

THE CONCEPT OF 'FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE' IN MARRIAGE: A CASE STUDY OF ABAGANA DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

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Abstract

The phrase "for better, for worse" is a solemn vow often exchanged during Christian marriage ceremonies, symbolizing a lifelong commitment to endure both joyful and challenging times together. However, in many modern marriages, this vow is increasingly tested by the rising incidences of domestic violence. This study explores the meaning and application of the "for better, for worse" concept in the context of abusive marriages, with particular reference to Abagana, a town in Anambra State, Nigeria. Using qualitative methods such as interviews, observations, and case studies, the research investigates how cultural expectations, religious beliefs, economic pressures, and gender roles contribute to the endurance of violence in marriages under the guise of marital commitment. The findings reveal that many victims, especially women, remain in violent relationships due to fear of social stigma, misinterpretation of religious teachings, and economic dependency. The study concludes that while the marital vow emphasizes perseverance, it should not justify or tolerate abuse. It recommends increased awareness, pastoral counseling, legal reforms, and empowerment programs as necessary steps toward protecting the dignity and safety of partners in marriage.

Keywords: For Better for Worse, Marriage, Abagana, Domestic Violence

Introduction

Marriage is universally recognized as a sacred institution, symbolizing the union between two individuals who commit to a lifelong partnership. The phrase 'for better, for worse' is a central tenet of Christian marriage vows, embodying the notion that couples should support each other through both prosperity and adversity (Collins, 2019). However, in many societies, this commitment has been misinterpreted to justify the endurance of suffering, including domestic violence (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). This study seeks to examine how the interpretation of this vow influences the prevalence of domestic violence in marriages in Nigeria, where cases of spousal abuse have become increasingly concerning. The motivation for this research stems from the alarming reports of domestic violence in Abagana and its surrounding communities. Many victims remain trapped in abusive relationships due to societal expectations, religious doctrines, and economic dependency (Olawale, 2021). In a society where marriage is often seen as a woman's ultimate fulfillment, the phrase 'for better, for worse' is frequently misapplied, compelling individuals, particularly women, to endure physical, emotional, and psychological abuse (Kalu, 2018). This study aims to investigate the socio-cultural and religious factors that contribute to this phenomenon, shedding light on the implications of such interpretations.

The theological foundation of marriage, particularly within Christianity, emphasizes love, respect, and mutual support, as outlined in Ephesians 5:25, where husbands are urged to love their wives as Christ loves the church (Collins, 2019). However, these teachings are sometimes misrepresented, reinforcing patriarchal norms that encourage male dominance and female subservience (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). As a result, many women are made to believe that enduring hardship, including domestic violence, is a testament to their commitment to the marital covenant. This misinterpretation has led to significant psychological and physical harm, necessitating a critical examination of how religious doctrines are taught and implemented.

Domestic violence manifests in various forms, including physical assault, emotional abuse, and financial manipulation (Olawale, 2021). Testimonies from victims reveal a disturbing pattern where abusive spouses exploit religious and cultural expectations to maintain control over their partners (Kalu, 2018). Religious and community leaders advise many women to persevere in their marriages, with

separation or domestic violence perceived as failure. The fear of societal stigma, coupled with limited access to financial independence and legal support, further discourages victims from seeking help. This study highlights a specific case in Abagana, analyzing the lived experiences of affected individuals and the systemic failures that perpetuate domestic abuse.

One of the primary objectives of this research is to challenge the prevailing narrative that equates marital endurance with passive suffering. It seeks to promote a balanced understanding of the 'for better, for worse' vow, advocating for interpretations that align with the principles of love, dignity, and mutual respect (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). The research will also explore the role of religious institutions in shaping attitudes toward marriage and domestic violence, urging faith-based organizations to take a proactive stance against abuse. Furthermore, it will examine the effectiveness of existing legal frameworks in protecting victims and recommend policies aimed at fostering safer marital relationships.

