

The Silent Scream: Verbal Violence Against Deaf Individuals in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT: Verbal violence against Deaf individuals in Cameroon is a pervasive issue that takes different forms. This research highlights often-overlooked issue of verbal violence and social malaise experienced by deaf individuals and its impact on their well-being. The study explores experiences of Deaf individuals, the forms and consequences, identifying potential solutions to address this issue. These include insults, discriminatory language, and derogatory remarks, which have severe emotional and psychological effects. The study is guided by Stigmatisation Theory by Erving Goffman (1963). The theory helps us understand how verbal violence perpetuates stigmatisation and marginalisation, leading to negative self-perceptions and reduced social opportunities. The theoretical framework guides our exploration, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon of verbal violence and its implication for deaf population. A Case Study Design method was employed. This design involved in-depth investigation of specific deaf individuals. A case study approach examined real-life instances of verbal violence towards them and explored the factors that influenced these incidents. The sample of the study was 25 participants, both deaf and hearing individuals. Findings reveal that: 1. 7 (46%) out of 15 deaf children experienced verbal aggression at home. Five distinct categories of verbal abuse were common in workplaces, school, homes, friends and community at large. 2. Emotional and psychological effects, communication barriers, impact on mental health and educational and professional consequences affected deaf individuals. 3. Inclusive policies, educational awareness campaigns, respect and empathy as well as empowering bystanders were approaches and strategies implemented for interventions. By amplifying their voices and sharing their experiences, this study hope to raise awareness, advocate for change, and contribute to the broader discourse on inclusivity and respect for all deaf individuals. The study recommends that communities should create a culture of respect and acceptance towards deaf individuals by promoting inclusive environments, diversity and inclusion initiatives.

KEYWORDS: Deaf culture, advocacy, violence prevention, insults, human rights, mental health.

1. INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM

I have a deep concern for the well-being and rights of Deaf individuals in Cameroon, who often face marginalization, exclusion, and violence in various forms. As a researcher, I am compelled to delve deeper into the issue of verbal violence towards deaf individuals, and the importance of fostering empathy and inclusion in Cameroon. Despite the significance of this issue, there is a notable lack of research and understanding about the experiences of Deaf individuals making it essential to investigate this topic. It is crucial to examine the nuances of this problem, which often stems from a lack of understanding, awareness, and accessibility. This study aims to give voice to the experiences of Deaf Cameroonians, highlighting the prevalence, forms, and impact on their well-being. By addressing these challenges, we can contribute to a more inclusive society where Deaf individuals are valued, respected and empowered. We gain a deeper understanding of the complex social, cultural, and systemic factors that contribute to violence thereby, advocating for change. Stigmatisation Theory by Erving Goffman (1963) guides the study. This theory focuses on the social and psychological consequences of being labelled as disabled or deviant. The theory helps us understand how verbal violence perpetuates stigmatisation and marginalisation, leading to negative self-perceptions and reduced social opportunities. By applying this theory, we analyse the experiences of deaf individuals, examine the power dynamics at play, and identify strategies for intervention and prevention. The theoretical framework guides our exploration, analysis and interpretation of the phenomenon of verbal violence and its implication for deaf population.

In subsequent sections we examine the psychological consequences of verbal violence on deaf individuals, highlighting the urgent need for a more empathetic approach to interactions and societal structures. By shedding light on the experiences of deaf individuals and the systemic issues that contribute to their marginalization in Cameroon, we can begin to develop targeted strategies to address verbal violence and social malaise. Ultimately, this article seeks to inspire a collective effort towards creating a more inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, irrespective of their hearing abilities.

Verbal violence refers to the use of aggressive or harmful language that causes emotional distress and harm to hard of hearing individuals. This unique communication challenge they face makes them particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of

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verbal violence. By examining this issue, we hope to shed light on the experiences of this marginalized group and provide valuable insights for creating a more inclusive and supportive society.

Verbal violence encompasses a range of aggressive behaviours, including insults, threats, and derogatory language. While its impact is often underestimated, verbal violence can have severe consequences on individuals' mental and emotional well-being. For deaf individuals, the effects of verbal violence can be compounded. The absence of auditory cues further compounds the challenges faced by them in comprehending and responding to verbal aggression.

