

Burden and Characteristics of Domestic Violence among Males in A Sub Saharan African Setting

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ABSTRACT

BACKGROUND: Domestic violence has been a subject of interest worldwide. However, most studies document men as the culprits with little attention given to male victims. This study sought to find out the prevalence and characteristics of domestic violence experienced by men in a sub Saharan African setting.

METHOD: This was a cross sectional study using questionnaires administered to 410 men aged 20 - >60 years.

RESULTS: Two hundred and twenty-seven (55.4%) of the men have ever experienced domestic violence, and 82.4% of them were verbally and emotionally abused. In 49.8% cases the culprit was their wife/wives, while in others a girlfriend 33 (14.5%) or a mother-in law (11.5%) was responsible. In 90 (39.6%) men, their own parents were also verbally abused by the culprit. Thirty (13.2%) of the 227 men who had experienced abuse were physically abused. Victims usually report the abuse to a third party, mostly to family members. Men aged above 40 years and those educated below tertiary level were more likely to experience domestic violence ($p = 0.0001$ and 0.014).

CONCLUSION: Men are also victims of domestic violence in this setting, but the violence is mostly verbal and psychological in nature. There is need to provide support services for male victims of domestic violence and also encourage them to report their experience of domestic violence in order to obtain help and assistance.

KEY WORDS: Domestic violence, men, victims

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INTRODUCTION

Intimate partner violence (IPV) refers to physical, sexual, psychological, or economic violence and controlling behaviour that one partner may perpetrate against the other in a relationship¹. Domestic violence has also been defined as "Any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary, deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life."^{2,3}

Most studies on intimate partner or domestic violence is centered on women as victims and men as the culprits. Rarely are men reported as possible victims^{4,5}. However, studies are beginning to show that men can be victims of

domestic violence even in relationships with the female.⁶

Studies are beginning to emerge which reveal that females can practice intimate partner violence under certain circumstances. These circumstances include those females who are on hard drugs or alcohol, and those who have migrated to the United States of America from developing countries.^{7,8} Those who migrate to the United States are in a cultural transition from their indigenous cultures to a western one.⁷¹

This is a report of the burden and characteristics of domestic violence experienced by men in a sub-Saharan African setting and is intended to raise awareness and encourage advocacy for its prevention and control.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Setting

The study was conducted in April 2010 in Zaria, northern Nigeria. Zaria is an ancient city in Kaduna state, inhabited by people from diverse cultures and religions but mostly by Hausas who are predominantly Muslims. The city has several tertiary educational institutions such as the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, College of Aviation Technology and the Federal College of Education. The city has a population of 695,069 (Nigeria Population Census 2006) and can be divided into Zaria City, Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Samaru, which are the main named areas of Zaria town. The literacy level for men in this region is no education 40.7%, primary education 21.7%, secondary education 27.5% and more than secondary education 10% (Nigerian Demographic and Health Survey, 2008).

METHODS

Sample

A sample size of 410 was the target, calculated using the formula $N = Z^2 \alpha PQ / d^2$ (where P = proportion or prevalence of the condition = 0.37, Q = 1 - P (1-0.37) = 0.63, d = Precision limit = 0.05, Z Alpha = Standard deviate at a 95% confidence interval = 1.96²).

Administration of questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was designed to capture the following information from respondents: their socio-demographic information, knowledge of the existence and experience of domestic violence amongst the men as well as the culprits and types of domestic violence experienced.

The questionnaires were allocated equally at 110 for each ward area of Zaria City, Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Samaru. Consecutive consenting males within the age group 20 >60 years (for the purpose of this study) were sampled and included in the survey, in each sampling area (Zaria city, Tudun Wada, Sabon Gari and Samaru), until the sample size of 110 for that area was reached. Males who did not consent and those outside the age group being sampled were excluded from the study. The questionnaires were administered by male medical students and trained demographic surveyors using English and Hausa depending on which language the respondent was most comfortable with.

Data management

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 15 and Analyse-it® for Excel. χ^2 test was used to test level of statistical significance for categorical variable. The level of statistical significance was set at <0.05.