The case study of Abagana is particularly significant because it represents a microcosm of a broader societal issue. Domestic violence is not unique to this region, but studying it within a specific cultural and religious context provides deeper insights into the structural and ideological barriers that sustain it (Olawale, 2021). Through focusing on Abagana, this research aims to provide actionable recommendations tailored to the community's needs, ensuring that interventions are both effective and culturally sensitive.

Concept of Marriage

It could be said that the institution of marriage is something that should not be toyed with. According to Stott (1999), marriage is in all societies a recognized and regulated human institution, but not a human invention. Ezenweke and Kanu (2012) affirm that marriage is a very important issue in Africa and is handled with maximum care to ensure the stability of the community at large. Otubah (2016) observes that marriage is a fundamental institution that does not exist just for the emotional satisfaction of two individuals but for the greater good of the community, which stands under the blessings or curse of God. Marriage, as a concept, has several meanings; it is an essentially contentious concept. Ogoma (2014) asserts that the concept of marriage is universal, but there is no universally accepted definition of marriage. It is well known that before two people could be said to be married, there are various processes which must be followed. These processes in marriage vary from one culture to another. According to Oyewale (2016), marriage is a mutual relationship endorsed by holy matrimony between a consenting man and a woman. Oyewale's viewpoint is of the opinion that marriage should be by willful consent and not be force. In support of Oyewale's line of thought, Owen-Hampo (2020) confirms that the couple must be capable and willing to join in matrimony which began by the careful manifestation of their consent. Therefore, the couple ought to have mutually given and accepted themselves solely to establish a marriage. Otubah (2016) views marriage as a religious and legal commitment between a man and a woman as well as the ultimate expression of love. Otubah's concept of marriage points to love as a major prerequisite for marriage and not on wealth. In support of Otubah's viewpoint, Ezenweke and Kanu (2012) state that "African society does not lay emphasis on individual looks and wealth as the primary motivation for marriage" (p.135). Nmah (2012) explains marriage as a divine agreement or sacred bond or contract involving a plurality of persons with certain goals. It is a holy institution that involves dowry, which is part of the norms of marriage. Nmah's idea of marriage drives home the idea that, apart from the divine being involved in marriage other family members must also be involved. This is true because even the living dead are not left out in marriage as they are also informed.

Marriage in Igbo Cosmological Setting

Marriage is a very important human relationship in Igboland. In Igboland, the choice of a wife is not the sole responsibility of the man or the woman. It involves the entire family. On sighting the woman or man of one's choice and love, the man will first introduce the lady to his family so that the parents and the kins will give their blessings. If the relatives do not give a positive approval to the marriage, it may not take place. If everybody is satisfied, then the marriage process will be initiated and the necessary rites will be

performed. Ogbalu (1982) noted that Igbo marriage is not just an affair or a relationship between a man and a woman, it involves the whole *umunna* to some extent. Marriage takes many forms in Igbo society. Throughout the continent, the diversity of system reflects the traditional religions and economic circumstance of a wide variety of distance cultures. In recent years, modern life, industry and cities have brought change to Igbo marriages and to the role of men and women. Igbo marriage systems do share several characteristics. They almost always involve the transfer of dowry cash, goods or services from the groom or his family to the bride's family. This exchange is both real and symbolic, as it marks the woman's passage from one social group to the other. Thus, Waya and Okanume (2017) reveal that, for Igbo marriages, marriage is a matter between families as much as between the bride and groom and many families arrange the marriages of their members. Igbo cultures emphasize that the union of two individuals must fit into the larger picture of social networks known as kinship, clan or tribal groups. The clan always has an important say in the acceptance of a marriage partner, precisely because marriage involves the welcoming of a new member into the clan. There are three defining aspects of marriage; first is a transfer of legal rights to a woman from her kin to husband. Not only does the husband gain rights to the wife's labour, sexuality and offspring's, but also the rights to receive compensation for the harm done to her by others. Secondly, marriage modifies, and to some extent, ruptures the relations between the bride and her immediate kin. In Igbo society, the wife moves out of her parents' home and they lose a family member. Third Waya and Okanume (2017) states that marriage is an alliance, an agreement or contract between two families or groups of kins, because Igbo society see marriage not as a relationship between two individuals people but also as a structural link between two individuals but also as a structural link between groups. Before the colonists came to influence how the norms were perceived in marriages, marriage was definitely no exception when it comes to celebrating.

