

# Domestic Violence and its Predictors among Married Women in Southeast Nigeria

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**Abstract:** **Background:** Domestic violence is a public health problem that is global in scope. Violence targeting women is a frequent occurrence; it tends to go under documented in most countries. It has far reaching consequences on female victims and their children. There are murders that are an offshoot of domestic violence. It is a social blight that is seen with regularity in Nigeria. This study aims to determine the roles of age of victims, family size, educational attainment and employment status on violence against women who are married. **Materials and Methods:** A cross sectional study of prospectively consenting women within 10 orthodox churches in the eastern town of Orlu, Nigeria during a period between 1<sup>st</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016. A total of 682 respondents were recruited and given structured questionnaires, assistance was offered where there were incompletely filled questionnaires due to misunderstood questions which were then explained in very simple terms and subsequently filled out. Using a 95% confidence interval, 5% margin of error, population proportion of 0.5, the minimum sample size was calculated as 384 using the Cochran's formula for sample size. The data was then analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 18. **Results:** Three hundred and eighty two respondents (56%) out of the total study population of 682 (100%) had experienced domestic violence while 300 (44%) had not. One hundred and thirty women (34%) sustained varying degrees of injuries; with 66 (17.3%) of them suffering pregnancy loss as a consequence of abuse. Two hundred and twenty four women (32.8%) had experienced only one form of abuse while 158 (23.2%) reported multiple forms of abuse. Violence against women most prevalent among women within the 25 – 34 years age range constituting a total of 170 (44.5%) cases of abuse. Those married women with only primary education formed the subset that had the greatest number of abused women; 138 cases (38.1%). **Conclusion:** Domestic violence is a pervasive problem in Nigeria with greater than 50% of the married women in this study having been abused by their partners. Unemployment of the woman, younger married women, poor educational attainment and a large number of living children were identified as factors that increased the risk of domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Abuse, Coercion, Homicide, Orlu

## 1. Introduction

Domestic violence (DV) occurs in all settings and among all socioeconomic, religious and cultural groups. The overwhelming global burden of DV is borne by women.<sup>1</sup> It is a global burden with serious public health and social implications. It is a malady that cuts across gender and class borders.<sup>2</sup> Affecting both males and females even though this study focuses on violence against married women perpetrated by their partners. Although women can be violent in relationships with men, often in self-defence, and violence sometimes occurs in same-sex partnerships, the most common perpetrators of violence against women are male intimate partners or ex-partners.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, men are far more likely to experience violent acts by strangers or acquaintances than by someone close to them.<sup>4</sup> Many authors use the terms domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV) interchangeably. The term 'domestic violence' is used in many countries to refer to partner violence but the term can also encompass child or elder abuse, or abuse by any member of a household. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines intimate partner violence as "behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours."<sup>3</sup>

Women of reproductive age are more vulnerable to abuse by intimate partners than by any other perpetrator.<sup>4</sup> The scourge of DV is seen among pregnant women worldwide, and in Africa a strong link between IPV and HIV infection has been shown by different researchers.<sup>4-7</sup>

Violence against women is a term used to collectively refer to violent acts that are primarily or exclusively committed against women. The United Nations General Assembly defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.<sup>3</sup>

The World Health Organization multi-country study indicated that worldwide domestic violence was widespread in all the countries studied. With 13–61% reported ever having experienced physical violence by a partner, 6–59% reported sexual violence by a partner at some point in their lives, and 20–75% reported experiencing one emotionally abusive act, or more, from a partner in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>

Studies done in Africa demonstrate a very high incidence of DV as highlighted in a systematic review done by Simukai Shamu et al 2011.<sup>8</sup>

A study in eastern Nigeria showed that 92% of the victims of IPV were women while only 8% were men.<sup>9</sup>

Domestic violence appears with different manifestations and forms, which include: physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, spiritual abuse, economic abuse and emotional or psychological abuse.<sup>3,4</sup>

The impact of DV is far reaching having physical and mental health implications. Murder represents an extreme

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consequence of DV which is not uncommon. A major challenge associated with DV is the fact that in some settings it is still a culturally acceptable practice with many women suffering in silence being held back by family secrecy, cultural norms, shame and fear.

