

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND MARITAL STABILITY AMONG COUPLES IN ALIMOSHO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR MENTAL HEALTH

Oladipupo, B. O. Abiola, Molayoto J. Olufemi-Sodipe, T. and Oniyide Kudirat O.
Dept. of Human Kinetics, Sport and Health Education, Lagos State University, Ojo.

Abstract

Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting many marriages in most communities, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of domestic violence to health can cross generations and last a lifetime. The study investigated the factors in domestic violence and marital stability among couples in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State. The descriptive survey research design was adopted while the sample consisted of 364 women attending marriage ceremonies in Alimosho marriage registry. The modified Domestic Violence Questionnaire (DVQ) Kr21p = 0.84 was used to generate data for the study. Data collected were analysed using X^2 on Winks SDA Statistical Package version 17.0 edition. Findings revealed a statistically significant impact of lifestyle of abusers ($\chi^2 = 510.185$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$); belief system of male superiority ($\chi^2 = 242.323$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$); cultural acceptance of spousal beating ($\chi^2 = 470.330$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$); educational status of domestic violence victims ($\chi^2 = 33.63$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$) and employment status of abusers and victims ($\chi^2 = 107.773$; $p = 0.001 < 0.05$) on marriage success among couples. Recommendation was made to the effect that to guarantee marital stability among couples, there is the need for husbands to shun violent behaviours at home by adjusting lifestyle habits that could jeopardise the coexistence so that the men will not become abusers based on their lifestyles. Health counselling that will correct the erroneous belief that a woman could be beaten as part of corrective effort by the man should be intensified in marriage counselling units before and after marriage. This will help dissuade men from violent activities, stabilise marriages and promote mental health.

Key words: *Domestic violence, Lifestyle of abusers, Marriage success*

Introduction

Domestic violence have commonly been referred to as spousal abuse, domestic abuse, intimate partner violence, or child abuse depending on who is victimised or affected in a way by the violence at home. The commonest form is violence against women in the family and it is as old as mankind worldwide. This global public health problem is defined as a wilful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behaviour as part of a systematic pattern of power and control perpetrated by one intimate partner against another (Essays, UK, 2013). Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury to women, accounting for approximately one third of all injuries not involving a motor vehicle. Pan, Daley, Rivera, Williams, Lingle and Reznik (2006) reported that women ages 15–44 lose more Discounted Health Years of Life (DHYL) to rape and domestic violence than to breast cancer, cervical cancer, obstructed

labour, heart disease, AIDS, respiratory infections, motor vehicle accidents or war. Abramsky and Garcia-Moreno (2011) in a World Health Organisation study reported that 40–70% of female homicide victims were killed by a current or former intimate partner. The act includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse in a domestic setting. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other (National Coalition against Domestic Violence, 2013).

Domestic violence is an epidemic affecting individuals in every community, regardless of age, economic status, sexual orientation, gender, race, religion, or nationality. It is often accompanied by emotionally abusive and controlling behaviour that is only a fraction of a systematic pattern of dominance and control. The act can result in physical injury, psychological trauma, and in severe cases, even death. The devastating physical, emotional, and psychological consequences of domestic violence can cross generations and last a lifetime (García-Moreno & Stöckli, 2013). Globally, there are severe forms of domestic violence and the victims are mostly women although the gender roles can and are reversed sometimes (McQuigg, 2011). In some countries, domestic violence is often seen as justified, particularly in cases of actual or suspected infidelity on the part of the woman, and is legally permitted. (Ipotokin, 2017; Concannon, 2013; Strong, DeVault & Cohen, 2010). Domestic violence is among the most underreported crimes worldwide for both men and women.

Many causes of domestic violence have been reported in literature. According to Goldsmith (2016), the need to control one's partner maybe borne out of low self-esteem, extreme jealousy, difficulties in regulating anger and other strong emotions, or feeling of being inferior to the other partner in education and socioeconomic background. Other causes include the traditional beliefs that a man has the right to control the partner, and that women are not equal to men, undiagnosed personality disorder or psychological disorder and learned behaviour from growing up in a household where domestic violence was accepted as a normal part of being raised in their family. Goldsmith (2016) further explained that violent behaviours are also learnt by abusers from people in their community and other cultural influences while growing up either as victims or have seen in others. Children who witness or are the victims of violence may learn to believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve conflict between people. Boys who learn that women are not to be valued or respected and who see violence directed against women are more likely to abuse women when they grow up. Girls who witness domestic violence in their families of origin are more likely to be victimised by their own husbands.