In the pre-colonialism period of the Igbo culture, marriages were arranged, where women did not have much of a choice of whom they married. The assumption is that love between the partners comes after marriage and more thoughts was given to the socioeconomic advantages accruing to larger family from the marriage than romantic love (Waya and Okanume, 2017). These arranged marriages were set up with ladies in their teens to be married off to much older men. The potential groom visited his potential wife in her father's Obi, or hut but before an agreement can be settled for the marriage, a bride price must be paid by the suitor. Bride prices can range from cowrie shells to goats. During this negotiation, food like foo-foo and soup are given out to everyone in the obi. Kola nuts are also eaten and palm wine is usually the drink of choice.

Abagana in Historical Perspective

Abagana is one of the 179 towns in Anambra State of Nigeria. It is the headquarters of Njikoka Local Government Area. According to the early Igbo history, Abagana, Nimo, Eziowelle, and Abba were related. There are various stories on the origin of Abagana but only one is widely accepted. Abagana is one of the biggest and most populous towns in Anambra.

Abagana is a town that can be taken to be sub-urban because of many activities going on in the community like business, education, religious events and so on. According to Esin and Nwafor (2024), it is widely accepted that Abagana had six children, five males and one female, namely, Okpala, Diese, Akpuche, Uruochu, Ajilija, and Obum- the only female...these five sons of Agana- Diese were the original inhabitants of the place called "Abagana", and this perhaps was the reason why we originally had "Abagana Ebo-n'ese, i.e., Abagana of five clans." Still in line with this historical origin, Esin and Nwafor (2024) remark that a spiritual mound was erected at the ancestral place where Agana- Diese lived and reared his children. The present four quarters of Abagana bear the names of the other four sons of Abagana, namely:-Akpu Abagana, Uruokpala/ Uduunu, Adagbe, and Orofia. Akpu Abagana lies on the main Public Works Department road between Onitsha and Enugu and its hilltop is well known to all travelers on that road. The current traditional ruler is His Majesty, Igwe Patrick Mbamalu Okeke.

Causes of Marriage Failure in the Contemporary Society

Marriage failure has been a reoccurrence feature in the society. However, the recent reports indicate that there is a consistent rise in marriage failure in the society. According to Lampard (2013), almost fifty percent of marriages in the society end up due to incompatibility, infidelity, arranged marriage, e.t.c. However, it is important to analyze some of the specific reasons that would make couples consider separation as the only solution whenever the marriage is riddled with some challenges. This study aims to explore factors that contribute to marriage failure among couples and how it affects parenting

Denial of Sexual Intercourse and Satisfaction

Sex is vital to relationship satisfaction, and withholding sex can cause resentment, rejection, and a lack of connection. Sex starvation has been discovered to be one of the reasons why marriage failure has increased amongst many couples. In marriage, a man denying sex to his wife and vice versa could amount to cruelty and may be grounds for marriage failure. Furthermore, Odeleye (2019) laments:

Sexual problems may arise in marriage as a result of sublimation of sexual urging for several possible concentrated interests in his or her work. He or she may suddenly have become disinterested in sex as an avenue of sensual happiness. One of the spouses could be nursing a grudge against another. (p. 364).

According to Hanafi (2021), other reasons for the denial of sexual satisfaction are erectile dysfunction (for men), being in the post-menopausal stage (for women), diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, alcohol addiction, side effects of medications and complications from smoking, among others.

