

## Original Article

# Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Abakaliki, Ebonyi State

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## ABSTRACT

Physical violence, by definition, is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury or harm. Physical violence among both men and women is a universal problem around the globe, and different people experience and perceive it differently. It is known to occur across society, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography inclination. It is also known not to be affected by intimate or non-intimate relationship in males and females. We analyzed 102 cases in the Accident and Emergency Department, Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki over two years from January 2016 to December 2018. Out of 102 cases, we recorded eight cases of death. The results obtained showed different types of domestic violence which include: physical violence, psychological violence and sexual violence. The age of the couples and their employment status did not correlate with domestic violence among couples, and that gender and educational status did not associate with domestic violence significantly. Thirty-four cases (33.3%) sustained bruises as a result of physical assault from either the husband or his relatives. Most of the women complained of being beaten and raped by their husbands, and from this study, it showed that thirty-one cases (30.4%) were reported as rape cases. One significant finding of this index study is that urban women prevalently experience domestic violence. Implying that the financial stress placed on men by their wives compounded with the high rate of illiteracy and unemployment among the individuals may not be unconnected with domestic violence stimulators.

**Keywords:** Autopsies, Abuse, Domestic, Physical, Violence, Women

## INTRODUCTION

Violence among both men and women is a universal problem in many countries. By definition, physical violence is the intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury or harm<sup>1</sup> Scratching, shoving, pushing, grabbing, throwing, biting, shaking, choking, slapping, burning or punching are

examples. Others include the use of a weapon, use of restraints or one's size of the body, or strength against another person, though the list is not exhaustive (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).<sup>1</sup> Physical violence is known to occur across society, irrespective of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth or geography inclination. It affects both males and females in an intimate or non-intimate relationship. Physical violence

presents in different shades like threats, coercion or arbitrary liberty deprivation, which could manifest in the victim's public or private life (United Nations, 1993).<sup>2</sup> Types/forms of domestic violence.<sup>3</sup>

At home, different forms of abuse may occur, and these include:

1. Physical abuse. This act is associated with the use of physical force which directly or indirectly results in inflicting injury to the victim or creating a situation where the victim is at risk of being harmed. The act of kicking, beating, knocking, choking, punching, and confinement are in this category. By this definition, female genital mutilation is a typical example of physical abuse. Physical abuse is known as one of the most prevalent forms of violence. In a study done by Obi and Ozumba, as much as 83% of respondents reported physical abuse.<sup>4</sup> A similar study titled Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Nigeria: Implications for Counseling by Aihie, ON, physical violence was also noted to be high.<sup>5</sup>
2. Neglect: The failure to provide for dependants who may be children or adults, denial of particular basic fundamental human needs like food, clothing, medical care, shelter, and protection from harm or a sense of being loved and valued to a family member is a type of domestic violence.<sup>5,6</sup>
3. Sexual abuse: This involves all forms of sexual harassment, assaults, or exploitation. It includes forcing or coercing a person to participate in sexual activity, the use of a child for sexual purposes either in the form of child prostitution and pornography. Marital rape also categorized under this purview.<sup>5,6</sup>
4. Economic abuse: This involves defrauding or stealing from a loved one, withholding money or precious goods that may be needed for the acquisition of essential items like medical needs or food, manipulation or exploitation of family member for selfish financial gains, prevention of a loved one from working or having control over his/her choice of occupation.<sup>5,6</sup>
5. Spiritual Abuse: This involves the act of prevention of a person from freely engaging in his/her spiritual or

religious practices or the use of one's religious belief to manipulate, dominate or control him/her.<sup>5,6</sup>

6. Emotional Abuse: Any act that negatively impacts on a person's sense of self-worth or puts a person at risk of developing severe behavioural, emotional, cognitive or mental disorders is termed emotional abuse. Examples of such acts are issuing threats to a person, the person's possession or harming his or her sense of self-worth by subjecting him/her at risk of severe behavioural, emotional, cognitive or mental disorders. Shouting at a partner which was found to be the most common abuse by Obi and Ozumba is included.<sup>3</sup> Also involved in emotional abuse are criticism, name-calling, social isolation intimidating or routinely making unreasonable demand or exploitation to dominate, terrorizing a person verbally or physically and exposing a child to violence.<sup>4,6</sup>

Abuse may occur once, or it may repeatedly happen often in an escalating or cascading manner. An individual may be a victim of more than one form of abuse.