RESULTS

The respondents were aged 20-73 years (median 35 years). Two hundred and thirty nine (58.2%) were Hausas, 58 (14.1%) Yoruba, 18 (4.4%) Ibos and 95 (23.1%) were of other tribes. Two hundred and ninety six (72%) were Muslims and 114 (28%) Christians (Table 1). Three hundred and one (73.2%) were married, 106(25.8%) were single and 3 (.7%) were divorced. Of the married respondents, 214 (71.1%) were in monogamous marriages and 87 (28.9%) were in polygamous marriages. Of those in polygamous marriages 60 (68.9%) had two wives and 27 (31.1%) had more than two.

Definitions of domestic violence as given by the men, included: misunderstanding in the family (60%), lack of respect for a man in his home (23.4%), transfer of aggression (12.2%), and physical combat in the home (4.1%).

Three hundred and ninety-one (95.4%) believed that men can be victims of domestic violence. When asked if they have ever suffered from domestic violence anytime at all in their entire adulthood, 227 respondents (55.4%) had experienced domestic violence (Table 2). Of those who experienced domestic violence, 187 (82.4%) had emotional and verbal abuse (Table 3); in 90 (48.1%) parents of the victim were also verbally abused by the culprits. Of those abused verbally, 49 (26.2%) were called 'cowards/woman wrapper and useless man' respectively, 29(15.5%) were called 'a total failure', 14 (7.5%) were called 'impotent'. Sixteen men (7.0%) each were slapped and refused sex respectively, 12(5.3%) were beaten, 11(4.8%) had financial deprivation, 9 (4.0%) had nutritional deprivation and 2 (0.9%) had chemicals used on them. Of the 410 men surveyed, 183 (44.6%) did not experience any form of abuse at all.

Of the 227 who experienced domestic violence 176

(77.5%) would report to a third party, which included: 103(58.5%) a family elder, 34(19.3%) a friend, 17(9.7%) a religious leader, 16(9.1%) a community leader, 9 (5.5%) their brother, 8(4.5%) the police and 7(4.0%) would report to other people (including their in law).

The culprits of domestic violence were the wife/wives 113(49.8%), 36(15.9%) others, girlfriend 33(14.5%), mother-in law 26(11.5%) and mother/sister 20(8.8%) (Table 4). No male relatives or household members were reported to have abused other men.

Amongst 390 men who indicated their age, being aged above 40 years ($p = 0.0001$) appear to predispose to experience of domestic violence (Table 5), and amongst 349 men who indicated their level of education, education below tertiary education ($p = 0.14$) appeared to predispose to experiencing domestic violence (Tables 6).

Table 1: Demographics of 410 men surveyed

Age distribution	Frequency	%
20-29	116	28.2
30-39	167	40.7
40-49	84	20.4
50 and above	43	10.5
Tribe		
Hausa-Fulani	239	58.2
Others	95	23.1
Ibo	18	4.4
Yoruba	58	14.1
Religion		
Christian	114	28
Muslims	296	72

Others: Nupe, Igbira, Igala, Kanuri

Table 2: Types of domestic violence experienced by men

Domestic violence	No. (%)
n = 410	
Experienced domestic violence	227 (55.4)
Non-physical abuse (n = 223)	
Emotional/verbal abuse	187
Refused Sex	16
Financial deprivation	11
Nutritional deprivation	9
Physical abuse (n = 30)	
Slapped	16
Physical abuse/attack	12
Use of acid/chemicals	2
Did not experience domestic violence	183 (44.6)

Some respondents experienced more than one type of domestic violence

Table 3: Types of verbal abuse experienced by 187 men

Type of verbal abuse	No. (%)
Abuse parents	90 (48.1)
Woman wrapper/coward	49 (26.2)
Useless man	49 (26.2)
Failure	29 (15.5)
Impotent	14 (7.5)
Total	187 (100)

Table 5: Age and experience of domestic violence

Age (Years)	Experience domestic violence		
	Yes (%)	No. (%)	Total (%)
≤40	140 (49.5)	143 (51.5)	283 (69.0)
>40	87 (68.5)	40 (31.5)	127 (31.0)
Total (%)	227 (55.4)	183 (44.6)	410 (100)

Chi Square test; $p = 0.0001$

DISCUSSION

Domestic violence remains a public health concern worldwide despite significant law reforms aimed at curbing abuse in various countries⁹. However most or all of these laws are specifically protective of only female victims as males are usually not expected to be victims of domestic violence. A limitation of the present study is the fact that the men were not asked what they actually did when they experienced domestic violence but were asked what they would do when abused.

