). Being a traumatic experience, victims need immediate medical attention (physical and emotional). More often than not, women, instead of inciting abuse are mere victims and therefore must be protected by law’ – Modupe

Semi-literate Women

‘As woman no get power reach man, I go say make the woman run’ – Talatu

Semi-literate Female Apprentice

‘She should seek legal action and divorce the man. A rape victim should treat her self and seek legal action too. Because beating and rape is ridiculous and bad. A rapist can kill’ – Tosan

Literate Men in Formal Work Settings

‘She should first make a report of the incident to the law enforcement agents and thereafter seek medical attention (in case she’s been beaten or raped). This will allow the law enforcement agents to deal with the culprit(s) and so serve as deterrence to

others that might want to repeat such a dastardly act. Medical help will allow for proper and comprehensive medical check up and subsequent treatment' – Tubosun

'Any woman who has been beaten, raped or sexually harassed should report to the police for criminal prosecution or to the court for civil action. To beat a woman or rape a woman is against morality, it is therefore a criminal offence and justiceable'

– Jacob

'She should confide in a close friend or adult immediately it happens. Such a person is expected to encourage her to take up the matter with the law enforcement agents. The society tends to stigmatize rape victims, for instance, making them appear as guilty as the culprit. It would then take efforts as well as some encouragement to make such victims come out to confront their assailants' – Adamu

Male Students

'She should report at the police station and also seek counseling to avoid the after-effects of shock and embarrassment. This is because raping or beating a woman is a brutal behaviour that should be totally discouraged in any society' – Gafar

'She should report the case to the appropriate authority or her parents and ultimately to law enforcement agents, and finally seek redress at the court of law. Keeping it secret will be like waging a psychological war against herself. Informing the law enforcement agents would bring about justice and prevent the culprit from future attempts' – Taiwo

'She should seek redress in court. She should not be ashamed as Africans are shy seeking redress for such claims. The society does not see rape and battery of a woman as dehumanizing. But the lady could be my sister, friend, mother and anybody' – Ayodele

'She should report to the school authority and the case should be taken to court. This is because it is religiously wrong to rape a woman and it is a criminal offence'

– Zubairu

to speak up more for their daughters who have been raped and who are in abusive relationships, both privately and publicly;² and getting women in a certain location/community to ostracize men who have raped girls/women and men who have battered their wives.

The advice that women hang around if there is mediation may or may not empower women, depending on the framework from which the mediators intervene. Mediators who hold strongly to the view that women be subject to men are likely to blame a woman for the problems between herself and her husband, or blame a woman who has been raped. Mediators who have a sense of fairness, kindness and who are honest, and or who take a liberating view of religion may be able to empower women through mediation.

The third group is composed of categories of responses that are comfortable positions/easy arguments that hold the least probability of empowering women, and enhancing women's social position. We can glean them in Box 5.4. They are: advice that appeared practical, but were actually judgmental (C); advice that depicted apathy, lethargy, fear and powerlessness (D); advice that appeared critical but were in fact judgmental (E); and advice that implored women to kowtow (I). Clearly, these sets of advice have their own uses, especially for those who hold traditional views of women's roles in the private and public spheres of life. Given data from this study, most women and men hold such views, in spite of the objections that they have to violence against women. It is because many people hold the traditional view of the roles of women in the public and private spheres that some are unable to object seriously to violence against women, especially battery. They are therefore unable to offer advice that could be deemed bold/radical steps by our society. Women who hold on to this comfortable position usually get by, in spite of pains of violence; they stay within a meaning perspective (that is, the lens through which each of them filters, engages, and interpretes the world {Merriam and Cafarella 1999}) that they are used to, and in which they feel safe. For some of the people who hold this view, objecting seriously to violence may mean questioning long-held values and assumptions, and this may rupture their meaning perspectives (Cranton 1994), make them insecure, and take them through pains that they might consider unnecessary.

In addition, in cases of battery, the advice that women should kowtow, if adhered to, holds possibilities of giving women immediate relief from abortions, broken jaws and bruises that result from battery. In the long term, however, the implications are many. In the case of a wife batterer, he would keep up the abuse of his wife; for, he would presume that she is a mule that needs to be beaten to shape or that she is a fool, a pushover. It would also strengthen him to expand the scope of his abuse beyond 'his domain' (his home/family) to the public, and then he would begin to demand that all women do not only do as he demands, but also offer him whatever he wants on their knees. Although the following example, given by one of the respondents in this study is not about

Box 5.3: Advice on Violence; Group B – Advice that May or May not Empower Women**Literate Women in Formal Work**

'First assess whether you are at fault in the situation. If beaten and you don't deserve it, be bold and organize a retaliation, if sexually harassed and you were decently dressed, rebuff the advance and prove your worth in a decent manner. It is my personal view and I oppose the view that women should be treated unjustly because of their sex!' – Itunu

Semi-literate Women in the Informal Economy

'If she is raped, she should leave everything to God to judge and be prayerful. If she is beaten, she should change her way and be more prayerful. The rape victim is stigmatized; she may not be able to get a man to marry in the neighborhood because of the rumors; so she should be prayerful' – Moji

'My advice is that she should change her ways if she is at fault and she should be prayerful so as to keep her home intact. My religion is against divorce' – Alake

'Leave everything to God; she can't take the fight upon herself. Because it will cause her more pains and it won't help the situation' – Yime

'Some women are stubborn. Men are the head of the family, she should submit herself and pray. Beating her will not solve the problem though. God can do all'

– Margaret

Semi-literate Female Apprentices

'She should be prayerful and be patient with the man if he is her husband. Because we are made to believe that the man is the head of the family' – Tolu

Male Students

'She should take everything to God in prayers; and seek help from professional counselors (psychologists) to work on her emotion. This will take the form of therapy. She should try and find out why that incident happened to her. We all believe in one thing or the other; therefore, seeking spiritual solution is number one. Though the spiritual is guided by faith and therefore there is need to seek human advice because both operate on the same level (physical)' – Odedele

'If any woman is beaten, probably by her husband, I implore her to seek spiritual guide from God to make him change his ways. Whatever situation one finds himself or herself, God placed him or her in that situation and it is only God that can change things permanently' – Daniska

battery, it is the case of men believing that all women are inferior to them. Rebecca, a lawyer said in response to whether men have ever tried to make her feel inferior: 'In the front seat of a bus, men would rather sit at the edge and not women, as one told me one day to come down from the edge so he can sit there'. To the likes of the man Rebecca encountered, Rebecca is just another woman, and he must have quickly reminded himself that he has her type, whom he orders around, as wife at home. Submitting to a rapist so one does not get hurt, as one of the respondents advised, would strengthen the rapist to pick up more preys, and he would convince himself that the woman wanted to be raped, and that it was actually a good thing he chose to rape her! If a woman begs the rapist, he would say to himself that her begging was rather feeble, and that she just wanted to be pushed a lot further.