Domestic violence is also regarded as a pattern of abusive behaviour occurring in any relationship that is utilized by one of the partners as a weapon to gain or maintain power and have control over another close partner. This definition goes further to add that domestic violence can occur to anyone irrespective of one's race, sexual orientation, gender, age or religion. Domestic violence is known to take many forms, which include: physical abuse, emotional, sexual abuse, psychological and economic abuse.<sup>7</sup> Other names of domestic violence are domestic abuse, battering, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence and family violence. It is also known as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one partner against another in a close relationship such as family, cohabitation, marriage or dating. Other forms of the definition of domestic violence, include physical aggression or assaults in the form of (hitting, biting, kicking, shoving, slapping, restraining, throwing objects), or threats thereof; emotional abuse; sexual abuse; controlling or intimidation; domineering; stalking; passive/covert abuse otherwise known as neglect; and economic deprivation.<sup>6</sup>

Domestic violence and abuse are not limited to apparent physical violence. It also involves endangerment, kidnapping, criminal coercion, unlawful imprisonment, harassment, trespassing, and stalking.<sup>8,9</sup> Families from all racial, racial economic, religious and educational backgrounds experience domestic violence in different ways. In the United States of America, on women experience about 4.8 million experience close partner-related physical assaults and rapes while men are found victims in about 2.9 million intimate,<sup>10</sup> Similar studies conducted in Oyo State, Nigeria and other parts of Nigeria, yielded strictly comparable results, which showed that the incidence of domestic violence is high in Nigeria. In a research performed by Obi and Ozumba,<sup>3</sup> on factors commonly associated with domestic violence, in South East, Nigeria, they found that 70% of respondents reported abuse in their family with as much as 92% of the victims being female partners and the remaining 8% were male victims. Project alert,<sup>10</sup> in a survey on violence against women, which was done by conducting interviews with women working in the market places and other areas of work involving girls and young women who are in secondary schools and universities, in Lagos State, Nigeria. Forty-five of the women interviewed (representing 64.4%) in the workplace said they had at a time been beaten by a partner (husband or boy friend), forty-eight of the (representing 56.6%) interviewed market woman accepted experiencing such violence at home.<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International documented that, the Federal and State governments have a responsibility and failure in governance is partially responsible for the alarming figures.<sup>11</sup> Neither the Federal nor State governments were perceived as being committed to providing a solution that would stem this violence. The governments are accused of condoning violence against women, thus subjecting at risk millions of women nationwide.<sup>11</sup> In Ghana, assault to spouses top the list of domestic violence.<sup>12</sup> In Nigeria; reports reveal a "shockingly high" level of violence against women.<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International reported that a third (and in some cases as much as two-thirds) of women were believed to have been subjected to sexual, physical and

psychological violence done to them primarily by husbands, fathers and partners.<sup>11</sup> In some situations, girls were often forced into early marriage, exposing them to high risk of punishment, especially if they make an attempt to escape from their husbands.<sup>11</sup> More pathetic is the revelation of gross under-reporting and non-documentation of domestic violence due to cultural factors.<sup>14</sup> in its study documented that traditionally in Nigeria, just as in many other African countries, wives' and children's beating has a full approval as a form of discipline. It is, therefore, believed that in beating their children, good parents are instilling the desired discipline in them. The same thing also applies to husbands beating their wives, which was regarded as the way children are disciplined. This cowardly act of societal indiscipline must be curbed.

Cases of domestic violence against women are noted to be on the increase in Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> Reports of cases where husbands kill or seriously maim their wives in the media abound.<sup>16</sup> In one story on the statistics of domestic violence presented by the Government of Nigeria's 2013 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), the figures were intriguing.<sup>17</sup> It was revealed that about 50% of women had been battered by their husbands at one time or the other.<sup>10</sup> It is shocking to note that more educated women (65%) are in this terrible situation when compared with their low-income counterparts which represent 55% of all the cases. Most persons (especially women) passing through this ordeal prefer to endure, with the belief that they have nowhere to go. They resort to such action by sticking to their partners even in the face of overt risk to their lives because they have this notion that the law will not protect them. A staggering figure of 97.2% of them is not willing to report to the Nigeria Police.<sup>10</sup>

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

We carried out at the Department of Morbid Anatomy, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki. The cases retrieved from the archive of the Department of Accident and Emergency, Federal Teaching Hospital, Abakaliki. This

work analyzed 102 cases in Accident and Emergency Department of the hospital over two years from January 2016 to December 2018. Approval had been obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Federal Teaching Hospital Abakaliki to meet the ethical guidelines to enable. Results of these cases were collated and subsequently analyzed. Medical Records register in Accident and Emergency Department of the hospital were retrieved from the archives and were reviewed by the investigators, who are consultant pathologists to confirm the various diagnoses in respect to the cases. Out of one hundred and two cases that were analyzed, we recorded eight cases of death, and autopsies performed on them.

