

# SOME SOCIAL VARIABLES IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN A NIGERIAN POPULATION

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## Abstract

**Background:** Domestic violence is any intentional abuse of a family member mostly women by a partner which causes pain or injury. It is a growing phenomenon and is affected by several social variables. In pregnancy, domestic violence causes adverse pregnancy outcomes and other reproductive health consequences to women and children. Unfortunately, the problem is under reported.

**Aims:** The study is undertaken to assess social variables that may influence domestic violence in our locality.

**Methods:** The subjects analysed here consisted of 215 women attending antenatal clinic who were found to be experiencing domestic violence. The modified Abuse Assessment Screen (AAS) developed by McFarlane was used.

**Results:** The results show that the uneducated were relatively less abused and the unemployed least abused. Education and social statuses directly affect the tendency/chances to abuse or to be abused.

**Key Words:** Domestic Violence, Spouses, Age, Education, Occupation

## Introduction

The World Health Organisation defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well being, and not just the absence

of disease. The International Conference on Primary Health Care in Alma Ata in 1978 declared that governments have the social responsibility to their citizens in helping them achieve health for all.

Domestic violence, which is 'any intentional abuse of a family member (mostly women) by her partner that causes pain or injury',<sup>1,2</sup> clearly affects maternal and child health which is a cardinal component of Primary Health Care. Domestic violence is a problem occurring throughout the world in all socio-cultural and religious settings.<sup>1,2,4</sup> Social variables like age, social statuses, education, employment, occupation are known to influence the occurrence of domestic violence.<sup>1,3,5</sup>

In the USA, domestic violence is a major cause of physical injuries, mental illness and homelessness among women.<sup>6</sup> In South Africa, a prevalence of 21.5% was found among general practitioners studying domestic violence.<sup>7</sup> In Nigeria, the national prevalence is not known, however 81 % was reported in a community based study in Lagos.<sup>5</sup>

In pregnancy, domestic violence is a threat to both mother and child as it can lead to unsafe abortion, abruption placentae, foetal death, premature rupture of membranes, pre-labour and low birth weight and neonatal mortality.<sup>1,3,4</sup> The prevalence of domestic violence in pregnancy is about 4.3%.<sup>3</sup>

There are several factors that are known to combine and interplay to trigger violence most of which are socio-cultural in nature. This can be explained based on the sociological model of the causation of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> This argues that no one factor alone can cause abuse or violence but rather that a number of factors combine to raise the likelihood that a particular man or woman in a particular setting may act violently. The social factors sometimes may actually combine to protect some of the women. For example women with authority and power outside the family may actually have lower rates of abuse.

The study attempts to find out some of the social variables or factors that may affect the~sation of domestic violence in pregnancy in our environment.

**Materials and Methods**

The study was conducted at the antenatal clinic of the ECW A Evangel Hospital, Jos after approval from the Hospital's Ethics committee.

The interview was based on the questionnaire (survey instrument) the Abuse Assessment Screen (with modifications) developed by McFarlane. Antenatal women with established pregnancy confirmed clinically, immunologically or by ultrasonography were admitted into the study.

A total of three hundred and forty (340) women were interviewed out of which two hundred and fifteen (215) who suffered violence are been analysed. Data collected was analysed electronically using the Epi Info Version 6.04b (CDC Atlanta, 1993).

**Results**

Results are shown in tables 1 to 6. Periodicity of domestic violence coincided with pregnancy only in 11.6% of the women, with 82.7% of respondent unable to define specific timing of the abuse. This is shown in Table 1. Table 2 shows the age distribution in relation to prevalence of abuse. The highest prevalence was among the 20 - 29 year age group (56.3%), closely followed by 30 - 39 year age group (38.6%).

Table 3 and 4, show the educational background of the abused subjects and their spouses. Subjects with primary education were least abused among the literate.<sup>7</sup>

The uneducated had the least prevalence of abuse of 3.2%. Higher levels of abuse were seen among women with secondary education (41.9%) and those who had tertiary education (37.2%). The pattern of abusive behaviour among their spouses also followed the same trend as that of the women (14.4% for primary, 42.3% for secondary and 39.1 % for tertiary educated spouses).

Tables 5 and 6 show the distribution of the domestic violence with regards to the occupation of the subjects and their partners. Civil servants had an abuse prevalence rate of 19.5%. Husbands who were civil servants also were most abusive (43.8%).

This was followed by those self employed (43.3% for the women and 38.7% for the husbands). Husbands who were farmers were less abusive and the unemployed the least abusive.