Alcohol and drugs may contribute to violent behaviour. A drunk or high person will be less likely to control his or her violent impulses toward their partner, so keeping such drinking or drug use episodes to a minimum may be valuable for a person living in a domestic violence situation. According to Bennett and Bland, (2008), 61% of domestic violence offenders also use or abuse substances. DiFalco (2016), found a distinct relationship between substance abuse and domestic violence and those found to commit domestic violence are also either using or abusing substances. Often these individuals blame their battering on being under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

United States National Centre on Domestic and Sexual Violence (NCDSV) (2016) however debunked a common misunderstanding that those who batter are extremely intoxicated and out of control when they batter and domestic violence is always a choice. Domestic Violence usually occurs in a safe setting for the batterer, carefully selected for the protection it affords, at a time of their choosing, with a predictable victim. The fact that violence rarely

occurs outside a batterer's comfort zone suggests that those who batter are very much in control and not out of control. It was also argued that the relationship between substance abuse and battering is strongest for those men who already think domestic violence is appropriate in certain situations.

Illiteracy has also been implicated in the causes of domestic violence. According to Domki (2015), rural illiterate women are more vulnerable to domestic abuse than their counterparts in urban areas. The exact figure of victims is unknown but the number is sure to run into thousands. Despite this modern age, incidents of domestic violence are on an upward trajectory. Of all the factors, illiteracy is the root cause of women being helpless against domestic violence. According to Tina de Benedictis, Jaffe and Segal (2014), the key elements of domestic abuse are intimidation, humiliation and physical injury while the types include physical abuse (domestic violence), verbal or nonverbal abuse, (psychological abuse, mental abuse, emotional abuse), sexual abuse, stalking or cyber-stalking, economic abuse or financial abuse and spiritual abuse. The divisions between these types of domestic abuse are somewhat fluid, but there is a strong differentiation between the various forms of physical abuse and the various types of verbal or nonverbal abuse

Marriage is explained as the union of a man and woman, a combination of elements and a harmonious combination. A marriage is a work in progress, therefore it is never completed and raising the level of the quality of marriage can only bring greater joy and fulfilment both sides (Brown, 2012). Marital success is defined as marriage that does not end in separation or divorce. Most often, marital stability includes an element of marital permanence and aspects of marital satisfaction, either indirectly or directly indicated in its meaning (Porta, Brown, 2016). Studies linking domestic violence with marital stability are scarce. Therefore, this study examined the significance of lifestyle of abusers, belief system of male superiority, cultural acceptance of spousal beating, educational status of the victims and employment status of the abuser and victims on marital stability among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Lagos State.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

1. Lifestyle of the domestic abusers will not have any significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Local State
2. Belief system of male superiority among domestic abusers will not have any significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Local State
3. Cultural acceptance of spousal beating as a normal reaction will not have any significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Local State.
4. Educational status of domestic violence victims will not have any significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Local State
5. Employment status of domestic abusers and victims will not have any significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Local State

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design using 400 conveniently selected married women attending marriage ceremonies as invited guests in Alimosho Local Government

marriage registry. The choice of convenient sampling was due to the accessibility of the participants to the researcher. A standardised “Domestic Violence Questionnaire” developed by Powel (1992) was modified to accommodate the variables under study and response options in line with Likert four point rating scale with response options of Strongly Agreed (SA-4), Agreed (A-3), Disagreed (SD-2) and Strongly Disagreed (SD- 1) in ascending order for positive items and reverse order for negative items. The instrument was subjected to peer-review for validation while reliability was determined using single administration to 10 respondents from Ojo marriage registry that were not part of the study sample. The choice of this method was because of the uncertainty of getting the same participant for further administration. A $Kr21p = 0.88$ internal consistency obtained made the instrument to be highly reliable for the study. The researchers and five trained research assistants that included counselors in the marriage registry. The respondents were given the questionnaires directly and collected immediately after completion. Single women and those aged <15 or >46 years were excluded from the study. Demographic information was described with frequency counts and simple percentage while Chi-square (χ^2) inferential statistics was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance

Results and Discussion

Result indicated that 231 (63%) had been married for 5 to 9 years, 76(21%) were between 10=14 years in marriage, 42(12%) were between 15 t 19 years in marriage while the remaining 15 (4%) were 20 years and above in marriage. This indicated that all the respondents were not new in family life and relationship.

Those who reported to have been physically abused at one time or the other by their spouse were 287 (79%) while 77 (21%) reported not to have had such experience in the past. This number indicated that domestic violence was common among the selected sample.