Finally, there is no reason to believe that respondents in this study can give the same advice in all circumstances of violence, or that they can abide by their own injunctions when faced with the experience of violence. They may, for example, move from being totally submissive to challenging the basis of violence and insisting that women's humanity be acknowledged, and they may move from organizing retaliation to praying.

In Tables 5.2 and 5.3, I present the percentages of responses that fell under the three groups/types of advice that women who had experienced violence have been given, or the types of advice that those who would experience violence will receive. The advice ranges from that with the highest probability of enhancing women's social position to that with the least possibility of enhancing women's social status.

Concerning advice on rape, we observe in Table 5.2 that literate men gave the highest percentage (88.09%) of advice that should empower women, while literate women followed with 72.3 per cent and semi-literate women trailed behind with 59.3 per cent of their responses grouped as capable of empowering women. However, both literate and semi-literate women gave almost the same percentage of advice that has been categorized as holding the least possibility of empowering women (22.8% and 22.03% respectively) as against 10.71 per cent of the advice given by men.

On the advice that respondents gave in respect of battery by husband, although more semi-literate women than the literate women and men responded to this question, a higher percentage of advice offered by the very few literate women (55.6%) who responded was considered to be capable of empowering women, compared with 37.5 per cent by literate men and 27.7 per cent by semi-literate women. Literate men and semi-literate women gave almost equal percentages of advice that was considered to hold the least possibility of empowering women, that is 50 per cent and 50.6 per cent respectively.

Box 5.4: Advice on Violence; Group C — Advice that Reflect the Comfortable Position and Hold the Least Possibility of Empowering Women**Literate Women**

'Watch their attitudes towards men; and try all possible means to be submissive. Women should dress properly to avoid sexual harassment and know the type of friends they keep. Women may be beaten by men due to their bad attitude. Most of the women who are harassed are those that dress half naked' – Omolola

'They should accept it as part of life; feel free and normal in the society' – Oduola

Female Students

'I would advice that women who experience either of or some of these abuses should go to the hospital for medical treatment and try to forget what has happened and start a new life with a good character. They should go to the hospital in order to prevent incurable diseases and unwanted pregnancy' – Foyeke

Semi-literate Women in Informal Economy

'A woman should be humble and submissive to her husband and a lady should be responsible in dressing and comportsment so as not to be raped. This is my belief' – Bolanle

'She should be patient because she has children' – Bolaji

'She should pray and stay with the husband so as not to leave the children in the hand of an unknown woman. Because where ever she goes, she will be a stranger there and the devil you know is better than a new sweet angel' – Memuna

'If she knows what can cause quarrel between her and the husband, she should not do it and if she has made any mistake she should try and rectify it. Even if she has to beg the husband, let her do so. Since the husband is the head of the house, she has to submit herself' – Tade

Semi-literate Apprentices

'For beating, may be she doesn't obey, so he beats her. She must have been doing something and provoking the man, so he beats in annoyance. Perhaps she's jealous and disgraces him in public. For rape, she must have been walking late hours; make im sidon for house. She should treat herself' – Salamotu

'Women should be patient, since they are married and have nowhere to go again. If it's a boyfriend, I will leave him, for if we get married, he will be beating me. I don't know of rape. If a woman is patient, the husband will do a rethink, and may realize that what he is doing is not right' – Towoju

'A woman should be submissive, so I will tell her to rectify her faults and live in peace with her husband. Women are weak so we should not engage ourselves in fistcuffs with men' – Tomiwa

Literate Men in Formal Work Settings

'She should try as much as possible to be submissive in order to avoid being seriously injured; but after the incident, she should report the matter to the law enforcement agents and go for medical examination. The only option left for a woman under such a situation is submission; otherwise, she may sustain serious bodily injuries that could result in an unforeseen disaster' – Audu

'If a woman is beaten, she should take heart. It is one of those things' – Kalio

Male Students

'She should tell her mother and behave maturely. She should not expose herself to the public so that she can avoid stigmatization. It will take extra efforts to associate oneself with anyone who has been raped' – Nosa

'She should check if she has aroused the sexual desire of the male counterpart or did something wrong to have warranted her being beaten, and then forgive herself. Some ladies dress wildly, thus arousing a strong sexual feeling' – Fijabi

'If a lady or woman is raped or has been sexually harassed, she should keep it to herself, and then go to the hospital to explain to her doctor and probably go for pregnancy and HIV tests. If she exposes it, it may affect her social life and the stigma may take a long time to disappear. Again, a case of rape is not easy to prove in a law court' – Yisa

Table 5.2: Advice on Rape by Category of Respondents

	From Among 86 Literate Women Came 123 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:	From Among 93 Semi-literate Women Came 59 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:	From Among 61 Literate Men Came 84 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:
Should Empower Women (ABFI)	89	72.3	35	59.3	74	88.09
May or May Not Empower Women (GHK)	6	4.9	11	18.6	1	1.19
Least Possibility Of Empowering Women (CDEI)	28	22.8	13	22.03	9	10.71

Key:

- A:** Practical Advice **B:** Outraged but offers practical advice **C:** Seemingly practical but actually judgmental advice **D:** Apathy, lethargy, fear and powerlessness
- E:** Critical and Judgmental **F:** Deconstruction of Myths and Social Constructions
- G:** Practical tips for believers? **H:** Just Enraged **I:** Kowtow **J:** End relationship
- K:** Hang around if there is mediation

Source: Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by (or for) all categories of female and male respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