*Table J: The Timing of domestic violence*

Time	n	%
During Pregnancy In between pregnancy	84 78	11.6 3.8
Any time		1.9
No pattern		82.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2: The relationship of age of subject to domestic violence

<u>Age (years)</u>	<u>Abused (%)</u>	<u>Not Abused (%)</u>
<20	7(3.3)	8(6.4)
20 - 29	12](56.3)	65(52.0)
30 - 39	83(38.6)	5(40.8)
40 - 49	<u>4( 1.8)</u>	<u>(0.8)</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>215(100)</b>	<b>125(100)</b>

p-value = 0.4448, x2 = 0.602

Table 3: The relationship of level of education of subjects to the prevalence of domestic violence

<u>Education</u>	<u>Abused (%)</u>	<u>Not Abused (%) ]</u>
Primary	38(17.7)	0(8.0)
Secondary	90(41.9)	52(4] .6)
Tertiary	80(37.2)	62(49.6)
None	<u>7(3.2)</u>	<u>(0.8)</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>215(100)</b>	<b>125(100)</b>

p-value = 0.03972, x2 = 4.230

Table 4: The relationship of the level of spouse education to domestic violence

<u>Education</u>	<u>Abused (%)</u>	<u>Not Abused (%) ]</u>
Primary	3](]4.4)	] 5(]2.0)
Secondary	9](42.3)	36(28.8)
Tertiary	84(39.])	72(57.6)
None <b>Total</b>	<u>9(4.2)</u>	<u>2(1.6)</u>
	<b>215(100)</b>	<b>125(100)</b>

Table 5: Occupation of Abused Women

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Abused (%)</u>	<u>Not Abused (%)</u>
Civil Servants		
Fulltime Housewife		
Business (Self employed)		
Student		
<b>Total</b>	<b>215(100)</b>	<b>125(100)</b>

Table 6: The Occupation of Spouses of Abused Women

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>Abused (%)</u>	<u>Not Abused (%)</u>
Civil	94(43.8)	61(48.8)
Servant	3(1.5)	5(4.0)
Farmers	83(38.7)	48(38.4)
Business	33(15.5)	8(6.4)
Unskilled labor	<u>1(0.5)</u>	<u>3(2.4)</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>215(100)</b>	<b>125(100)</b>

## Discussion

The social variables of domestic violence in pregnancy are as complex as they are many. Domestic violence may commence or escalate in pregnancy.<sup>3,9</sup> This was seen in this population of women as all of them were pregnant. Indeed, 11.6% of the respondents have been abused in the course of their current pregnancy. On the other hand, 82.7% had violence meted to them irrespective of pregnancy. It is possible that this larger group of respondents might just be playing down on the frequency they experience abuse. Perhaps repeat questioning at a subsequent visit may have changed this pattern of response. This much has been reported by several authorities?<sup>9</sup>

The 20 - 29 year age group was most abused. They represent the young and newly married especially in northern Nigeria, where they may be overrepresented in the group studied. This is more so when you see that they are closely followed by the 30 - 39 year age group which represented 38.6% of those abused. The study in south western Nigeria agrees that victims of abusive relationship are likely to be young.<sup>10</sup> The study in New England USA, also agrees that the abuse victims are more likely to be young.<sup>11</sup> In India however, it was found that the victim is more likely to be older and of higher parity.<sup>9</sup> It can thus safely be said that women of reproductive age, mostly those pregnant are prone to be abused.

There is no clearly defined pattern of violence based on educational attainment as figures found range from 17.7% for primary educated women, rising to 41.9% for secondary educated women and dropping to 37.2% for tertiary educated women. The women with no education were found to be least abused (3.2%). The uneducated are socio-culturally most disadvantaged and should be most vulnerable to abuse. This is due to their ignorance of their rights in marriage and poor power of negotiation. This

may thus make them less provocative as they may tend to accept whatever they find in their marriage situation. The prevalence of abusive behaviour based on the educational attainment of the spouses also follows the same pattern. The general trend suggests that education does influence domestic violence prevalence. These findings are collaborated by studies in Ibadan where victims of domestic violence were found to be educated, mostly higher education and Odujurin in Lagos found that education influenced the prevalence of violence.<sup>4,10</sup> The studies in India and China disagree with this, they rather found that men who were unemployed were more abusive in their relationships.<sup>3,9</sup> This may be due to cultural variations.

The women who had defined jobs like civil servant were abused less (19.5%) compared to the women who were fulltime housewives and self employed (35.3% and 43.3% respectively). The spouses were more likely to be abusive if they economically empowered (civil servants 43.8%, business men 38.7%). This again agrees with Fawole and Odujurin which found that occupation influenced causation of domestic violence and the chance that one may be abused. This position is further supported by the finding that unemployed husbands were not abusive at all. These husbands have their responsibilities, most likely, shifted to the wives and this may be followed by a shift in the violence in such a family. This is explained by the ecological model which suggests that some factors in the social environment may combine to protect women like those with authority outside the family actually have lower rates of abuse.<sup>1</sup> The other reason for this trend may be due to the fact that in most cultures in Nigeria, (indeed the world), the man is expected to provide for his family then he will be given free reign and the wife show him obedience.<sup>1,12</sup> The unemployed because of the above may rather keep quiet in shame and be afraid of asserting certain rights especially with an overbearing employed partner.

From the foregoing highlights, age, pregnancy, education, occupation are suggested relevant factors affecting domestic violence in pregnancy.

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