Feelings of isolation, anxiety, and depression are common among deaf individuals who are subjected to verbal violence on a regular basis. Moreover, this form of violence hinders their ability to effectively communicate and assert themselves in various situations. Lack of understanding about deafness within society is a significant factor contributing to verbal violence. Ignorance often leads to misguided assumptions, stereotypes, and discriminatory attitudes towards them.

The absence of inclusive policies further exacerbates the problem, making it challenging to fully participate in different aspects of life. It is crucial to foster empathy and create inclusive environments. This can be accomplished through strategies such as, education and awareness campaigns that aim to dispel misconceptions about deafness and promote understanding.

By fostering an inclusive mindset, we can create a society where deaf individuals are respected, valued, and empowered.

Verbal violence towards deaf individuals is a pressing issue that demands our collective attention and action. Recognizing the impact of verbal violence, addressing its root causes, promoting empathy and inclusion are issues we highlight in this study with the following objectives:

1.1 Research objectives

- To examine various types of verbal violence experienced by individuals who are hard of hearing.
- To analyse the effects of verbal violence and social malaise on deaf individuals.
- To develop strategies and interventions for creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for hard of hearing individuals.

To shed light on this topic, the following research questions guided the study

1.2 Research questions

RQ1 What are the different forms of verbal violence on deaf individuals and how do they manifest in various contexts

RQ2 What are the impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals.

RQ3 What strategies, interventions, or policies can effectively mitigate verbal violence both at individual and societal levels.

These questions delve into the multifaceted nature of verbal violence, exploring its origin, impacts, and potential avenues for prevention and intervention.

1.3 Implication of study

The implications of studying verbal violence are far-reaching and significant. Understanding these implications will help inform individuals, organizations, and policymakers on the vitality of implementing effective interventions. Key interventions are as follows:

1.3.1 Educational awareness

Studying verbal violence can contribute to educational initiatives and awareness campaigns aimed at preventing and addressing this issue. By disseminating research findings we can raise awareness about the impact of verbal violence and educate individuals on effective conflict resolution strategies.

1.3.2 Verbal violence can have severe negative impacts on individuals' mental and emotional well-being. Studying this phenomenon, we can develop strategies to support and empower individuals who have experienced verbal violence, by helping them rebuild their lives.

1.3.3 Verbal violence can have adverse effects on workplace environments, leading to decreased productivity, and a hostile working atmosphere. Organizations can implement policies and practices that promote and foster a positive and inclusive work culture.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of literature consists of conceptual, theoretical and empirical framework. Concepts related to the study are examined. The theoretical frame focused on stigmatization theory of 1963 postulated by Erving Goffman. The empirical frame reviewed previous studies on similar topics and their weaknesses. The conceptual frame focused on concepts closely related to the topic. John C. Maxwell et al. (2010) posits that "Verbal violence is the act of using language in a harmful or aggressive manner, intentionally causing emotional or psychological harm to others through words ".Maxwell recognises the impact of words and communication. He emphasizes the need for individuals to choose their words carefully, using them to inspire, motivate, and uplift others rather than to demean or harm them.

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2.1.1 Verbal violence

Verbal violence refers to the use of aggressive and harmful language with the intention of causing emotional or psychological harm to another person. It involves the use of insults, threats, derogatory remarks, or any form of speech that belittles, devalues, or humiliates another individual. Verbal violence can occur in various settings, including personal relationships, workplaces, social media platforms or even in public spaces. It is important to recognize that verbal violence can have severe consequences on the well-being and mental health of individuals and it should be addressed and prevented to foster a respectful and inclusive society.