Table 5.3: Advice on Battery by Husband

	From Among 86 Literate Women Came 9 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:	From Among 93 Semi-Literate Women Came 83 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:	From Among 61 Literate Men Came 8 Pieces of Advice	Per centage of Total Advice that:
Should Empower Women (ABFG)	5	55.6	23	27.7	3	37.5
May or May Not Empower Women (GHIK)	3	33.3	18	21.7	1	12.5
Least Possibility Of Empowering Women (CDEJ)	1	11.1	42	50.6	4	50

Key:

A: Practical Advice **B:** Outraged but offers practical advice **C:** Seemingly practical but actually judgmental advice **D:** Apathy, lethargy, fear and powerlessness

E: Critical and Judgmental **F:** Deconstruction of Myths and Social Constructions

G: Practical tips for believers? **H:** Just Enraged **I:** Kowtow **J:** End relationship

K: Hang around if there is mediation

Source: Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by (or for) all categories of female and male respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

On aggregate, the advice that literate women gave to women on rape and battery by husband was mainly advice that should empower women; although on the matter of rape, more of the advice that men gave was considered to be capable of empowering women. The reason was that on the matter of rape, although many literate and semi-literate women rejected rape of women, a number of women accepted the easy and lazy arguments that women who have been raped brought it on themselves because: of their bad attitude to men; they were dressed half-nakedly; they have been walking around at night; and, have been keeping the company of bad girls. They therefore accepted the myths and arguments that allow rape to flourish, and that hinder attempts to stem the tide of this type of violence on women. The women who imbibe and proffer these arguments do not know that they, their mothers and their daughters are potential victims of this kind of violence. They fail to take cognizance of some of the witnessing that some women in this study have given concerning how: a ten-year-old was raped; how armed robbers raped a young woman; and how a gang of boys, led by a boyfriend raped a girl. Neither did they take cognizance of the actual and potential consequences of the incidents on the victims, their families and the society at large.

The fact that more literate and semi-literate women than men took this position, a position that holds the least possibility of empowering women, is particularly unfortunate because when women are raped, those are the voices that they hear, and the views that the voices articulate condition their reactions and those of their families to their ordeal. Those views result in informal learning. This is part of the process of construction of who those women become. It is also part of the process of constructing the identity of other women who have heard the negative comments about victims of rape.

Equally unfortunate is the advice that semi-literate women who are mothers and potential mothers, who take active part (and will take active part) in the construction of the identities of female and male children, gave to victims of battery by husband. Fifty point six per cent (50.6%) of their advice had been categorized as holding the least possibility of empowering women. This is because they took the position that women who have been abused by their husbands: were stubborn; were not submissive; should have begged their husbands; lacked character; and, must have provoked the man. Although not many men offered advice on battery by husband, 50 per cent of the advice offered, very much like the advice that the semi-literate women gave, assumed that, women who are stubborn; who behave badly to men; who challenge men's authority; who are not submissive; and who are confrontational, deserve to be beaten.

In Table 5.4, we compare the advice that literate and semi-literate women who have had close encounters with violence have given (or would give) on how victims of rape and battery should handle their experience.

On balance, from the examples of the responses of literate and semi-literate women that are represented in Table 5.4, there is no clear-cut difference in the positions of literate and semi-literate women (who have had close encounters with violence) on how victims of rape and battery should handle their experience.

We recall that literate men gave more of the advice on rape that were considered capable of empowering women than did literate women, and both literate and semi-literate women gave almost equal percentages (22.8% and 22.03% respectively) of advice that was considered to hold the least possibility of empowering women. And, more literate and semi-literate women took positions that were considered to hold the least probability of empowering women than did literate men.

These results underscore the position earlier articulated in this work that women do not benefit from education in the same way that men do. Although literate women and men have had the same formal school training and work on the same kinds of schedule in their work places, the differences in the positions taken by literate women and men in this study are traceable to the educative influences/experiences (socialization achieved through day-to-day interactions in schools and outside the schools and religion) that women have, that men do not have, and that women and men teach women or compel women to learn through a system of rewards and punishment. These educative influences that have become knowledge, will account for why 22.8 per cent of responses from literate women were comfortable positions that would not challenge the superior social position of men.

We need to recall what Aanwo, Itunu and Adedigba – three literate victims of violence – did when they experienced violence. They did not do anything. Listen to them: ‘They’, people she means, ‘believed it was normal for a stubborn woman to be beaten by her husband or boyfriend, and that a victim of rape or sexual harassment asked for it by the way she dressed, spoke or behaved’; ‘It was like it is the usual thing to be beaten or sexually harassed and that there’s nothing you can do about it’.

I could not report to anyone because it was a shame telling anyone, even your mother. The blame will always be that of the woman. Others were not happy but they said it was part of growing up. The society does not attach much importance to sexual harassment. They see it as normal, provided you didn’t yield.

All these statements reflect women’s knowledge of reactions of some members of society to violence against women.

Even though we had categorized reportage to the police/appropriate authority as a position that depicts outrage and practicality, and capable of empowering women, and many of the male respondents gave this type of advice, Aanwo, a victim of violence said: ‘Never report to the Police as this would lead to more degradation and harassment’. Although we may say a negative interpretation of

