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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PATTERNS AND LEVELS OF PHYSICAL FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Domestic violence remains a pervasive social issue in Nigeria, affecting individuals across socio-economic and cultural boundaries. This study assesses the patterns and levels of domestic violence in Nigeria, exploring its various forms, underlying factors, and societal implications. In other words, domestic violence does not know any kind of barrier, be it age, sex, race, culture, tribe, religion, geographical location, etc. The study mainly exploited secondary data source obtained from the National Population Commission (National Demographic and Health Survey, NDHS 2018 Report) to analyze the pattern and levels of domestic violence in Nigeria. The study revealed that the aforementioned socio-demographic and economic factors inter-alia have the strongest impact on physical violence; age -experience of domestic violence according to age shows that the age group 30-39 experiences the highest rate of domestic violence (31.9%), and the least is the age group 40-49 (28.2%); marital status – the divorced/separated/widowed (48.8%), followed by never married (36.0%); according to residence, urban (32.3%), rural (29.9%); according to geopolitical zone, highest, South-south (46.4%), lowest, Northwest (11.7%); among the states of Northwest, highest, Kaduna (28.7%), lowest, Jigawa (4.4%); according to religion, domestic violence is reported highest among the Catholic (38.4%) and other Christians (41.5%) than among other religious faiths, Islam (21.9%) and Traditionalist (34.9%). The paper recommended enlightenment programmes to be targeted most especially to couples and other family members.

Keywords: Assessment, Domestic Violence, Levels, Patterns and Nigeria.

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive and complex issue that affects individuals, families and communities worldwide. It encompasses physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse within familial or intimate relationships. It is a term used to describe violence and abuse by family members or intimate partners such as a spouse, former spouse, boyfriend or girlfriend, ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, or date. Other terms used for domestic violence include the following; intimate partner abuse, family violence, child abuse, etc. In a simple sentence, domestic violence is violence that takes place in the home, especially by one person against their partner. Women are still the main victims of domestic violence. In Nigeria, domestic violence cuts across all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. In other words, domestic violence does not know any kind of barrier, be it age, sex, race, culture, tribe, religion, geographical location, etc. In Nigeria, domestic violence is widely acknowledged to be of great concern, not just from a human rights perspective but also from an economic and health perspective. Despite ongoing efforts to protect women and vulnerable populations against violence, there is widespread recognition in Nigeria that much remains to be done to protect victims (NDHS 2013).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative and quantitative research approach by reviewing existing literature, national surveys, and case studies on domestic violence in Nigeria. Secondary data was obtained from the National population Commission Report on National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) of 2018. The data was tabulated using percentages to conform to the pattern and levels of domestic violence in Nigeria, which is the aim of the study. Other sources of data exploited include non-governmental organization (NGO) publications – United Nations, World Bank and academic journals, etc.

Patterns and Levels of Domestic Violence in Nigeria

1. Forms of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence in Nigeria manifests in various forms, *including physical abuse* (i.e. assaults, beatings, and bodily harm); *emotional abuse* (verbal insults, threats, and psychological manipulation); *sexual abuse* (marital rape and coerced sexual acts) and *economic abuse* (financial control and deprivation of resources).

2. Prevalence of Domestic Violence

Women are disproportionately affected compared to men. Statistics from the National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) indicate that a significant proportion of Nigerian women experience domestic violence. Reports show that one in three women has faced some form of abuse in her lifetime. Table 1 – 7 shows experience of physical violence, showing percentage of women aged 15-49 who have experienced physical violence since age 15 and percentage that experienced violence during the 12 months preceding the survey, by background characteristics, Nigeria 2018.

3. Socio-Demographic and Economic Factors

The result of this study revealed that there are many socio-demographic and economic factors affecting physical abuse on women. Some of these factors are discussed here and presented in tables.

3.1 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Age

Age is a very important demographic index. Studying populations according to age is important because it is a key factor that influences many aspects of people's lives, needs, behaviours, and health (Hudson et al. 2009). Also, age influences vulnerability, type of abuse, willingness or ability to seek help (Beaulaurier, *et al* 2005). While young adults are statistically at greater risk, domestic violence occurs across the lifespan and requires age-sensitive interventions and support systems (Band-Winterstein & Eisikovits, 2014).