This study looks at the contributing factors to IPV among married couples, its prevalence and the spectrum of abuse among the study population.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This was a cross sectional study, it used a community based approach during a period between 1<sup>st</sup> August to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2016. This a period during which a large proportion of urban based women spend time in their hometowns which are usually rural/semi-rural areas to partake in the annual "August meeting." They participate in church and community driven developmental projects. This window afforded access to both rural and urban respondents. Structured questionnaires were given to prospectively consenting women in churches and within local married women's meetings within the Okporo area of Orlu in eastern Nigeria. Assistance was granted in carefully explaining aspects of the questionnaires where areas of difficulty were encountered. This was only necessary in 36 cases. A total of 682 respondents formed the study population.

### Statistical analysis

Cochran's formula for sample size was used to determine the minimum sample size of 384. Correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination were determined for abuse in

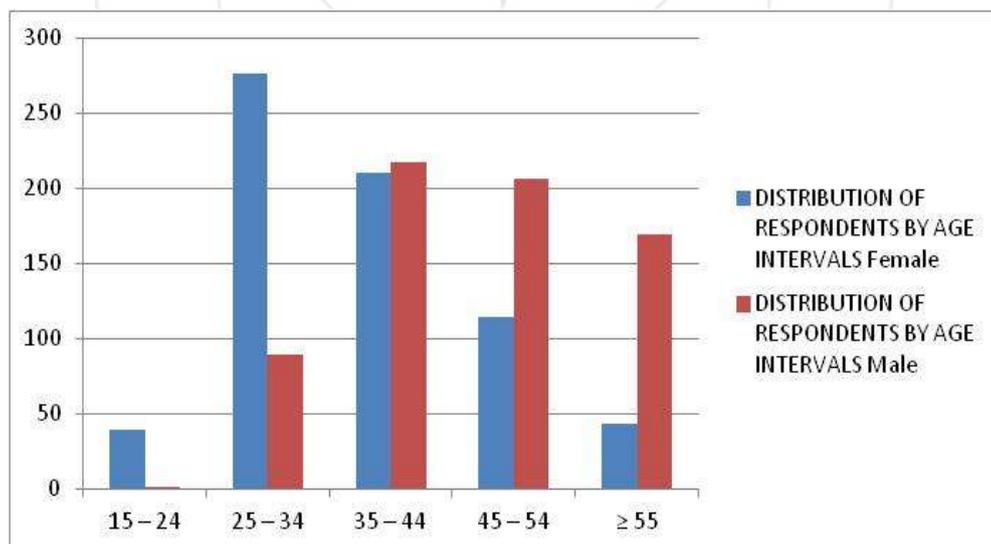
relation to three varying variables; number of living children, employment status and age. A P-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Multiple regression analysis was then done using the above stated variables. The data obtained was then analyzed using SPSS version 18.

## 3. Results

A total of 682 respondents formed the study population. Domestic violence was encountered by 382 married female respondents (56%) within the study population, the remaining 300 (44%) had not experienced DV. This represents a picture where greater than half of the respondents in this study being victims of DV. The age distribution of the respondents and their partners was spread between 15 years to 71 years. The largest group of married women in the study were those within the 25 – 34 years age range constituting 276 respondents (40.5%). For the husbands the 35 – 44 years age interval was the single largest group accounting for 217 men (31.8%). This can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 2.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents using Age Interval

| Age Interval | Female (%)  | Male (%)    |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 15 – 24      | 39 (5.72)   | 1 (0.15)    |
| 25 – 34      | 276 (40.47) | 89 (13.05)  |
| 35 – 44      | 210 (30.79) | 217 (31.81) |
| 45 – 54      | 114 (16.72) | 206 (30.21) |
| ≥ 55         | 43 (6.31)   | 169 (24.78) |
| Total        | 682         | 682         |



**Figure 2:** Age distribution of respondents and their husbands

Domestic violence was most prevalent among women within the 25 – 34 years age range constituting a total of 170 (44.5%) cases of abuse. Table 2 and Figure 3 both illustrate the age distribution of the respondents.