Table 1: Types of domestic violence experienced by respondents

How were you abused					
	Frequency	% approx.		Frequency	% approx.
Pushing	11	4	Assault with weapon	8	3
Grabbing	12	4	Making afraid	13	5
Choking	19	7	Hitting and throwing	15	5
Kicking	32	11	Talking down	12	4
Slapping	61	20	Bruising	9	3
Beating	65	21	Combination of many	30	11

Table 1 revealed that women who suffered beating from their spouses were highest, followed by slapping, kicking, combination of many acts of physical violence in that order although those who experience assault with weapon such as knife were few. This showed that the types of domestic abuse being experienced by women in the area of study are not limited to physical assault alone but could also involve emotional abuse (making afraid) as well.

Table 2: Frequency of domestic violence

How often does your partner abuse you?	Frequency	% approx.
Very Often (Almost every day)	41	14
Often (At least once a week)	67	23
Not Often (At least once in a month)	73	25
Just few times (below five times in a year)	106	37
Total	364	100

Table 2 showed that 37% responded that they were not being assaulted more than five times in a year those who are being subjected to almost daily domestic violence are 14%. This implied the existence of domestic violence as majority of the respondents are being abused either daily, weekly or at least once in a month.

Table 3: χ^2 analysis of domestic violence variables and marital stability

Variables	Responses	Frq	%	df	Ls	Cal χ^2	p-Value	Rmk
Lifestyle of abusers	SA	285	19.6	9	0.05	510.185	0.001	SIG
	A	452	31.0					
	D	385	26.4					
	SD	334	22.9					
Belief system of male superiority	SA	459	21.5	9	0.05	242.323	0.001	SIG
	A	581	39.9					
	D	225	15.5					
	SD	191	13.1					
Cultural acceptance of spousal beating	SA	291	20.0	9	0.05	470.330	0.001	SIG
	A	402	27.6					
	D	438	30.1					
	SD	325	22.3					
Educational status of domestic violence victims	SA	146	10.0	9	0.05	33.660	0.001	SIG
	A	203	13.9					
	D	564	38/7					
	SD	543	37.3					
Employment status of abusers and victims	SA	324	22.3	9	0.05	33.660	0.001	SIG
	A	388	26.6					
	D	486	33.4					
	SD	258	17.7					

Table 3 is on the χ^2 analyses of domestic violence variables and marital stability as stated in the hypotheses for the study. The table revealed a calculated χ^2 value of 510.185, which is statistically significant at $p= 0.001$ at 9^0 of freedom for lifestyle of abusers; χ^2 value of 242.323 which is statistically significant at $p= 0.001 < 0.05$ for belief system of male superiority; χ^2 value of 470.330 which is statistically significant at $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ for cultural acceptance of spousal beating, χ^2 value of 33.63 which is statistically significant at $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ for educational status of domestic abuse victims and χ^2 value of 107.773 which is statistically significant at $p = 0.001 < 0.05$ for employment status of abusers and victim at

9⁰ of freedom. Hence, domestic abuse has significant impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Lagos State.

The analysis revealed a significant impact of lifestyle factors such as alcohol consumption, smoking and illicit drug use on marriage success among couples in the area of study. This finding is supported by the Alli, Alli, Khuwaja and Nanji (2014) who reported in a multivariate study that experiences of violence were independently associated with smoking habit of husbands (3.3; 1.9-5.8), and substance use (3.1; 1.7-5.7). The finding however negates a research conducted by Griffiths (2014) at the University at Buffalo School of Public Health and Health Professions and Research Institute on Addictions, in New York, where it was discovered that the more couples smoked marijuana, the less likely they were to engage in domestic violence a year afterwards. The study further discovered that couples who smoke the drug together are actually less likely to be violent towards one another.

The result of this study is also in conflict with evidences from earlier studies as reported by Leonard (2005) strongly indicating that drinking patterns marked by current, very heavy consumption or by other alcohol problems are associated with domestic violence. The study provides only suggestive evidence that intoxication, *per se*, has any association with domestic violence. A heavy drinker who has engaged in domestic violence may have done so only while sober or both while sober and while intoxicated. Laboratory studies of aggressive behaviour indicate that subjects who receive alcohol are more aggressive than subjects who receive no alcohol or subjects who receive placebo beverages. It could be inferred that lifestyle of abusers do have impact on marriage success. In essence drinking, smoking or use of drug by an abusive partner is not a guarantee that a marriage will fail. However, such lifestyle factors should be controlled so that it does not lead to failure of marriages.