Table 1: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Age

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence in Since Age 15+
Age	
15 - 19	31.8
20 - 24	31.1
25 -29	31.1
30 -39	31.9
40 - 49	28.2

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 1 shows that physical abuse is highest among women of lower age group, e.g. 31.8% as in the age group 15-19, it progressively decreases with higher ages, e.g. 28.8% in the 40-49 age group.

3.2 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Religion

Table 2: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Religion

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence in the Since Age 15+
Religion	
Catholic	38.4
Other Christians	41.5
Islam	21.9
Traditionalist	34.9

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 6 shows that women in the Islamic religion are least abused (21.9%), while the women in the Christian religion are most abused (Catholic 38.4% and other Christians 41.5%).

3.3 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Location/Residence

Location plays a significant role in understanding and addressing domestic violence. It influences both the prevalence of domestic violence and the resources available to victims (Bolarinwa, O.A., Ahinkorah, B.O., Frimpong, J.B. *et al.* 2022).

3.3.1 Rural versus Urban

Domestic violence impacts individuals across all demographics. However, several studies confirm that it occurs more frequently in rural areas than in urban environments. According to the *National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services* ((NACRHHS, 2015 Report), domestic violence victims in rural America face higher rates of abuse and more barriers to support. A report from the *National Institute of Justice* ((NIJ, 2019 Research Brief) also concluded that women in rural settings experience higher lifetime rates of intimate partner violence than those in urban areas.

Table 3: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Residence

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence in the Since Age 15+
Residence	
Urban	32.3
Rural	29.8

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

The data in table 3 is inconsistent with the foregoing discussion; here, contrary to expectation, it is shown that women in the rural areas experienced lower abuse (29.8%) than women in the urban locations (32.3%)

3.3.2 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Geopolitical Zones of Nigeria

Nigeria as a sovereign country is characterized by diverse regional and socio-cultural dichotomy, which is why among other things it is politically demarcated into six geo-political zones, i.e. North-central, North-east, North-west, South-east, South-south and South-west. Each of these

geographical divisions has its own unique cultural and socio-economic characteristics among other things.

Table 4: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Geopolitical Zone

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence Since Age 15+
Geopolitical Zone	
North-Central	43.3
North-East	38.3
North-West	11.7
South-East	36.1
South-South	46.4
South-West	29.8

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 4 shows that women in the South-southern region of Nigeria are most abused (46.4%), those of North-western region are least abused (only 11.7%).

3.3.3 Experience of Domestic Violence according to States of North-West Geopolitical Zone

This section intends to look at the dichotomy in domestic violence among the women in the states of North-western Nigeria.

Table 5: Experience of Domestic Violence according to States of North-West Geopolitical Zone

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence Since Age 15+
States of the North-West Geopolitical Zone	
Jigawa	4.4
Kaduna	28.7
Kano	5.9
Katsina	8.5
Kebbi	9.0
Sokoto	8.6
Zamfara	7.1

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 5 shows that experience of domestic violence is least among the women in Kano State (1.1%) and highest among the women in Kaduna State (28.7%).

3.4 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Marital Status

Table 6: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Marital Status

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence in the Since Age 15+
Marital Status	
Never Married	36.0
Married or living together	28.3
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	48.8

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 6 shows that the highest abused women are those that are either divorced, separated or widowed (48.8%), followed by never married women (36.0%). The least abused women are those currently in their matrimonial homes (i.e. Married or living together, 28.3%).

3.5 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Employment Status

Table 6: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Employment Status

Background Characteristics	% Who Experienced Physical Violence in the Since Age 15+
Employment Status	
Employed for Cash	31.5
Employed not for Cash	42.7
Not Employed	25.0

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 6 shows that women employed but not for cash are highest abused (42.7%), and those not employed at all are least abused (25.0%)

3.6 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Educational Status

Lower educational attainment is linked to a higher risk of domestic violence.