**Table 2:** Distribution by Age Groups of Abused Respondents

| Age Interval | Female (%)  |
|--------------|-------------|
| 15 – 24      | 15 (3.93)   |
| 25 – 34      | 170 (44.50) |
| 35 – 44      | 150 (39.27) |
| 45 – 54      | 34 (8.90)   |
| ≥ 55         | 13 (3.40)   |
| Total        | 382         |

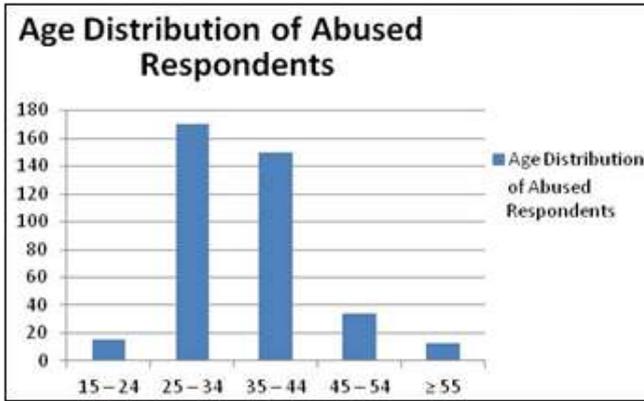


Figure 3: Age distribution of abused respondents

The majority of the 682 respondents and their husbands had attained primary school education or higher levels of education, with the women having literacy rates of 95.2% and the men 93.8%, while the uneducated were in the minority 4.8% versus 6.2% for the married women and their husbands respectively. This is displayed in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents and their husbands by Educational Qualification

| Level of Education | Female (%)  | Male (%)    |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| None               | 33 (4.84)   | 42 (6.16)   |
| Primary            | 138 (20.24) | 132 (19.36) |
| Secondary          | 322 (47.21) | 361 (52.93) |
| Tertiary           | 189 (27.71) | 147 (21.55) |
| Total              | 682         | 682         |

Those married women with only primary education were the most abused subset of the study population; 138 cases (38.1%). As seen in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Distribution by Educational Qualification of Abused Respondents

| Level of Education | Female (%)  |
|--------------------|-------------|
| None               | 33 (8.69)   |
| Primary            | 138 (36.13) |
| Secondary          | 122 (31.94) |
| Tertiary           | 89 (23.24)  |
| Total              | 382         |

Of the 56% who had been abused, the abuse varied from a single form of abuse in 224 women (32.8%) to multiple forms of violence in 158 respondents (23.2%). This is illustrated in Table 5, Figures 3 and 4 below.

Table 5: Distribution of Respondents by Level of Abuse/Violation

|          | Number (%)  |
|----------|-------------|
| None     | 300 (43.99) |
| Single   | 224 (32.84) |
| Multiple | 158 (23.17) |
| Total    | 682         |