2.1.2 Social malaise

Social malaise refers to a general sense of unease, dissatisfaction or discontent that permeates a society or a specific social group. It is characterised by a feeling of collective disillusionment, lack of purpose, or a disconnection from shared values and norms. Social malaise can manifest in various ways, such as increased apathy, cynicism, or a decline in social cohesion. It may be caused by a variety of factors, including economic instability, political unrest, cultural shift, or social inequalities. Recognizing and addressing social malaise is crucial for promoting social well-being and creating a more harmonious and inclusive society.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws upon several key concepts:

Erving Goffman, a sociologist, is well known for his work on stigmatization theory in 1963. Goffman's concept of stigma draws on use of the term, which refers to signs that expose something negative about someone's moral status. He examines how stigmatized individuals feel about themselves and their relationship with "normal" members of society. The theory sheds light on the challenges faced by stigmatized individuals and the ways in which society can work towards reducing stigma and promoting acceptance. By drawing upon this theory the study's theoretical framework provides a lens through which to analyze and understand the complexities of verbal violence on deaf individuals in Cameroon. The theory is of utmost importance as it provides a solid foundation for understanding and analysing complexities of the subject matter. Here are some key reasons why the theory is crucial:

1. This theory helps us comprehend how stigmatised individuals are subjected to negative social meanings, stereotypes, and discrimination. It sheds light on the mechanisms through which societal attitudes and beliefs shape stigmatization processes.
2. By studying stigmatization theory we gain insights into the psychological and emotional toll that stigmatized individuals experience leading to a better understanding of their well-being and the potential interventions needed to support them.
3. A deep understanding of the theory can inform the development of interventions and policies aimed at reducing stigma and fostering inclusivity.

By applying this theory, we analyse the experiences of deaf individuals, examine the power dynamics at play, and identify strategies for intervention and prevention.

2.3 Empirical framework

Many studies have discussed the incidence of violence in schools particularly where girls with disabilities are enrolled (Dupper & Meyer-Adams, 2002). These studies highlight devastating impacts on the lives of victimised students.

One other study conducted by (Han et al., 2019) found prevalence of violence in schools at alarming levels on the lives of adolescents. In spite of all the negative effects on the girls, research has not focused on their various experiences.

Sullivan et al., 2006 posits that, the incidences of violence are mostly felt among girls with hearing impairment. They suggest that this could be due to their language and communication problems

Some researchers believe that girls with disabilities are at high risk of several abuses including verbal, physical, psychological and sexual including institutional violence and drug use (Khan & Fatima 2015).

2.4 Research gap

Few studies focus on verbal violence against Deaf individuals in Cameroon. Deaf voices and their experiences are often under-represented in research. There is need for a more comprehensive study to understand the prevalence, impact, and specific dynamics within Deaf community in Cameroon. Limited understanding of the cultural nuances and specific challenges faced by these individuals needs awareness. Further research could explore the effectiveness of existing support systems and the development of intervention tailored to their unique needs. Identifying and addressing these gaps contribute to a deeper understanding and inform intervention strategies.

3. METHODOLOGY

Population for this study included: 15 deaf individuals, 2 policy makers, 5 teachers and 3 parents in Yaounde. We used the purposive sampling technique with a diverse range of participants who provided valuable insights into the issue. A survey was conducted to identify cases of deaf individuals who had experienced verbal violence in their communities. Three instruments were used to collect data: Observation, interviews and questionnaires. Observation sessions were carried out in two deaf schools to observe instances of verbal violence on pupils either from their teachers or peers. In-depth interviews were conducted with deaf

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pupils, teachers, hearing individuals and policy makers to explore their personal experiences of verbal violence. Questionnaires comprising 10 questions were distributed to hearing individuals and community leaders to get their opinions on measures taken by them to support deaf victims. These qualitative methods uncovered the psychological and emotional impact of verbal violence as well as identify specific incidents and patterns. Survey questionnaires measured the prevalence and frequency of verbal violence experienced by deaf individuals including questions that accessed the types of verbal violence encountered, the settings in which it occurred and the perceived impact on their wellbeing. Transcribed and coded interview data was done using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to verbal violence. Survey data was analysed with the use of appropriate statistical techniques to calculate frequencies, correlations and descriptive statistics.

4. FINDINGS

The table below presents questions on verbal violence and social malaise.