Table 5.4: Advice Offered by Women who have had Close Encounter with Violence

Literate Women	The Experience	What she Did	Advice On Violence	Further/Other Comments
Anwo	I have been beaten, and I know several women who have experienced all stated above.	I did not do anything	Run for their lives and seek spiritual and medical cleansing. Never report to the police as this would lead to more degradation and harassment	If a man hits a woman, then he can kill her one day, so the best solution is to give him a wide berth. Reporting to the police would only mean opening up wounds that may have healed, since most times the sympathy is with the accused not the victim
Itunu	Yes, I've been beaten and sexually harassed	I braced up to the challenge. I strengthened my resolve that I am an individual with equal rights and that I would not be a weakling	First assess whether you are at fault in the situation. If beaten and you don't deserve it, be bold and organize a retaliation, if sexually harassed and you were decently dressed rebuff the advance and prove your worth in a decent manner	It is my personal view and I oppose the view that women should be treated unjustly because of their sex!
Omolade	Yes, I know women who have been beaten – my mother and a young church member	My mother (a widow then) slapped the man back. Surprised and caught unawares, he turned away as others jeered. The lady ran to take solace in my house as it was becoming too much – she had wounds. We later counseled them and she returned home.	They should fight back in as much a decent and result oriented way as possible. They should not keep quiet or else, more will come their way. Keeping quiet over such issues or not acting is rather a sign of weakness which can encourage more or even worse of such actions from those doing it to you and other onlookers	Well, a woman should not be treated as a nonentity and the earlier men/people realize that, the better
Adedigba	Yes, I've been sexually harassed	I could not report to anyone because it was a shame telling anyone even your mother. The blame will always be that of the woman.	Report to the police. It is a new world the situation has changed	
Semi-literate Women				
Rukayat	I've been beaten before. I've heard of a rape victim before too	When my husband raised his fist and it pained me, I retaliated even though I was not as powerful as he was.	Concerning beating, women should be patient because of their children. As for rape, I can't take it, in fact I will tell the victim to report to the authority immediately	This is because the rape victim will not be able to face the world because of the stigma
Toun	My apprentice was raped in Lagos. My husband beat me twice because I was stubborn. I went against his wish. I proved too stubborn thereby getting my husband angry to the extent that he slapped me. I therefore believe that some	I went to my father after the beating to report him but my father said that I should go back there but I went to stay with my friend in her house and after some days he came	I would advise a woman that has been beaten to meet the man's family and tell them to warn him against beating her and also tell him what can result from such beating.	I can not tell the woman to move out of her husband's house I would rather tell her to be patient

Table 5.4: (continued)

Toun	My apprentice was raped in Lagos. My husband beat me twice because I was stubborn. I went against his wish. I proved too stubborn thereby getting my husband angry to the extent that he slapped me. I therefore believe that some women deserve beating because of their behavior. Yes, my sister's husband used to beat her regularly	I went to my father after the beating to report him but my father said that I should go back there but I went to stay with my friend in her house and after some days he came to beg me and my family and this made me to go back to him She eventually moved out and even lost a child during the process of beating.	I would advice a woman that has been beaten to meet the man's family and tell them to warn him against beating her and also tell him what can result from such beating.	I can not tell the woman to move out of her husband's house I would rather tell her to be patient
Morenike			A woman who has experienced continuous beating should move out of the house. If raped, she should go to the hospital and report to the police	A woman may lose her life in the process. A rape victim can become pregnant so she should treat herself and report to the police for justice. Otherwise, the rapist would have cheated her.
Adama	My husband used to beat me	I would run away, and he would come and beg me and then I will go back	I tell them to stay in their husband's place and settle the quarrel because of their children	

life experience (Merriam, Mott and Lee 1996) had taught her to take a position that is apposite to an empowering position, that is her own reality, and it will require some efforts and real changes to convince her that reportage to the police/appropriate authority stand to benefit women. In spite of her experiences, Itunu still retained the meaning perspectives that considered that victims of rape and battery are at least partly responsible for their ordeal. From this framework, she advises that a woman should take decisive actions against her assailants when she knows that she has fulfilled societal expectations about how a woman should conduct herself and her affairs. On how she reacted to her abuse, she said: 'I braced up to the challenge. I strengthened my resolve that I am an individual with equal rights and that I would not be a weakling'. This response is indicative of the fact that she dealt with the situation by tapping on her inner strength, her active agency.

On her part, Adedigba, who could not report her experience of sexual harassment, advised that women should report to the Police, for, according to her, the world has changed. Given Adedigba's responses to many of the questions in this study, her meaning perspectives too has changed. She, for instance, took a cynical view of the roles of women in the private sphere of life when she said their expected roles are: 'To cook, rear children, fetch water, keep the home clean and perform all kinds of dirty jobs at home. They are just to be seen not to be heard and should also be breadwinning'. We recall that Adedigba had told us about how she had to do household chores for her teachers as a primary school pupil, because she is a female.

In the paragraphs that follow, we hear what literate men have to say about their capacity to hit women.

Literate Men's Capacity to Exhibit Violence

Three quarters (45 of 61) of highly literate respondents in Ibadan and Lokoja indicated that they cannot beat/hit a woman, while the rest (1/4) said they can beat a woman or would probably beat a woman. Those who said no responded this way: 'No, God forbid'; 'No, I cannot beat a woman', and 'No, why should I?'

The reasons they gave ranged from: it is indecent; morally and religiously wrong; it's ungentlemanly; women are weak in nature; that is lack of self-control and being irresponsible; and, my religion forbids it, to: not polite; it's the exit of love between the couple and, it will misguide the children; they are flexible in nature; she's a human being like myself; and, I'm used to their temperament. Details of the reasons that some of the men gave for their position can be found in Box 5.5. Those who said they can beat a woman said they would do so for the following reasons: 'if extremely provoked and that is an acceptable defense in law'; '5 per cent of the time because of the presidential role of man in the house and to check her excesses, but it will be light beating'; 'yes if the

Box 5.5: Why Many Literate Men Will Not Hit Women**Literate Men in Formal Work Settings**

'It is inhuman treatment to beat a woman you call your wife, the mother of your children. Such beatings can result in serious injuries and cause problems for the whole family' – Jacob

'Women are weaker vessels as enjoined by the scripture and more so, women are not strong like men to deserve beating rather they deserve pity' – Zaki

'Women are fragile and if beaten they can easily collapse. I hit a young lady when I was in secondary school who fainted, thereafter; I swore never to do so' – Haliru

'I would rather end a relationship if we are not compatible than endure until it becomes unbearable and frustrating. Women on the other hand can be easily swayed. Dialogue works magic' – Adamu

Male Students

'I can't beat a woman because women are special gift to us by God and also my upbringing and religion does not permit such acts. In fact, I love women because one is my mother, two are my sisters, and one day I will have one who will be called my wife and I would also have daughters' – Odedele

'Actually, ladies should be respected; if not for anything, they should be respected for bearing children' – Samuel

'It is not scriptural. It does not show the manly character in me' – Oyesiji

'Their physical constitution, they are a highly emotional gender, and because I respect their cultural role in homebuilding, child bearing and childrearing' – Fijabi

'I have a mother! Beating a woman might mean that I have no respect for my mother. In addition, I do not see women as weaker sex who should only be corrected by bullying. Therefore, I can never beat a woman' – Daniel

situation demands it, no if she happens to be my wife'; 'if extremely provoked'; 'this will create fear in her to avoid confrontation'; 'it all depends on the attitude or behaviour of the woman'; 'there are nagging women and the only language that they understand is being beaten'; 'if a woman attacks me first', and 'if she misbehaves like being involved in extra-marital affairs'.