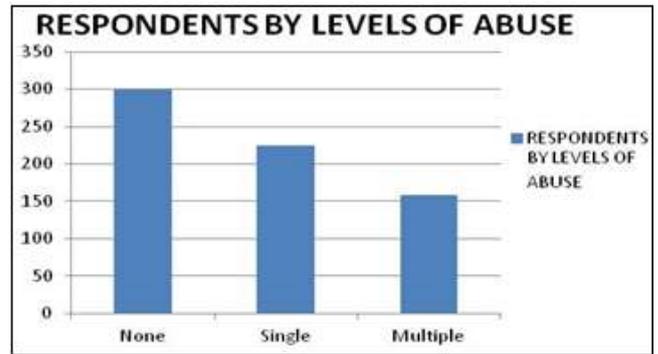


Figure 3: Varying levels of Intimate Partner Violence

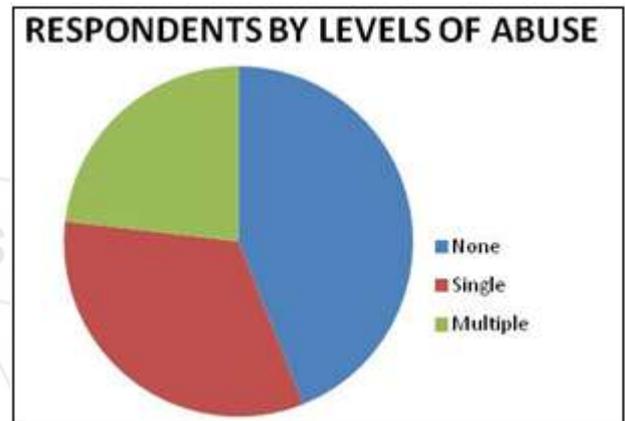


Figure 4: Depiction of the various levels of abuse experienced within the study population.

Different contributing factors for DV were identified in this study these included financial demands/constraints which was responsible in 123 cases (32.2%) of abuse, a combination of factors were implicated in 74 cases (19.4%), incitement accounted for 53 (13.9%), alcohol intoxication/being drunk was the sole factor in 40 cases (10.5%), spurned sexual advances resulted in 29 women (7.6%) being abused by their husbands, substance abuse was the least common cause accounting for 15 cases (3.9%) while other factors contributed to 48 cases (12.6%). Table 6 and Figure 5 display these contributing factors.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents by Factors Contributing to Abuse

| Factor(s)         | Number of Victims of DV |
|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Substance Abuse   | 15 (3.9%)               |
| Drunkenness       | 40 (10.5%)              |
| Financial Request | 123 (32.2%)             |
| Sexual Advances   | 29 (7.6%)               |
| Incitement        | 53 (13.9%)              |
| Multiple Factors  | 74 (19.4%)              |
| Others            | 48 (12.6%)              |
| Total             | 382 (100%)              |

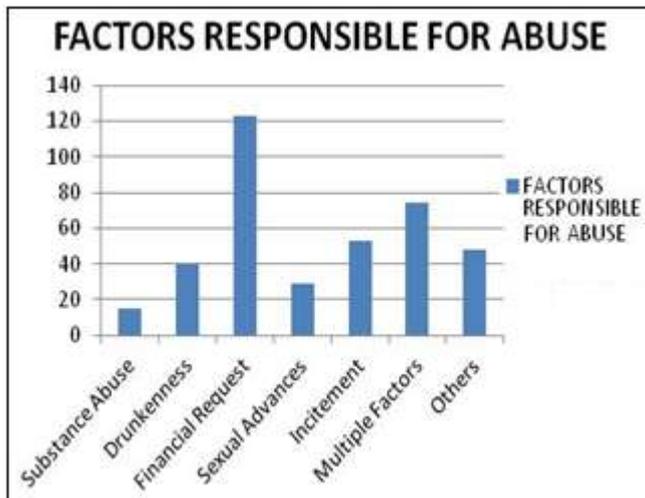


Figure 5: Illustration of factors responsible for abuse

Table 7: Distribution of Abused Respondents by Number Children

| Number of Living children | Abused respondents | Percentage |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| 3                         | 67                 | 17.5       |
| 4                         | 90                 | 23.6       |
| 5                         | 115                | 30.1       |
| 6                         | 58                 | 15.2       |
| ≥6                        | 52                 | 13.6       |
| Total                     | 382                | 100%       |

#### Correlation between Abused respondents and Number of Children

| R (Correlation Coefficient) | R <sup>2</sup> (Coefficient of Determination) | P-value |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|
| 0.87                        | 0.69  | 0.0032  |

The Correlation Coefficient ( $r = 0.87$ ) shows that there is strong positive relationship/correlation between abused respondents and their number of living children. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) shows that 69% of Abused are explained by the number of Children of the respondents while 31% of the abused are unexplained. The P-value shows that the test is significant at 5% level of significance.