Our inclusion criteria in the study are:

1. Established cases of Domestic violence whose diagnosis had been verified by at least two pathologists.
2. Cases with complete patient data. While the exclusion criteria are:
  1. Cases with incomplete patient data.
  2. All cases that could not be gotten from the departmental archive or store of A&E.

Data collected was analyzed using International Business Machine, Statistical Package for Social Science (IBM SPSS) window 23. Relevant means and frequencies were presented in tables, figures, and summary indices. Inferential statistics (bivariate analysis) was done using the chi-square test. P-value < 0.05 was considered significant.

Sexual, physical, emotional and sexual violence is the measured outcome of interest of domestic violence. Questions included experiences of one or several of the following acts of abuse by a victim:

Sexual, physical, emotional and sexual violence is the measured outcome of interest of domestic violence. One or more of following acts of abuse by a victim are worthy of discussion:

*Physical violence:* *i)* shaking, pushing or throwing an object something at her is one usual acts; *ii)* the victim could be slapped; *iii)* arm twisting or hair pulled; *iv)* punching or hitting the subject with the intent of inflicting harm; *v)* beating, kicking or dragging the subject; *vi)*

burning or choking on purpose, and *vii)* attacking or threatening the victim her with a harmful weapon like penknife or gun.

*Sexual violence:* *viii)* forced sexual intercourse; *ix)* physically forcing her to perform any other sexual act when undesired, and *x)* forcing her with threats to perform sexual acts when undesired.

*Emotional violence:* *xi)* humiliating her in public; *xii)* threatening to hurt or harm someone close to her, and *xiii)* insulting or making her feel bad about herself

## RESULTS

The results obtained showed that couples are faced with different types of domestic violence which are: physical violence, psychological violence and sexual violence; the age of the couples and their employment status did not correlate with domestic violence among couples, and that gender and educational status did not correlate with domestic violence significantly.

Out of one hundred of two cases (102) that reported to the relevant authority before taking to hospital thirty-four cases representing 33.3% sustained bruises as a result of physical assault from either the husband or his relatives. In some instances, most of the women complained of being beaten and raped by their husbands and from this study, it showed that thirty-one cases representing 30.4% reported as a case of rape. Table 1 showed that injury sustained as burns had the least number of case 1 representing 1%. There were a few instances where the man was attacked by his wife by pouring hot water on him. There are incidences where husband attacks his wife by pouring hot water on her body, creating more than 60% burn that eventually took the life of the patient and an autopsy was done on her. This accounted for only 1% of the cases of injury sustained by patients in this study. However, this could be more than just 1 case reported if the victims of this domestic violence report to the necessary or relevant authorities, the number are expected to be on the rise because of the high rate of wife battering in the state. These women believed that things would one day turn around for good, without

knowing that evil day is fast approaching. Most of these women presented with various types of fracture, ranging from simple to comminuted fracture. There are only 5 cases of fracture documented in this study, and this represented 4.9%. Bruises and Laceration were other nature of injuries sustained by these patients, and they were 34 and 21 cases representing 33.3% and 20.6% respectively. Table 2 of this study showed that head was the commonest affected site 32 (31.4%), followed by multiple site injuries with 28 cases representing 27.5%, followed by injury in the genitals which had 22 cases representing 21.6%. Table 3 showed age groups of the patients that were involved in this study. The highest number of cases recorded in this study was seen in the group of 20 to 29 years which 45 cases were recorded representing 44.1%, followed by 30 to 49 years age groups which have thirteen (23) cases representing 22.5% respectively and the least number of cases were seen in the age groups of 80 to 89years and 90 to 99 years, which recorded 0 and 1% respectively. This study showed that young people are mostly involved in domestic violence; this may occur due to a lack of maturity in mind and character among young people. Contributing factors could also be over-dependence of female partners on their male counterparts. Table 4 illustrated several factors contributing to domestic violence (abuse). As confirmed in the table, ten women representing 9.8% of the cases attributed its occurrence to drunkenness; 55 (53.9%) of

**Table 1:** Nature of injury

Nature of injury	Frequency	Percentage
Bruises	34	33.3%
Penetration (Rape)	31	30.4%
Abrasion	5	4.9%
Laceration	21	20.6%
Fracture	5	4.9%
Burns	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 2:** Site of injury

Site	Frequency	Percentage
Head	32	31.4%
Neck	4	1.0%
Anterior Chest	2	2.0%
Posterior Chest	2	2.0%
Upper arm	1	3.9%
Forearm	4	3.9%
Anterior Abdomen	4	3.9%
Posterior Abdomen	1	1.0%
Buttock, Thigh	1	1.0%
Genitalia	22	21.6%
Multiple sites	28	27.5%
Leg	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 3:** Physical assault according to Age groups