Poverty

Plucker and Peters (2018) state that individuals in poverty are vulnerable. When basic personal needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, are challenging to obtain, one is said to be in poverty. Banerjee and Buflo (2011) opine that amongst Christians, it is difficult to find couples who can endure poverty in food, shelter or housing. That is to say that when what the woman expects in the marriage is not materializing, and they have other men enticing them, they will file for divorce. Uroko and Enobong (2022) stress that what comes from economic insecurity in the family and chronic financial issues makes the dissolution of the marriage easier. Odgers and Jaffee, (2013) state that children from poor families suffer from certain deficiencies. Also, most aspects of children's physical, cognitive and affective health and development are affected by poverty, primarily due to the effects of deleterious environments, lack of access to quality education and resources.

Marital Infidelity amongst Couples

The issue of marital infidelity is a common reason for marriage failure. Marital infidelity is considered a crime which contravenes the law of marriage in society. The Mosaic Law forbids and prescribes penalties against those involved in marital infidelity. In the covenant he made with the Israelites, Yahweh included adultery among the sins that must be avoided. The Book of Exodus stated that followers of God must not commit adultery. According to Familusi (2019), couples must avoid committing the sin of marital infidelity. In Christian marriage, the wife is expected to be faithful to her husband, and when this is not found, the one who feels cheated does not forgive the offender, and this gives divorce an opportunity. Marital infidelity represents a sin against God, man and nature. Couples must make efforts to be faithful to one another. This will then help them to consolidate their relationship.

Childlessness

The essence of marriage is to procreate in order to prolong the family lineage. Describing the importance of children, it is important to note that procreation is the main purpose of marriage. This shows that many people consider children to be the consummation of marriage. A woman without a child, or specifically, a male child, in many parts of Igbo land, loses the right of inheritance, and the family is considered hopeless. On the other hand, the woman's security is removed, and the man may decide to commit domestic violence against her and get another woman. Nmah (2003) states that:

In rural areas the roles of women centers on being a wife and a mother. The bearing of children is seen as a means of maintaining the lineage, whether it is in the patrilineal or matrilineal society. Barrenness could easily lead to domestic violence of a woman and her going back to her people.

In fact barrenness is often seen as a disgrace, especially in patrilineal societies. (p. 143).

Childlessness may cause anxiety, distress and frustration in marriage and subsequently lead to domestic violence. Arugu (2014) states that, “in African culture, any marriage that is not blessed with children is not considered to have achieved its aim” (p. 375). It is assumed that when a couple cannot bear children, there will be nobody to remember them, and their genealogical line will disappear.

Moreover, Mohanty and Biswal (2007) state that in some cultures, a woman who gives birth only to girls may be subject to domestic violence because the girl child cannot continue with the surname of the father. In fact, the hope of a woman in marriage is in the production of children, especially male children. This male child preference and the consequent tendency to care more for the male child than for the female child in matters of upbringing and education have put women in a serious tight corner. This situation can lead to a woman losing her rights of inheritance or even a share in her husband’s property, and in a stricter dimension, may lose her marriage through domestic violence.

Arranged Marriages and Incompatibility

Arranged marriages are a longstanding tradition in many cultures, including parts of Nigeria, where parents or community elders take an active role in selecting partners for their children. While these unions are often intended to promote family unity, economic security, and cultural preservation, they may also contribute to marital incompatibility when individuals are compelled into relationships without mutual understanding or affection (Collins, 2019). Incompatibility in arranged marriages can manifest in various ways, including emotional disconnection, differing personal aspirations, and conflicting values, which can exacerbate tensions and lead to marriage failure. Many individuals enter marriage without prior courtship, limiting their ability to assess compatibility. This lack of mutual understanding often results in dissatisfaction, resentment, and, in extreme cases, abusive behavior (Kalu, 2018). Women, in particular, face significant challenges, as they are often expected to submit to their husbands regardless of personal grievances or mistreatment. Such dynamics reinforce patriarchal structures that prioritize male authority over female well-being.