We thought it might be interesting to know the type of advice that men who can, or would probably, beat a woman gave to women who had experienced violence. Details are contained in Table 5.6

Table 5.6 shows that men who can hit women had no doubts about how they expected women to handle rape cases. They thought women should seek redress in court, or report to an appropriate authority. Only one of the four, Oyeyipo,

Table 5.5: Literate Men on Violence Against Women

	Yes						Probably						No						Total
	Ibadan		Lokoja		Ibadan		Lokoja		Ibadan		Lokoja		Ibadan		Lokoja				
	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage	Frequency	Per centage			
Men in Formal Work Settings	0	-	3	10.3	4	13.8	3	10.3	9	31.0	10	34.5	29						
Male Students	1	3.1	3	9.4	2	6.25	0	-	13	40.6	13	40.6	32						
Total	1	1.6	6	9.8	6	9.8	3	4.9	22	36.1	23	38.0	61						

Key: Yes – Means yes I can hit a woman.

Probably – Means I would probably hit a woman if ...

No – Means I cannot hit a woman.

Source: Data generated from the open-ended questionnaires completed by the two categories of male respondents who provided information during fieldwork.

Table 5.6. Advice on Violence by Men who can Hit Women

Literate Men in Formal Work settings	Why I Can Beat a Woman	Advice on Violence	Reasons for Proffering the Advice
Oyejipo	If extremely provoked. This will create fear in her to avoid confrontation	If a woman is beaten, she should try to avoid what brought the conflict. If raped, she should seek redress in Court for the abuse	This is because her consent has to be sought in sex related matters
Alade	It all depends on the attitude or behaviour of the woman. There are nagging women and the only language that they understand is being beaten	She should either seek redress in the law court or get the family to settle with the person involved	This is to ensure that such an act does not occur in future.
Duro	Under very serious pressure but not my wife	Report to the Police and seek counselling	Women's rights should not be violated
Male Students Zubaru	If she misbehaves, like getting involved in extra marital affairs	She should report to the school authority. The case should be taken to court.	Because it is religiously wrong to rape a woman. Because it is a criminal offence

came clear about how a battered woman should proceed, and his position was that the woman should avoid what brought the conflict. This is a presumption that the other party, the man, could not have caused the conflict.

Religious Leaders on Violence against Women

Islam

Male Muslim Leaders

Male Muslim Leader (MML): Do not approach fornication or adultery (reading from the Qur'an). It says do not approach, not do not commit. It says don't go close to – like caressing, touching, romancing, kissing all those ones that are not legally married to you. It is forbidden, talk more of going to commit... That is, don't go near anything that will take you close to committing fornication. And the Prophet is saying there is fornication of the eyes, hand; it is in the Hadith that gazing, that is looking at a woman lustfully, is fornication and that is why it is said in the Qur'an – lower your gaze. Let the living men and the living women lower their gaze. If you look at Chapter 24 vs. 30, it says that you should lower your gaze and safeguard your chastity.

Olutoyin Mejiuni (OM): When Allah says lower your gaze and says that to everybody, men and women, and then men complain that women are dressing in a particular way; shouldn't we be asking them whether they have been looking at the women?

MML: You know our society is a place for all people and you do not expect me to close my eyes when you are passing by. But what we are saying is that you try as much as possible to discipline yourself, and even if somebody is going and you see the person, take away your eyes, do not keep on looking. The Prophet says first look lawful, second look unlawful. For instance, I have seen you like this, I am supposed to take away my face. You see, if it is not because of the programme that brought you people, after seeing you, I will turn away my face even if you're talking, I will just be backing you; okay. This is because the Prophet says he sees Satan run round our body as blood runs round our body. Before you know it, Satan don already jam you people; and before you know it, the deed is done. That is why Islam wants this thing to be prevented. The Prophet says even scent, the man's scent has a sharp smell but that of a woman is coloured and mild. Secondly, the prophet says you should not wear bangles and be shaking it when you're passing in order to call attention. The Prophet says that you should not wear shoes that will call attention to you

when you're passing by. Immediately you attain the age of puberty, you cover all the parts of your body that men will want to look at to hide away your beauty. Chapter 24 vs. 30-31 will give you all these.

So when you talk about rape, definitely there is no way you can even approach it if actually you follow all the tenets that have already been laid down. Why would you even want to rape? You've gotten your own wife based on some conditions, okay? And the condition here is righteousness and piety and if you see that this woman is nothing but blessing/garment to you, then why rape? Why go and pick somebody to rape? How will punching and beating come in? There is no room for beating, when this is a gender that you must respect. Even between husband and wife, the Prophet said you should not jump on your wife like an animal. In fact, Islam provides for much romance. That is, you play with your wife very well. In fact, he says do not go to your wife as if you are going to a log of wood. In fact, you have to have some prerequisites to lovemaking, like kissing, caressing, romancing, you're playing until the two are moved to go into it before they do it. Like the Prophet said, if you have actually done it and released do not stand up like that. You will remain there until the two of you have actually enjoyed what you have done. That is what the Prophet says.

OM: Do we preach this?

MML: Yes, we do. There is a section in the Qur'an that says when there are differences between you and your wife, admonish her; that is the first stage. If she does not change, then the second stage is distance yourself from her, show her that you have a grudge. After that, you can frown. Some people say you can beat, but scholars say you frown. Frown here does not mean beating; rather, it is that you can rebuke her, talk to her in a harsh manner. Let her know that you're really annoyed. If you have done this and she does not change, now it is time to call on the elders, the parents, and they will settle things. This is the process to frown the face.

Female Muslim Leaders – Lokoja

Female Muslim Leader (FML): We organize workshops/seminars and group discussions on salient issues in our society, including violence, and in most cases, we bring people within and outside to talk to adherents. We discovered there has not been any serious report of violence, all because of the stigma that is associated with it when it is heard. And so, people keep these things to themselves, dying in silence. But we keep talking and counselling on what they should do if such a thing happens, and what they should do to avoid such occurrences. We have discovered that street hawking that results in rape, for example, has an added problem of poverty

because if you're rich, you will not want to expose your child to the hazards on the streets. This is why government should look at programmes on poverty reduction. Why should the privileged ones continue to benefit from programmes aimed at alleviating poverty among poor people? And the masses, especially women, are not happy because when you talk of poverty, it carries the woman's face. Until the economic power of women improves, the issue of street hawking will continue to pose a problem.