Table 1: Questions on verbal violence and social malaise on deaf individuals

Question number	Questions
1	What do you understand by the terms verbal violence and social malaise in the context involving deaf individuals
2	Have you ever witnessed or experienced verbal violence directed towards deaf individuals
3	In what settings or situations do they occur
4	Are there any specific challenges that make deaf individuals more vulnerable to verbal violence
5	How does verbal violence specifically affect and impact the social inclusion of deaf individuals
6	What measures or interventions can be taken to prevent or address verbal violence towards deaf community
7	How can society promote a more inclusive and respectful environment to mitigate the impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals
8	What strategies, interventions, or policies can effectively mitigate verbal violence both at individual and societal levels
9	What are the possible trajectories that can be observed as far as verbal violence and social malaise is concerned
10	Future directions for addressing verbal violence

The questions on table 2 align with specific focus on verbal violence and social malaise on deaf individuals.

4.1.1 RQ1 What are the different forms of verbal violence on deaf individuals and how do they manifest in various contexts

Table 3: Different forms of verbal violence and the perpetrators

SN	Types of verbal violence	Perpetrators	Description
1	Insults	Family members, peers, colleagues, teachers	Using derogatory remarks and offensive language to attack someone's appearance
2	Name-calling	Hearing individuals, classmates	Assigning offensive names to demean and belittle someone
3	Mockery	Strangers, managers	Making fun of someone or ridiculing through sarcastic and scornful comments
4	Discrimination	Authority figures, supervisors, within families	Prejudice against deaf individuals e.g
5	Isolation	Within families, community, school	Some deaf children were being isolated from family and friends.

Findings reveal that five distinct categories of verbal abuse on deaf individuals were common in workplaces, school, homes, friends and community at large. In certain homes, parents yelled at and bullied their deaf kids to get them behave in a certain way. From our study 7 (46%) out of 15 children experienced verbal aggression at home. Verbal abuse did not only come from parents. Other family members including siblings bullied these children.

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4.1.1.1 Practical Instances

Name-calling and insults

Being called derogatory names such as "muumuu, idiot, fool" were common in homes. Constant exposure to derogatory and hurtful language eroded self esteem of deaf individuals, causing feelings of shame, worthlessness and inadequacy. These offensive slurs demeaned and degraded their identities and abilities

Humiliation

Belittling and mocking deaf individuals especially in front of others were common. Lack of auditory cues made it difficult for them to comprehend and respond to abusive language. This led to feelings of frustration, isolation, and self-doubt.

Isolation

Deaf individuals faced discrimination and prejudice from their families and communities. Some deaf children were being isolated from family and friends. This social exclusion further marginalised and hindered them from social integration. Isolation limited their access to education, employment, and career advancement.

Mocking and ridicule

Mocking deaf children's personal characteristics is a form of violence that caused them humiliation and undermined their identities. One form was gaslighting which involved denying and minimizing their feelings, making them doubt their own sanity. From our study, these categories of verbal violence significantly affect their self-esteem.

4.1.2 RQ2 What are the underlying impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals

Verbal violence significantly affected their emotional well-being, self-esteem, and overall quality of life. Here are some key points to consider regarding the impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals:

Table 4: Impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals

SN	Impact of verbal violence on deaf individuals	Description
1	Psychological and emotional effects	Verbal violence led to feelings of humiliation, shame and embarrassment. Deaf individuals experienced increased levels of stress, anxiety and depression as a result of verbal abuse. Constant exposure to negative and derogatory comments eroded their self-confidence and self worth.
2	Communication barriers	Verbal violence isolated deaf individuals by creating communication barriers. Insults and exclusionary language hindered their ability to participate fully in conversations and social interactions. They felt excluded, misunderstood and marginalised due to their communication differences.
	Mental health	Verbal violence contributed to the development of mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). They experienced long-lasting psychological trauma as a result of verbal abuse. Cumulative effect of ongoing verbal violence led to chronic stress and negatively impacted their overall mental well-being.
4	Educational and professional consequences	Verbal violence hindered educational and professional opportunities for deaf individuals. Negative comments or discriminatory language created a hostile learning and working environment. Deaf individuals faced barriers in accessing education, employment and career advancement due to the impact of verbal violence.