Moreover, incompatibility in arranged marriages is further compounded by societal expectations that discourage separation or divorce. Religious and cultural norms dictate that once married, a woman must remain with her husband, even in cases of extreme abuse (Johnson and Ferraro, 2000). This rigid perception of marriage perpetuates cycles of marriage failure, as victims feel trapped with no viable means of escape.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that transcends cultural, religious, and socio-economic boundaries. It encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical assault, emotional manipulation, psychological intimidation, and economic control. In the context of this study, domestic violence is examined within the framework of marital expectations. This has led to a normalization of violence within households, where victims are often discouraged from seeking help due to fear of societal judgment and economic dependency. Religious and traditional beliefs play a crucial role in shaping societal attitudes toward domestic violence. In many cases, faith-based institutions emphasize marital endurance, urging victims to persevere rather than seek justice or protection. This has contributed to the widespread acceptance of domestic violence as an unfortunate but inevitable aspect of marriage. Additionally, societal pressure to maintain the facade of a successful marriage further silences victims, preventing them from reporting abuse or seeking legal recourse (Kalu, 2018). The result is a cycle of suffering that perpetuates the oppression of vulnerable individuals within the marital institution.

‘For Better, for Worse’ in Marriage: A Look at Abagana Domestic Violence

Marriage is a sacred institution built on love, trust, and commitment. The phrase "for better, for worse" signifies the partners' willingness to endure the ups and downs of marital life. However, in Abagana, Anambra State, a case of domestic violence has raised concerns about the true essence of this marital vow. The recent tragic case of Chioma Nwaka, a mother of five, who was allegedly set on fire by her husband, Obiozor Nwaka, over a family misunderstanding, highlights the growing domestic violence crisis in Abagana. According to Obianeri (2025), eyewitness reports, Chioma, the primary breadwinner of the family, suffered third-degree burns before succumbing to her injuries in a medical facility in Enugwu-Ukwu. The gruesome nature of this incident has prompted the intervention of the Anambra State government, with the governor's wife, Nonye Soludo, vowing to ensure full justice is served. According to Nnadozie (2021), domestic violence has been on the rise, with many cases going unreported due to societal pressure and cultural norms that discourage victims from speaking out. This aligns with the findings of Eze (2019), who argues that the patriarchal nature of Igbo society often silences women, making them endure abusive relationships under the guise of marital endurance. Domestic violence manifests in various forms, including physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. As Okeke and Umeh (2020) observe, some women remain in abusive marriages due to economic dependence on their spouses. This economic factor forces many victims to stay silent, enduring pain and suffering to avoid financial insecurity. The legal framework in Nigeria criminalizes domestic violence, yet enforcement remains weak. Uzochukwu (2022) highlights that despite the provisions of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, many victims lack access to justice due to limited awareness and inadequate support systems. The intervention of Nonye Soludo and government officials in Chioma's case emphasizes the need for stronger enforcement mechanisms and support structures to protect victims.

Implications of 'For better, for worse' in Marriage

Death

The vow "for better, for worse" takes on profound implications when death occurs within marriage. While the commitment is meant to foster enduring love and unity, the reality of death often brings emotional, financial, and social challenges to the surviving spouse and family. In cases where a spouse dies due to natural causes, the bereaved partner faces the pain of loss and the burden of adjusting to life without their companion. Psychological distress, depression, and loneliness can result from this sudden void, making emotional support from family and community essential (Obinna, 2023). Additionally, economic hardship may arise, particularly if the deceased was the primary breadwinner. As Uche (2022) notes, widows and widowers in Nigeria often struggle with financial instability due to the lack of social security and legal protection. However, when death in marriage results from domestic violence, as seen in Chioma Nwaka's case, the implications extend beyond grief. Such cases highlight the dark reality of toxic marriages where the vow "for worse" is misinterpreted to justify enduring abuse. The legal and social ramifications of spousal homicide demand justice and systemic reforms to prevent future occurrences. Strengthening the enforcement of domestic violence laws and providing safe havens for victims can help mitigate these tragedies (Okoroafor, 2024).