OM: Highly educated women and women with some economic power experience violence too, why is it so?

FML: Stigma and protection of marriage do not allow highly educated women to enforce their rights when they have been abused by husband and others. In other words, the possession of formal education does not prevent violence on women in some cases. Some are fighting it though, but they are few because of the fear of losing the family. The problem here though is not religion. It is culture. Even when you run to your parents, they tell you 'my daughter; go back to your husband's because of your children'. It is better that you urinate in a place than scatter the urine about. Stay there and bear all the children for a man. Islam does not encourage divorce. That is why there is a council of elders. If there is any problem you believe you cannot chew, report to the elders.

Female Muslim Leaders – Ibadan

Female Muslim Leader (FML): The Prophet says, 'the best among you men is the best to his wife'. A wife should be a wife, companion and confidant. Women are told to respect their husbands. Where conflict arises is when some of us acquire Western education and by stroke of luck rise above your husband by grade/salary, then you begin to raise the eyebrow to the husband. An example in the Holy Qur'an is that the first wife of the Holy Prophet Mohammed, Hadijat was his boss. The Prophet was one of the attendants in her workplace. The Prophet was twenty-five while the woman was forty. She saw his honesty and dedication to work. When she lost her husband, she approached the younger man. He said he would think about it, so he made supplications to the Almighty Allah and told her he would marry her. The woman called all the workers and told them this is my husband, from today onwards, myself and all the things I have will submit to him. So with all her wealth, she still submitted. But if she had let all those things get into her head, the man would want to say no, I have my own personality to keep. So if you rise above your husband in all ways, you should still be his wife, not his boss. Let him be the head of whatever you have. It is when you do that that you will enjoy his cooperation. A man will not want his wife to belittle him anywhere, and I

think that is one of the things that bring conflict. Where women are wealthier than their husbands and they are submissive, you will see that there is always peace in the house. The Qur'an admonishes women to be submissive, no matter their status.

OM: What about drunken husbands?

FML: Well, if adherents follow the Qur'an, there will be no drunks, for it is one of the reasons Islam forbids drinking. Before the message came, people in the Arabian world drank and drank and committed all kinds of atrocities, such that even when they were to worship Allah, they forgot to, and so Almighty Allah had to send the message that banned people from drinking. Muslims are not supposed to drink, sell or handle alcoholic drinks. Battery will not arise if Muslim men adhere to the injunctions that they should not drink.

OM: We have been told that the Qur'an says when your wife offends you, the third stage in getting her to do a turnaround is to frown your face, and some men interpret frown your face to mean beat your wife.

FML: Frowning is not the same thing as beating. If a wife does a wrong, and the husband follows all the guidelines as stipulated and she does not change, even when you sleep on the same bed, you turn your back to her, and that will send a message that something is wrong. Even according to Sharia, if you're to beat, you should put something under your armpit and hold the stick, and what you have under your armpit should not fall off while you're beating. This means you can't even raise your hands above your shoulders to beat. It has to be gentle.

Christianity

Male Christian Leader – Lokoja

Male Christian Leader (MCL): The first thing is to modernize our culture so as to see our women as our mate as it were. In the Bible, they use the word that indicates somebody with whom you do something side by side as it were, and some people even say that is why God created women from the ribs not from the head or feet, so she can be side by side with you, your partner. Because if we respect them, we remove all those things in our culture that are against the rights of women, and withhold and indeed develop things that are positive to women in our culture, then we can remove things that arise as a result of negative usage of our culture. So when you talk of rape, I look at the totality of it. I was listening to the BBC this morning and they were talking about rape in Darfur. A lady, speaking in her language said they gathered round her and pointed guns at her. Now, how can somebody who respects a woman or sees a woman

as partner, his wife as partner, just stumble on a woman you have not met before, how can you even have the arousal, you know, to have sex with her? You can only do that if you are an animal. That is, your instinct is not human in that sense. Even dogs still circle themselves and do all sorts of things before they then penetrate. But here you just see somebody you've not met before, you tear her cloth and then you come erect and you... I do not understand. But it is because you don't think of that lady as she should be seen. You have so downgraded her that you just went to an animal, and then you descend to that level too and do it.

It is the same thing with battery of women. I used to say it when I am preaching the sermon on marriage. The Bible says that when you quarrel with your wife, and that includes battery, you're called a murderer. And I used to tell them: I say some of you men that have just gotten married now, and you're sitting together now, if you want your prayers to be answered as individuals and collectively, and the prayers are not answered, you are battering your wives, quarrelling, etc. I also tell them that Jesus says don't allow the sun to set on your anger. So when prayers are not being answered or you're having difficulties, you must look inwards because your wife is supposed to be part of you. By marriage you have become one, so it will be foolish or stupid for an individual to decide to bash himself, for that is how God sees it. If you beat your wife, you are beating yourself. If you know whom you are, and you think your wife is part of you, then you wouldn't beat her.

The problem is a lot of us don't practice our religion. We say we are Christians, yes we are Christians; but as situations arise, we behave unlike a Christian, and people are watching. They ask, ha ha, why should you behave like this when Jesus said love your enemy, pray for him, so why are you now chasing your enemy and beating him? They will say no o... that was in those days, I cannot turn another cheek, and I don't have another cheek to turn, you know, which is unfortunate. You have to be a Christian all the time. If you bash your wife, you inhibit your progress and everything you stand for. That is what it is. That is the way I see it, and that is what I tell them.

So one must see his wife as an extension of himself. Once one is able to do that, then you will respect your wife, and she too will, and should do the same. We were discussing this some days ago. Some tribes, I won't mention their names, their women naturally want to be independent even when they are married. This is as opposed to, I think, women in Calabar area where by the time you go to the fattening room, you are taught how to look after a man³. I remember when I was going to be transferred to Calabar, I was told I would be finished if I go there, for I will just marry

one of the women because of the way they will treat you – pet you. You know men are like little boys. Once you pet him and give him what he wants, that's it. So it was said that unlike women from Calabar, the other group of women try to be independent and even compete with their husbands. Inevitably, the one that pets the husband will bond with him better than the one that tries to be independent. So women have to respect their husbands too, and cooperate so that they can work together for the good of the family, for the good of each other and for the good of the nation, because the family means the nation.