4.1.3 RQ3 What strategies, interventions, or policies can effectively mitigate verbal violence both at individual and societal levels

Table 5: Different approaches of preventive strategies for verbal violence

SN	Preventive strategies	Description
1	Education and awareness campaigns	Using derogatory remarks and offensive language to attack someone's appearance
2	Promote inclusive policies and practices	Implement policies that promote inclusivity, respect, and zero tolerance for verbal violence
3	Foster a culture of respect and empathy	Encourage culture that values and promotes respectful communication, empathy and understanding others
4	Provide communication and language access	Ensure access to communication resources, such as sign language interpreters and assistive technologies.
5	Empower bystanders to intervene and speak up against verbal violence	Encourage bystanders to intervene, support victims, and speak up against verbal violence when they witness it.

5. Policies and Legal Frameworks for Combatting Verbal Violence

In this section, we explore the importance of policies and legal frameworks in addressing and combating verbal violence. Establishing clear boundaries and consequences for verbal abuse, we can create a safer and more respectful society. This section delves into the role of legislation, the implementation of policies, and the importance of holding perpetrators accountable for their actions.

5.1.1 Defining verbal violence

The first step in addressing verbal violence through policies and legal frameworks is to clearly define what constitutes verbal abuse. Verbal violence, ranging from direct insults to subtle manipulation and emotional intimidation. It discusses the challenges in defining and categorizing verbal abuse and the importance of comprehensive definitions in policy development.

5.1.2 Protection and prevention

Policies and legal frameworks should aim to protect individuals from verbal abuse and prevent its occurrence. This section examines strategies for creating protective measures, such as work place policies, anti-bullying initiatives, and educational campaigns. It explores the role of organizations, institutions, and government agencies in implementing preventive measures and fostering a culture of respect.

5.1.3 Consequences and accountability

Establishing consequences for perpetrators of verbal abuse is crucial for discouraging such behaviour and promoting accountability. This section explores the importance of legal frameworks that hold individuals accountable for their abusive words. It discusses the role of law enforcement, courts and disciplinary procedures in addressing verbal violence and ensuring justice for victims.

5.1.4 Support and rehabilitation

Policies should not only focus on consequences but also include provisions for supporting and rehabilitating both victims and perpetrators of verbal abuse. This section discusses the importance of providing resources for victims, such as counselling services, support groups, and access to justice. Additionally, it explores initiatives aimed at rehabilitating perpetrators through education, counselling, and behaviour modification programs.

5.1.5 Collaboration and implementation

Addressing verbal violence requires collaboration amongst various stakeholders, including government agencies, organisations and community groups. This section examines the importance of coordinated efforts in policy development, implementation and enforcement. It explores strategies for fostering collaboration, sharing best practices, and ensuring consistent application of policies across different contexts.

Policies and legal frameworks play a vital role in combating verbal violence by establishing boundaries, protecting individuals, and promoting accountability. Through comprehensive definitions, preventive measures, consequences for perpetrators and support for victims, we can create a society that values respectful communication and reject verbal abuse. By working together and implementing robust policies, we can build a safer and more inclusive society where individuals can thrive free from the destructive effects of verbal violence.

6. TRAJECTORIES ON VERBAL VIOLENCE

When examining trajectories in verbal violence it is important to consider how this behaviour unfolds overtime and the potential patterns it may exhibit. While each situation and individual may vary, here are some possible trajectories that can be observed.

6.1 Exclamation trajectory

Verbal violence may follow an exclamation trajectory, starting with minor instances of disrespectful or hurtful communication and gradually intensifying overtime. This trajectory may involve an increase in frequency, intensity and severity of verbal abuse, leading to a more hostile and toxic environment

6.2 Clinical trajectory

Verbal violence can also exhibit a clinical pattern characterised by periods of calm interspersed with episodes of heightened aggression. This trajectory may involve intermittent outburst or cycles of tension, conflict and reconciliation, with the verbal violence resurfacing periodically.

6.3 Maintenance trajectory

In some cases, verbal violence may persist at a relatively consistent level without significant fluctuations. This trajectory may involve a sustained pattern of verbal abuse, where the aggressor maintains a consistent level of hostility and aggression over an extended period.