Divorce

Divorce, though often seen as a last resort, is sometimes the only viable option in marriages plagued by domestic violence, infidelity, or irreconcilable differences. The vow "for better, for worse" should not be a justification for enduring a toxic or life-threatening relationship. According to Chukwuma (2023), staying in abusive marriages under societal pressure has led to severe emotional and physical consequences for many individuals, particularly women. In Abagana, Anambra State, cultural stigmatization of divorce often forces victims of domestic violence to remain in unsafe environments. As Okafor (2022) points out, many women fear societal backlash, family rejection, and economic instability, which discourage them from seeking divorce as a solution.

Broken Marriage

A broken marriage occurs when the foundational elements of love, trust, and mutual respect are eroded, often leading to separation, emotional distress, and in extreme cases, violence. Many broken marriages stem from domestic violence, financial struggles, or cultural and religious pressures that force couples to remain in unhealthy relationships (Eze, 2023). The consequences of a broken marriage extend beyond the couple, affecting children, extended families, and the broader community. According to Uche (2024), children raised in violent or broken homes often experience psychological trauma, leading to difficulties in forming healthy relationships in the future. Societal perception plays a significant role in how broken marriages are handled. In some cases, victims of domestic violence are pressured to remain in their marriages due to fear of societal judgment or religious beliefs that discourage separation (Okonkwo, 2022). This societal pressure often prolongs suffering and prevents individuals from seeking help

Psychological Trauma

Psychological trauma is one of the most profound consequences of domestic violence and broken marriages. Victims, particularly women and children, suffer from long-term emotional and mental distress that affects their overall well-being. According to Ezeobi (2023), individuals who experience prolonged abuse often develop anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), making it difficult for them to trust or form healthy relationships in the future. Many survivors of domestic violence face social isolation, stigma, and a lack of professional psychological support. As Okechukwu (2022) notes, there is an urgent need for mental health interventions, including counseling services, therapy, and rehabilitation programs, to help victims recover from their traumatic experiences. Additionally, children raised in abusive households are at risk of developing behavioral and emotional issues. Nwankwo (2024) emphasizes that witnessing domestic violence can normalize aggression in young minds, increasing the likelihood of them either becoming victims or perpetrators of abuse in adulthood.

Solutions to Ameliorate Violence in Marriage

Courtship

Courtship means the period of time that people intending to live together as husband and wife take while studying one another. Courtship is a vital aspect of human relationships, and it plays a crucial role in the development of relationships. It is a period where two people get to know each other, build trust, and determine compatibility before committing to a long-term relationship. Courtship helps the couple establish each other's health status through medical tests, allowing them to accept each other's health status without affecting their marriage. In courtship, intending couples come to a place of understanding each other's status so that each time they come together, they prepare for the financial constraints. Courtship is a time when they express love for one another, like visiting, exchanging gifts and sharing inner feelings. This helps to cement their relationship. Courtship helps the partners to know each other's family background and appreciate each other, leading to making a commitment from an informed point of view, hence building a stable relationship. Courtship helps the couple to know their religious beliefs, find and agree on how to handle the identified differences in their relationship. Courtship helps to introduce relatives to each partner. This reduces the possibility of committing incest and engenders closer commitment to one another. Courtship is the time when the two share experiences in life, like problems, and how they intend to live together with them. Courtship helps the two to understand, identify and respect each other's likes and dislikes (individual hobbies). This helps in determining whether the partners will in the future share their leisure time together.

Prioritizing Quality Time

Spending quality time together as a couple can significantly reduce conflicts and foster a stronger emotional bond. Many cases of domestic violence stem from unresolved tensions, miscommunication, and emotional disconnection. According to Okeke and Umeh (2020), couples who actively engage in shared activities, meaningful conversations, and mutual interests tend to have healthier relationships with fewer instances of conflict and violence. Creating intentional moments to connect, such as regular date

nights, open discussions, or engaging in shared hobbies, can help couples understand each other better and address underlying grievances before they escalate into violence. Nkemdirim (2024) emphasizes that emotional intimacy is key to a peaceful home, as partners who feel heard and valued are less likely to resort to aggression.