OM: From all of these, I conclude that you don't think the pursuit of women's rights is against Biblical injunctions.

MC: No, no; after all, they brought out a woman caught in adultery and they said the law says they should stone her and Jesus said no problem, among all of you, the one that has no sin should cast the first stone. Legend says Jesus started writing on the ground. Apparently, he was writing their names according to the gravity of their sins. They saw what he was doing. By the time he got up, it was the woman alone that was standing there, and he said go and sin no more. So if you deprive anybody of his fundamental human right, you are not doing anything good at all. And the main problem we have is man's inhumanity to man arising from the greed to selfishly acquire and acquire power, authority. In acquiring power, you suppress other people, even when you are in the home.

Female Christian Leader – Lokoja

FC: I frown so much against rape. I also preach against adultery and fornication. Rape is a result of lack of discipline. Any disciplined man, no matter how aroused, will look for somebody that is willing to offer sex. After all, it is on that ground that enjoyment can be found. The Bible frowns at having sex with just anybody. It says be faithful. Once you're married, you're only allowed to have sex with your partner. Bible does not support that you have concubines, not to talk of raping other people. If a man keeps beating his wife, the wife should at least report to the pastor.

OM: If a Church member comes and says her daughter has been raped and she knows the person, what would you say?

FC: The Bible says we should not take ourselves to court – we can report to religious leaders. I would not blame anybody who takes such a case to court, but I would rather advise that having taken it to court, it should be withdrawn, so that some elders can be called to wade in. The elders will call the parties involved, find out how and why it happened. Because when it comes to forgiveness of sins, Matthew 18:22 taught us that we should forgive 70 times 7 times. That is to say whatever type of offence

anybody commits, we should be able to forgive. That is after making sure that the one that committed the act is ready to admit his fault. Having done that, we should be able to forgive. If the person who did the act refuses to own up, then he should be taught a lesson so that others can learn from that. A part of the Bible says we should punish the offender so that that will help others learn their lessons. We can also commit a rapist who has refused to own up to his misdeeds to the hands of Satan and what will Satan do to him? He will destroy him. That is why it is better that the person own up and confess and stop the act. He needs to go into prayer and fasting, to ask God for forgiveness. For there is no sin that God is unable forgive.

Male Christian Leader – Ibadan

Male Christian Leader (MCL): You find different types of people in the Church. When we preach about these issues, we address the situation, we don't focus on the individual. Addressing a person will not solve the problem. We let them know what the word of God says, and the consequences of disobedience. Sin is sin; there is no small or big sin. All disobedience, the Bible says, is sin. You address the spirit of adherents. What makes a person do a bad thing is inside. When the inside can be purged, the outside will be affected positively. There is no one who has the spirit of God who will be involved in these things.

Olutoyin Mejiuni (OM): Including beating? Some say the Bible recommends a little bit of spanking for women, for a wife.

MCL: No. It is not scriptural. The Bible says there is no one who will not cherish his body. If like the Bible said, the wife is the body of the man, now when a person beats himself, then something has happened. When you see a man beating himself, that is beating his wife, then he has become mad. The understanding of the word of God, what God has set as standard, will help a person. The culture may say you can beat your wife, but God never recommended that. No one beats himself. Everyone will take care of his body, care for it and cherish it. So the body of a man is his wife. Ephesians 5 vs 23/29 says, 'No man hates his own flesh, but he nourisheth and cherisheth it even as the Lord the Church.' The Bible says the two of them shall become one flesh. If a man is one flesh with his wife and then he beats his wife, then he has become mad.

OM: If a member of your church reports to you that her husband has been beating her, or that a neighbour, also a member of your Church, raped her daughter, what would you advise her to do apart from praying for her.

MCL: You need to counsel them. Because taking a legal step – going to court – will not solve the problem. It will not undo what has been done. Except the spirit that is behind the behaviour is dealt with, the person cannot be free. Every misbehaviour has a spirit behind it. There is the spirit of rape/sexual abuse, adultery, fornication. That is why somebody who has raped will not stop at that one person. The spirit that is making him to do it will push him to do another one. It is the same thing with fornication.

OM: What if the man refuses to own up?

MCL: The Bible says in Proverbs 28 vs 13 that he that covers his sin shall not prosper, but he that confesses shall have mercy. If someone needs mercy, he has to accept and confess his sins, but if he covers it, the sin will uncover him in time. Because the spirit behind the sin will continue to push him and if he continues, it will get to a point that he will not be able to escape judgement, not even God's judgement alone, because he will be caught red-handed.

Female Christian Leader – Ibadan

Female Christian Leader: A man that beats his wife is a madman. If your wife is you, how can you be beating yourself and you would think you are normal? Many things contribute to battery of wives. The world is wicked and loaded with psychological problems. It starts from a broken home. That is, a boy sees the father beating his mother; he too will wake up one day and beat his wife. That is why marital counselling is very important. You do not just go into a relationship. A child that comes from a broken home, who is rejected, or who comes from an abusive and violent home will have difficulties loving people. Another factor is lack of respect for one another.

Olutoyin Mejiuni (OM): What do you say to women who have been battered by their husbands or a woman who says she has been sexually harassed by her boss?

FCL: This is not something to gloss over. A woman who has an abusive spouse would have seen the signs in courtship. Women marry for different reasons. Some do so to leave home because they have unhappy families. Some are looking for love so they make wrong decisions. These problems have to be tackled from the roots. That is why I have a special ministry for young women.

I advise women who have experienced rape or sexual harassment to forget the past. Don't cry over spilt milk; don't build a wall around yourself because of that. You don't have to be bitter to every man. I let them know that better days are still ahead.

Yoruba Traditional Religion – The Worship of Sango

Olutoyin Mejiuni (OM): Mama, have you heard about cases of rape ...

Female Traditional Religious Leader (FTRL): If a man forces himself on a woman and Sango gets hold of him, Sango will seize his manhood and he will never be able to make use of it again. Sango cannot tolerate rape, he will not agree.