A survey of high school and college females in the United States showed that 29-59% of them practiced physical aggression against their male partners.¹⁰

Various definitions of domestic violence suggest some physical, verbal, psychological or sexual abuse and depreciation in public which can lead to harm to the victim. Men in this study defined domestic violence in several different ways.

The prevalence of domestic violence in this study is 55.4%. This is high compared to the 40% in a United State study and 37%, from a previous study amongst men in this same environment 7 years previously (2005) and even higher than rates of 28% amongst females.^{7, 11, 12} There's also a high level of verbal abuse in other reports. This high prevalence rate may be due to cultural differences between the United States (Western culture) and northern Nigeria (African culture). However, this present survey may not be typical of northern Nigeria, as Zaria is an academic/educational town and the level of education may be different from a typical northern Nigerian setting. The increase of the rate between the previous study and the present report may be due to an increase in awareness of what constitutes domestic violence amongst the men.

Table 4: Culprits of domestic violence amongst 227 men who experienced domestic violence

Culprit	No. (%)
Wife/wives	113 (49.8)
Girlfriend	33 (14.5)
Mother-in-law	26 (11.4)
Mother/sister	20 (8.8)
Others	35 (15.4)
Total	227 (100)

Table 6: Educational level and experience of domestic violence

Educational level	Experience domestic violence		
	Yes (%)	No. (%)	Total (%)
Below tertiary education	107 (72.3)	41 (27.7)	148 (42.4)
Tertiary education	78 (38.8)	123 (61.2)	201 (57.6)
Total (%)	185 (53.0)	164 (47.0)	349 (100)

Chi Square test; $p = 0.014$

and financial independence of women from their husbands or due to an increase in awareness of women's right around the world including northern Nigeria. However, a study from rural Bangladesh did not show any improvement in women's experience of domestic violence with increase in their financial independence¹³.

The culprits in the present study were mostly the wives and girlfriends as found from other studies and also the mother in-laws of the men were also implicated as the culprits in a few cases¹⁴. A mother-in-law may practice domestic violence like ridiculing her son-in-law or calling him names if her daughter has an advantage over the man especially if it is a financial advantage. However, our study did not explore the financial status of the wives of men who experienced domestic violence and the specific nature of abuse by mother-in-laws was not captured.

A study from Canada showed that younger men are more likely to experience domestic violence¹⁴. But in this study respondent's age of 40 years or above was a predisposing factor to experience of domestic violence. This difference may be due to cultural differences between Canada, with a Western culture and northern Nigeria with an African culture. However, in the present survey the studied men were asked if they have ever suffered from domestic violence at anytime in adulthood, as this may give an impression of older men having experienced domestic violence more than younger men.

A high proportion of victims of domestic violence in the present report experienced verbal and psychological abuse which is also the commonest type of domestic violence practiced by women¹⁵. This is similar to findings from other parts of the world.⁸ Victims of domestic

violence are usually reluctant to report to a third party; in a study on female victims of domestic violence, 64.1% of victims are likely to report to a third party compared to 60% in this study.¹² This implies that male victims of domestic violence are ready to discuss with a third party, probably as a help seeking behavior. For those who do report they are most likely to report to an extended family member probably to keep the problem within the family: similar to findings amongst female victims of domestic violence in similar settings^{3, 11}. Men may be reluctant to report their experience of domestic violence to a third party because they may feel embarrassed or they may seem to appear to be weak. This is in view of the fact that the respondents' defined domestic violence as "a lack of respect for a man in his own house". Men may be reluctant to report or disclose their experience of domestic violence because it is common for men to be the culprits rather than the victims and because men experience verbal abuse more than physical abuse.⁹ Physical abuse can be reported to a third party especially if it results to injury. However, verbal or psychological abuse may have nothing physical to show as evidence for it.

Respondents who experienced verbal abuse were called names such as 'impotent', 'woman wrapper', 'a failure', 'coward', 'useless man'. In 48% of cases, the abuse was extended to their parents. The extension of verbal abuse to a partner's parents, in the African culture, is an extreme form of domestic violence.

Of the variables studied, an educational level below tertiary level, age =40years, and being Hausa or Ibo by tribe seemed to predispose to the experience of domestic violence. This is in contrast to a previous study in the same setting in which men in polygamous marriages were more likely to experience domestic violence.¹¹

Men can be victims of victims of domestic violence. It's important to establish support network for the victims and also encourage them to report their experience.

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