#### Correlation Between Abused and Employment Status

| R (Correlation Coefficient) | R <sup>2</sup> (Coefficient of Determination) | P-value |
|-----------------------------|---|---------|
| 0.91                        | 0.82  | 0.0015  |

The Correlation Coefficient ( $r = 0.91$ ) shows that there is strong positive relationship/correlation between abused respondents and their Employment Status. Simply put, 91% of the Unemployed respondents are abused while 9% of the Abused are employed. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) shows that 82% of Abused are explained by the employment status of the respondents while 18% of the abused are unexplained with respect to employment. The P-value shows that the test is significant at 5% level of significance. This can also be buttressed by the fact that financial request forms the major factor precipitating abuse (see table on factors precipitating abuse in the earlier work)

#### Multiple regression analysis between Abused and employment Status, number of Children and Age interval

| Variables          | Coefficient |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Constant           | 0.0352      |
| Employment         | 2.8360      |
| Number of Children | 1.2036      |
| Age interval       | -0.1106     |

From the table, the variables (Employment and Number of Children) contributes positively to violence and/ Abused in married women while Age contributes negatively to abused.

#### 4. Discussion

Domestic violence especially violence against women by intimate partners is a public health problem with a scope that encompasses the global frontier. Domestic violence is a reality in both developing and industrialized nations.<sup>9</sup>In its 2010 report the World Health Organization defines intimate partner violence as “behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors.”<sup>10</sup>Murder or homicide is a disturbing but real consequence of DV. According to the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) fatal intimate partner violence includes; homicide or murder and non-negligent manslaughter, defined as the willful killing of one human being by another. Statistics from the BJS show that in 2007; intimate partners committed 14% of all homicides in the U.S. The total estimated number of intimate partner homicide victims in 2007 was 2,340, including 1,640 females.<sup>11</sup>The overall complexion of this problem assumes different proportions in different countries for instance; twelve thousand women die every year in Russia as a result of domestic violence. The killing of women by their husbands accounts for 50% of murders in Bangladesh.<sup>12, 13</sup>

Domestic violence is widespread and women are the victims of abuse more often than men. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says 80 percent of women there are victims of domestic violence, this is much higher than what was seen in this study.<sup>14</sup>Intimate partner violence against women most often took the form of simple assault (66 percent), rape or sexual assault (14 percent), or aggravated assault (10 percent).<sup>11</sup>In South Africa, 49,280 cases of rape were reported in 1998 while Non-governmental agencies assert that the actual number of rapes is higher since many incidents go unreported.<sup>14</sup>

Statistics from the BJS revealed that American women between the ages of 20 and 24 were victimized at a higher rate than older women, regardless of marital status. Separated women age 20 to 34 had the highest average rates of intimate partner violence of women in any age group.<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup>With regard to age this study aligned with the above scenario where domestic violence was most prevalent among young women between 25 and 34 in this study.

The prevalence in this study was similar to what was seen in studies done in eastern India and Pakistan.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Domestic violence cuts across all strata of the society irrespective of age, educational attainment,

poverty/affluence, and even religious/non-religious affiliations. Traditionally, in Nigeria, as in many other African countries, the beating of wives and children is widely sanctioned as a form of discipline. This sociocultural attitude further fuels this societal blight.<sup>17, 18</sup>