OM: You know these days some men rape women and children and then they beg for forgiveness. They even make the case that after all, when we ask God for forgiveness he forgives us, why then would a human being refuse to forgive?

FTRL: Sango wouldn't forgive! He will pull him out and deal with him in the open for all to see, so that the entire community can jeer at him. Also a man who tries to rape a woman who has traditional incisions or a Sango worshipper/supporter will not succeed. His semen will become water and ineffective.

OM: What should a woman who has been raped or a woman who had her breast or buttocks suddenly grabbed by a man do?

FTRL: Women who are not interested should slap and beat up such men thoroughly (*ko koko ko igbati boo, ko nan daadaa*), such that everybody will know he has done a wrong. Of course, those who are interested will sheepishly ask: so when should I see you tonight and how much would you give me? A rape victim should go to Sango and ask for help. Sango will come to her aid. If the victim is not sure of the identity of the assailant, and a parade of close to a hundred men is held, Sango will single out the assailant for punishment.

God should give Nigeria and Nigerian women peace and progress. Some women do not want to pick up concubines and get into prostitution, but because they are hungry and cannot feed their children, they prostitute so they can feed their children. This is the reason women prostitute and get into all kinds of things.

Discussions

From these interviews, one can say that all religious leaders oppose violence against women, although elsewhere, most had taken submission of wives to their husbands as a given. The Muslim female leader in Ibadan added a slant to this position, when she said a problem arises when women acquire Western education and become haughty to their husbands. A woman who is haughty is the one who is not submissive if we go by the responses of this religious leader. In the context where religious leaders preach submission of women to men, and most adherents believe it is the right thing to do, the haughty woman would

most probably also be considered a stubborn woman. It is therefore not surprising that some illiterate/semi-literate women said some women are battered because they are stubborn.

One issue that the female and male Muslim leaders and the female traditional religious leader raised strongly is the connection between violence against women and poverty, and the role that the government should play. They were apparently raising the matter of the political economy of violence. The religious leaders were weighing in on the side of justice and morality (Keynes 1955) when they called on government to address the problem of poverty (the feminization of poverty and who benefits from poverty alleviation programmes), which religious leaders believe is implicated in battery and sexual abuse of women and children (Weissman 2007).

The female Muslim and male Christian leaders in Lokoja also thought that culture, 'our culture', is responsible for violence against women. The question is: which culture do they have in mind here? The cultures represented in Christianity and Islam? Nigerian cultures, our culture, before these two religions took over the cultural space? Or the culture that has emerged from the fusion of the new religions with traditional cultural practices when they have the same goal? There is a need to raise these questions because these religious leaders appear to be providing an understanding of violence against women as a phenomenon that is a result of belief systems, values and ideologies that are outside their own religions. They do not reckon with the fact that culture is dynamic; it changes voluntarily (in order to adapt) or by coercion as it happened to us Africans after the arrival of Islam, Christianity and colonialism. So for some people, 'our culture' reflects the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions; for others, 'our culture' are those traditional behavioural norms and values that were central to our lives before the new religions and colonialism; whereas for yet others, it is the culture that has emerged from the fusion of traditional norms and values with the norms and values of the new religions.

A good example is the Ogori Ovia Osese festival. Ovia Osese is the festival of the maidens, held by Ogori people of Kogi State. It is the initiation of grown-up girls, who are virgins, into womanhood. 'It is the period in which grown-up girls are taught how and what it takes to become women' (Boro 1992:8). Boro indicated that Christians, Muslims and Traditional religionists have embraced and assimilated the festival into the practice of their respective religions. These days, thanksgiving services are held in the worship places of all religions by the maidens and their families after an Ovia Osese. In addition, girls who want to marry in churches and mosques in Ogoriland have to first present their Ovia Osese certificates. The reason for the fusion of the tradition of Ovia Osese with the new religions may be traced to the fact that both are concerned with purity of young women before marriage.

According to this tradition, all young girls who are indigenes of Ogoriland, no matter where they are resident, have to go through the Ovia Osese before marriage. Those who cannot go through Ovia Osese are those who had lost their virginity before they were due for the rite of passage. Surely, by insisting that young girls who wish to marry in churches, mosques and traditional institutions in Ogoriland should present the certificate that was given to them at the grand finale of the Ovia Osese festival, the Ogori community is showing and teaching young girls why they should stay away from pre-marital sex. The certificate is a reward for staying away from pre-marital sex, while a lack of it is punishment for engaging in pre-marital sex. So the young girls learn this lesson through explicit informal learning. However, after my unofficial interaction⁴ in Lokoja with the three elderly Ogori women who had themselves gone through the Ovia Osese, and who provided information about the Ovia Osese festival, one thought has refused to leave my mind. I have been wondering about what would become of Ogori girls if they would be unfortunate to become victims of child sexual abuse or rape before they were due to go through this rite of passage. I did not ask the three Ogori women who told me about the festival this question. My concern here is not about the merits and demerits of the instructions they are given (or non-formal education process that they go through) as part of their initiation into womanhood; this should be the subject matter for another work. My worry is about the requirement for participation in this rite of passage, being a virgin, especially in the context of rampant child sexual abuse, most of which goes unreported; and the requirement that they present their certificate of initiation to religious institutions before marriage.

Notes

1. This translates to: it is because of her character that we don't like.
2. There are lessons that women can learn from the mother's movement (*madres de plaza de mayo*) in Argentina. The women demanded that their children who had 'disappeared' under the military dictatorship in Argentina between 1976 and 1983 be brought back alive. See Hernandez (1997).
3. Like this male Christian leader, many Nigerians (although I suspect more men than women) have heard about the fattening rooms that turn Calabar women into good wives. However, this religious leader forgot about, or failed to equate a similar rite of passage in his constituency in Kogi State, the Ogori Ovia Osese festival with the Calabar fattening rooms. Ovia Osese is the festival of the maidens, held by Ogori people of Kogi State. It is the initiation of grown up girls who are virgins into womanhood.
4. My interaction with the three elderly Ogori women in Lokoja, although recorded on tape, was unofficial because I did not go to Ogoriland; I did not ask for, neither did I receive official permission from the traditional hierarchy in Ogoriland to hold interviews with the three women. I also need to add that the women tactfully refused to provide detailed information about the training for the girls preparatory to the final ceremony.