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 9yrs	0	0.0%
10 -19yrs	3	2.9%
20 - 29yrs	45	44.1%
30 - 39yrs	23	22.5%
40 - 49yrs	16	15.7%
50 - 59yrs	9	8.8%
60 - 69yrs	2	2.0%
70 - 79yrs	3	2.9%
80 - 89yrs	0	0.0%
90 - 99yrs	1	1.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Table 4:** Factors Contributing to Domestic Violence

Factor(s)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Drunkenness	10	9.8
Financial Demand	55	53.9
Sexual Advances	15	14.7
Annoyance/ Provocation	12	11.8
Cultural Factors	6	5.9
Combined Factors	4	3.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>100</b>

them claimed it was due to financial demand; 15(14.7%) suggested that it was because of rebuffed sexual advances; 12 (11.8%) of the victims blamed their abuse on the annoyance nature or temperament of their husbands; 6 (5.9%) of them pointed at cultural and stereotypical beliefs; while 4 (3.9%) of the women said that combination of these factors was responsible for their abuse by men.

## **DISCUSSION**

In some African regions, including Nigeria, the act of beating wives and children has been an accepted a way of life, enshrined in the societal norms.<sup>5</sup> The dastardly act is widely recognized as a form of discipline and punitive measure for correcting misbehaviour among women and children.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, in beating their children, some parents have the notion they are instilling the needed discipline in their children, just as some husbands who beat their wives believe the same with the intents of imbibing moral codes in them- an act so rampant among women who are economically dependent on the man.<sup>5</sup> The society appears patriarchal, and women's position within the system remains subordinate by arrangement.<sup>5</sup> Domestic violence has been consciously designed by the community to consistently subjugate women into submissiveness to men within customary society. This study revealed that 33.3% of women had bruises from punching and kicking (Physical assault) inflicted by their male partners during domestic violence; this is similar to studies done in Oyo, Lagos and Enugu other parts of the country. This finding is different from other studies done were the common forms of abuse were slapping or pushing (77%), shouting at a partner (93%) and kicking 40%. Interestingly, the data obtained appear disturbing to note due to the display of ignorance by some women who do not know if they had been abused or not (Afrol News 2007),<sup>13</sup> this could be due to the acceptance of some abusive behaviour as usual. Print and electronic media are engorged with vicious attacks on women by loved ones which range from rape, 'acid bath', beatings, some of which sometimes culminated in victim's death. Moreover, it is appalling to note that sizable

populations of women who are violated fail to report the incident for fear of reprisal from abusers or the belief that the police and legal system may not be of assistance. The police are also said to frequently dismiss complaints of domestic violence as a 'private matter'. The index we created included areas such as household decision-making, access to and control over economic resources, which also have been used in other studies.<sup>14,18</sup> However, indices created in other studies did not include education, literacy, media exposure or age at first cohabitation/marriage. This interaction, although small, underscores the importance of contextual factors in Domestic violence occurrence. Even if a woman had high status, community norms among men tend to override the effect of her position. Men would readily go with the standard that expects them to be in control of their home affairs and discipline their partners when the need arises since prevailing norms influence behaviour and non-compliance with such norms can attract consequences.<sup>6,14,19</sup> Therefore, if individual women's status was to be improved, a woman cannot realize the full benefits if there is no change in men's attitudes towards Domestic violence, particularly at the community level. One research revealed that the protective effect of education against Intimate Partner Violence was muted by community norms that approved of Intimate Partner Violence. Some studies have found that the protective effect of women's status against Intimate Partner Violence is absent in culturally conservative contexts.<sup>20-25</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

One significant finding of this index study is that domestic violence is prevalently experienced by urban women as 85% of the women who reported and present to the Accident & Emergency of the Hospital (AUEFTHA) complained that they were abused by their spouses. This agreement with the previous studies that have observed domestic violence is a global problem and that it transcends social, geographical and ethnic divide (Odumegwu 2001, WHO, 2004). The study also uncovers the factors that contribute to such menace in the urban areas

are: Over-dependence on men for financial demand, snubbed sexual advances, annoyance, a lousy economy and cultural factors. A more significant percentage of the victims who had bruises as a nature of injury at presentation stated that they were beaten by their spouse on financial demand/ request. This implies that the financial stress placed on men by their wives is much, which most time results in disagreement between husbands and wives. The financial burden may be compounded with the high rate of illiteracy and unemployment among the individuals.)

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