Domestic violence can be grouped into six major categories;<sup>18</sup>

- a) Physical abuse: here physical force is used in a way that can or might injure the victim. This includes choking, beating, pushing, biting, spitting, kicking, knocking, confinement and female genital mutilation. Physical abuse is one of the most common forms of DV.
- b) Economic abuse: This covers stealing from or fraudulent acquisition from a loved one, withholding money for essential things like food and medical treatment, manipulation or exploitation of family members for financial gain.
- c) Sexual abuse: This includes all forms of sexual assault, exploitation or harassment and marital rape.
- d) Neglect: Abdication of one's duty to provide food, clothing, shelter, medical care within the family unit.
- e) Spiritual Abuse: The use of religious or spiritual beliefs to oppress an individual.
- f) Emotional Abuse: This includes threatening a person or harming a person's sense of self-worth by putting him/her at risk of serious behavioral, cognitive, emotional or mental disorders.

Emotional abuse (verbal derision) was the most common form of DV encountered within the study population which agrees with the findings in a study done in Enugu by Obi and Ozumba (2009) which showed emotional abuse (shouting at a partner) as the most common form of abuse in their study.<sup>7</sup> Other forms of IPV seen in this study were physical violence, marital rape, abandonment (being driven out of the home), food deprivation, pouring hot water on the victim, numerous other forms were mentioned like forced imprisonment, and emotional neglect. Some beatings resulted in hospitalization, miscarriages, and physical injuries. A hospital based study in Nairobi showed sexual violence as being the more common form of IPV with a prevalence of 61.5% while the proportion of physical assault was 38.5% with the majority of the perpetrators of gender based violence being married (72.3%), alcohol was implicated as a significant contributor in 10.1% of cases.<sup>19</sup>

Multiple Factors contribute to domestic violence, the study showed that a large number of living children (the peak was seen with five children) is a significant predictor of domestic violence. Unemployment is a predictor of domestic violence, this becomes more obvious with the leading cause of IPV in this study being financial constraints. Poor education was also a predictor of domestic violence. A similar study done in Ethiopia revealed findings that agreed with this; it showed that the educational status of women, occupational status of women, and the number of child alive were significantly associated with domestic violence.<sup>20</sup>

From the above findings it is clear that financial lack is an important factor/trigger for domestic violence and poor

education, unemployment and a large number of living children only serve to exacerbate this further fuelling DV.

The negative effects of DV on the health of the victim and even on their children has been extensively researched and documented in recent literature.<sup>21</sup> There is an increasing understanding and recognition that the potential health consequences of DV both in relation to acute and chronic health issues goes beyond the physical trauma cases that are commonly seen in emergency departments of hospitals.<sup>22</sup> A growing body of literature has focused on associations between IPV and physical and mental health.<sup>23, 24</sup> Intimate partner violence has been linked to PTSD, anxiety, depression and other related psychological conditions.<sup>25</sup>

The effects of DV impact on other areas of family life such as pregnancy loss (which was seen in this study), psychological traumatization of the children, economic consequences and death.<sup>1, 18, 26</sup>

## 5. Limitations of the Study

Due to the tendency of the victims of DV to quite often suffer in silence; living either in a state of denial or downplaying the severity of the problem. This afrequently encountered obstacle in obtaining data. In Africa this is worsened by perceived sociocultural norms that subtly endorse DV within marriage. It is therefore almost impossible to ascertain the entire spectrum of the malady. The issue of men being victims of IPV was not explored in this study.

## 6. Conclusion

The prevalence of Domestic violence in this study was 56%. Poor education, unemployment, the number of living children and the age of the married women were all seen to have a clear role in increasing the incidence of DV. Other factors such as alcoholism, substance abuse, and financial constraints were identified as factors contributing to this menace. Domestic violence is a public health challenge that deserves greater attention with a strong need for far reaching advocacy, economic empowerment, community level enlightenment/engagement, the provision of universal access to education particularly for girls/women, a legislative framework that places emphasis on victim protection as well as a support system for victims of abuse.

## 7. Conflict of interest

None

## 8. Source of funding

Authors

## 9. Ethical Approval

Ethical approval was given for this study by the ethical committee of the Imo State University Teaching Hospital, Orlu.

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