6.4 Escalation and De- escalation trajectory

Verbal violence can also follow a trajectory of escalation and de-escalation, where the intensity of aggression fluctuates overtime. This trajectory may involve periods of heightened verbal violence followed by periods of relative calm or reduced aggression.

6.5 Trajectory of intervention

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Intervention, such as counselling, education, or legal measures, can impact the trajectory of verbal violence. In some cases, the intervention may lead to a decline in verbal abuse, as individuals recognize the harmful effects of their behaviour and work towards positive change. However, without sustained support and ongoing intervention, the trajectory may revert to previous patterns.

In all, trajectories may intersect with other forms of abuse and violence, such as physical and psychological abuse. Understanding these trajectories can help identify early warning signs, inform prevention efforts, and guide interventions to break the cycle of verbal violence, promoting healthier and more respectful communication.

7. ADDRESSING VERBAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL MALAISE AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Addressing verbal violence can serve as a catalyst for social change by recognizing the transformative power of communication and taking proactive measures to combat abusive language, we can create a society that promotes, respect empathy, and constructive dialogue. This section examines strategies and initiatives that empower individuals and communities to actively address vv and drive positive societal transformation.

7.1 Education and awareness

These are key components in addressing verbal violence. This section explores of educating individuals about the impact of abusive language, promoting empathy, and fostering a culture of respect. It discusses initiatives aimed at raising awareness of verbal violence, its consequences and the role individuals can play in creating change.

7.2 Empowerment and skill development

Empowering individuals with the necessary skills to effectively address verbal violence and social malaise is critical. This section delves into the development of communication and conflict resolution skills, emphasising active listening, assertiveness, and non-violent communication techniques. It highlights the role of empowerment in enabling individuals to confront and mitigate verbal abuse.

7.3 Community engagement

Creating social change requires collective action and community engagement. This section explores the importance of fostering community dialogue, creating safe spaces for discussions and promoting inclusivity. It discusses initiatives the encourage collaboration among community members, organisations and institutions to address verbal violence and promote positive communication norms.

7.4 Policy and legal frameworks

They play a vital role combating verbal violence. This section examines the importance of enacting legislation that protects individuals from verbal abuse and establishes consequences for perpetrators. It discusses the role of organisations, government agencies, and advocacy groups in influencing policy changes and implementing measures that promote respectful communication.

7.5 Media and technology

Media and technology platforms have a significant influence on societal norms and communication patterns. This section explores the responsibility of media organisations to promote ethical and respectful communication practices. It discusses the potential of technology in creating positive online spaces, combating cyber bullying, and fostering digital citizenship.

Conclusively, addressing verbal violence as a catalyst for social change requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses education, empowerment, community engagement, policy changes, and media awareness. By collectively working towards creating a society that values respectful communication, empathy and understanding, we can transform the dynamics of our interactions and build a more harmonious and inclusive world. Through our commitment to combating verbal violence, we have the power to create lasting social change and foster a culture of respect, kindness, and compassion.

8. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR COMBATING VERBAL VIOLENCE:

A CALL TO ACTION

This study provides practical steps for addressing verbal violence and promotes respectful communication.

- Advocate for the inclusion of policies addressing verbal violence in schools, homes, work places and public spaces. We need to support organizations and groups advocating for the rights of deaf individuals affected by verbal violence.
- Educate individuals on intervention techniques to empower them take action when witnessing verbal violence
- Create spaces for deaf individuals to echo their concerns, share experiences, and engage in constructive dialogue.
- Integrate education on respectful communication into school curricula at all levels.
- Offer training programs and workshops for individuals in various settings, emphasizing the impact of verbal violence.

9. CONCLUSION

Recognizing the link between verbal and social malaise is crucial for addressing the deep-rooted issues that plague our communities. By understanding how abusive language impacts, fuels conflict, and contribute to mental health challenges, we can work towards creating a society that values and fosters social interactions. Through collective efforts, we can break free from the

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grip of verbal violence and build a more harmonious and inclusive society. Our collective efforts, at both individual and systemic levels will bring about lasting change in our community dynamics. We can create a world where our words are used to uplift, inspire, and connect, fostering a culture of respect and harmony.

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