Furthermore, quality time fosters a supportive environment where both partners can express their emotions freely. According to Iheanacho (2023), effective communication reduces misunderstandings, which often trigger conflicts. By prioritizing time together, couples can reinforce trust, improve problem-solving skills, and ultimately cultivate a home built on love rather than fear.

Dialogue Approach

Divorce is unhealthy for the family, children, husbands, wives and the Church. Thus, Anaana, Ahura and Tyoakaa (2019) state that the Church should set up a standard to guide married couples. It is believed that the Church has the power to resolve some of the problems that society and Christians face in their marriages. Thus, as regards dialogue between couples, the Christian Church should learn to appreciate marriage and avoid divorce amongst Christians. In dialogue, all parties involved must respect the feelings and faiths of other parties. There is a need for openness, and prejudice must be reduced as dialogue seeks to eliminate every prejudice, intolerance and unnecessary misunderstanding.

Marriage Separation

Marriage separation can serve as a vital solution in preventing further domestic violence and ensuring the safety of victims. While many societies, including Igbo communities, emphasize marital endurance, temporary or permanent separation can provide a necessary respite for individuals facing physical, emotional, or psychological abuse (Nnadozie, 2021). Separation allows couples to evaluate their relationship from a distance and seek professional intervention, such as counseling or legal assistance. According to Okeke and Umeh (2020), structured separation can create space for healing, reducing tension and preventing violent confrontations. In many cases, separation can either lead to reconciliation under healthier circumstances or provide a path toward legal divorce when necessary. Legal provisions, such as judicial separation under the Matrimonial Causes Act, offer protection to spouses without immediately dissolving the marriage (Obi, 2021). This can be beneficial for individuals who are not ready for divorce but require legal safeguards against abuse. Separation also empowers victims by giving them the opportunity to regain financial independence and emotional stability before making long-term decisions (Chukwuma, 2023). Furthermore, religious and traditional leaders must be encouraged to recognize separation as a protective measure rather than a failure of marriage. Advocacy for safe housing, legal support, and financial empowerment for separated individuals can help them transition into independent and violence-free lives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The phrase "*for better, for worse*" in marriage symbolizes a commitment to stand by one's partner through life's challenges. However, it should not be misinterpreted as a justification for enduring domestic violence, suffering, or any form of inhumane treatment. The tragic case of Chioma Nwaka in Abagana, Anambra State, who lost her life due to domestic violence, underscores the urgent need to redefine societal perceptions of marital commitment and take proactive measures to combat domestic violence. This study has demonstrated that domestic violence in marriage is fueled by multiple factors, including economic dependence, cultural expectations, religious doctrines, and inadequate legal enforcement. Many victims endure abuse in silence due to societal stigmatization, fear of financial instability, and lack of institutional support.

Some recommendations for addressing domestic violence

i. The Nigerian government must fully implement and enforce the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act and other legal protections to ensure that perpetrators of domestic violence face justice.

- ii. Awareness campaigns should be intensified to educate individuals, especially in rural communities, on their rights in marriage and the dangers of enduring abusive relationships. Schools, religious centers, and traditional rulers should actively participate in disseminating knowledge about domestic violence, including the psychological and social consequences of marital abuse. Media outlets should create more content that challenges harmful gender norms and promotes healthy marital relationships.
- iii. Many victims of domestic violence remain trapped in abusive marriages due to financial dependence. Government and NGOs should provide vocational training, skill acquisition programs, and financial grants to empower victims economically. Women should be encouraged to have financial independence through entrepreneurship and educational opportunities.
- iv. Pre-marital counseling should be made compulsory to prepare couples for marital responsibilities and conflict resolution. Ongoing marriage counseling programs should be available at religious centers and community organizations to help couples navigate challenges without resorting to violence.
- v. More safe houses, shelters, and crisis response centers should be established across communities to provide immediate refuge for victims escaping abusive marriages. Psychological support and trauma counseling should be provided to survivors to help them heal emotionally and mentally.

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