Table 7: Experience of Domestic Violence according to Educational status

Background Characteristics	% Who Have Experienced Physical Violence Since Age 15+
Education	
No Education	22.3
Primary	35.6
Secondary	35.9
More than Secondary	33.6

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Contrary to expectation, table 7 shows that physical abuse is lowest among women with no education (22.3%), and, women with secondary education have the highest experience of physical abuse (35.9%). However, research based on the Indian National Family Health Survey (1998–1999) revealed that women without any education were over five times more likely to experience recent IPV compared to college-educated women (OR = 5.61). Additionally, higher community literacy levels were associated with a decreased likelihood as reported in the Data Base on *Intimate Partner Violence Public/Publisher MEDLINE* (IPV [PubMed](#)). Also, a study examining women offered HIV testing in urban and rural Kenya found that those with post-primary or college education were significantly less likely to experience physical violence compared to those with only primary education. In urban areas, women with post-primary education had a 26% lower likelihood (OR = 0.74), and those with college education had a 22% lower likelihood (OR = 0.78) of experiencing physical violence ([PubMed](#)).

An analysis of Demographic and Health Surveys from The Gambia, Liberia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone indicated that literacy had the most consistent protective effect against domestic violence. The study emphasized that different forms of education schooling, literacy, and health knowledge each play distinct roles in reducing the risk of abuse ([PubMed](#)).

From the Global Perspective, a comprehensive review highlighted that women with lower levels of education were about two to five times more likely to experience intimate partner violence compared to those with higher education levels. Lower educational attainment may limit access to resources and increase the acceptance of violence.

3.6 Experience of Domestic Violence according to Number of Living Children

Table 7: Experience of Domestic Violence by to Number of Living of Living Children

Background Characteristics	% Who Have Experienced Physical Violence Since Age 15+
Number of Living Children	
0	32.9
1-2	32.0
3-4	31.0
5+	27.7

Source: National Population Commission (NDHS, 2018)

Table 7 shows that the most abused women are those without children (32.9%). Domestic abuse decreases with increasing number of children among women; 1-2 children (32.0%), 3-4 children (31.0%) and 5 children and above (27.7%).

Contributing Factors to Domestic Violence

Studies have found out that there are many factors contributing to domestic violence, some of which are briefly discussed below.

- ❖ Cultural acceptance of violence – societies that accept or normalize violence (Jewkes, 2002).
- ❖ Low educational attainment – lower levels of education, in both perpetrators and victims are associated with higher risk of domestic violence (Abramsky, T., et al. 2011)
- ❖ Economic Dependency and unemployment: financial dependence on abusers and unemployment limit victims' ability to escape abuse. Also, financial stress and unemployment can increase tension and the risk of violence in households (Kapaldi, D.M., Knoble, N.B., Shortt, J.W., & Kim, H.K. 2012).
- ❖ Alcohol and Substance Abuse are strongly linked to the perpetration of domestic violence. Indeed, there is strong correlation between substance abuse and aggressive behaviour (Foran, H.M., & O' Leary, K.D., 2008).
- ❖ Inadequate Legal Framework - Limited enforcement of existing laws and legal loopholes. Weak legal frameworks and poor enforcement of laws enable perpetrators to act with impunity (UN Women, 2011).
- ❖ Gender inequality and patriarchal norms – societies with strong patriarchal values often tolerate or justify violence against women (Heise, L., 1998)
- ❖ Childhood exposure to violence – individuals exposed to violence during childhood are more likely to perpetrate or experience domestic violence as adults (Wisdom, C.S., 1989).

Impact of Domestic Violence

Some of the impact of domestic violence include - health consequences (Umeora *et al*, 2008), which involve physical injuries (Okenwa *et al*, 2009), psychological trauma, and reproductive health issues; economic impact: Loss of productivity and financial instability for victims

(Fawole, 2008); social implications-breakdown of family structures and negative effects on children (Antai, 2011), health consequences – may result to physical violence, etc.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that affects individual, families and communities worldwide. This assessment of physical domestic violence in Nigeria highlights the need for awareness, support and levels of domestic violence. It remains a significant challenge in Nigeria, with deep-rooted cultural and socio-economic factors contributing to its persistence. A multi-faceted approach involving legal reforms, public awareness, and victim support services is essential for addressing this issue. Collaborative efforts between the government, NGOs, and community stakeholders are crucial to creating a safer and more equitable society.

Based on findings of this research, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. **Strengthening Legal Protections:** Ensure uniform implementation of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act across all states
2. **Awareness Campaigns:** Promote public education to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate violence
3. **Economic Empowerment Programs:** Support financial independence for women
4. **Counselling and Support Services:** Establish shelters and counselling centers for victims
5. **Capacity Building for Law Enforcement:** Train law enforcement officers to handle domestic violence cases sensitively

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