The analysis also revealed a significant impact of belief system of male superiority on marriage success. The finding is in agreement with Alli, Alli, Khuwaja and Nainji (2014) of the acceptance of male superiority as a license for spousal beating where 268 (67%) participants accepted that a wife should always follow her husband's instructions irrespective of her will and 74 (18.5%) women agreed that violence against wife was justified if she did not follow her husband's instructions. Therefore, for a wife to remain in her marriage, the spouse need to periodically correct her by beating to serve as a constant reminder that the man is the head of the family. The result of the study also agrees with Christ (2013) that patriarchy is as a system of male dominance rooted in the ethos of war which legitimates violence against women and sanctified by religious symbols. Linos, Slopen, Subramanian, Berkman and Kawachi (2012) equally reported in a study that a number of individual-level variables were significantly associated with victimization, including a woman's accepting beliefs toward spousal violence (OR=1.11; 95% CI=1.09, 1.14). It could therefore be concluded that the belief that man is superior to his wife can make him beat her without questioning and that women are not expected to voice a different opinion than their partner to avoid being assaulted. Also, most women tend to always please their partner rather than themselves in order to avoid being hurt and most religion accepts that the man is superior in all matters in the family and as such should be respected by the wife

The analysis on cultural acceptance of spousal beating was found to be significant in marriage success among couples in the area of study. The finding is also relevant to the research on factors associated with women's attitude towards spousal abuse by Kusanthan, Sidney, Mwaba and Menon (2015) which shows that younger women were more likely to justify wife beating when compared to older women ($P < 0.05$). Women from urban areas (68%) with middle income background (71%) were more likely to agree that wife beating is

justified compared to rural women (56%) and women with a higher income background (51%). The finding also agrees with Omaje (2013) in another study where it was discovered that beating up a spouse accounted for 21.7% out of the 60 participants on critical issues in marriage failure in Benin-City, Nigeria. Spousal beating was therefore accepted as a cultural norm that should not necessitate break up in marriage. It could be inferred therefore that most women feel it is morally accepted to be beaten and so has to watch what she is doing in order to avoid making the husband angry or upset to the extent of hitting or slapping. Most family members will never support the woman if the partner beats her because it is accepted as a way of correction in the marriage. Therefore, cultural acceptance of spousal beating has contributed to the success of marriages among couples in Alimosho Local Government area.

Analysis of educational status of domestic violence victims also showed a significant impact on marriage success. Leornad (2005) indicted educational mismatch as a factor in domestic violence that can ultimately result in marriage failure. When there is a wide educational gap between spouses, their approaches to life will be at variance and problem may arise as the less educated person may be more superstitious, traditional or conservative and there may be difficulty in reasoning together. When these disparities exist in a wedlock it is often difficult to maintain peace and stability, so failure may likely result since the spouses are not at par in intellectual or rational thinking levels. It could be inferred that where there is disparity in educational status, it can positively or negatively impact on marriage success. Positive impact could be achieved if the woman's educational level matches that of the husband and negative if one of the spouses is lower in educational status more than the other

Employment status of domestic abusers and victims was also significant in marriage success. Lack of economic empowerment could be viewed as a social factor in domestic violence. According to Otufale (2013), a woman might remain in an abusive relationship purely for economic reasons. She may be unskilled or unemployed as in the case of fulltime housewife. Also, fear of hunger, fear of raising children by herself, her self esteem and confidence might have been crippled due to many years of battering. A study by Oyediran (2016) on the patterns and trends in attitudes towards wife-beating among women in Nigeria and their determinants show that during interviews in 2003, 2008, and 2013, 62.4%, 45.7%, and 37.1% of women, respectively, believed that wife-beating was justified for at least one of the reasons given including wealth index.

It could be concluded that a husband could turn to a wife beater if he could not get a satisfying job or if the spouse's job is financially stable and secured or if he feels jealous of the financial strength of the wife. However, good employment status that guarantees financial stability for the home is anecdotal to a woman remaining in marriage despite battering. Therefore, employment which could guarantee financial stability has impact on marriage success among couples in Alimosho Local Government area of Lagos State.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that lifestyle of abusers (which could include their drinking, smoking or drug abuse habits) does not necessarily indicate that their marriages will fail. Also the belief system of male superiority, cultural acceptance of spousal beating, educational status of abusers have been accepted as a way of life for most women, therefore, divorces most times were not predicated on these socio-cultural factors. Equally, as long as the husband is financially stable, most women will want to remain in their marriages despite the spouse being abusive. Therefore, abusive relationships could endanger the life and health of its victims.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, it was recommended that although these socio-cultural variables impact on marriage success, there is the need to

1. Adjust lifestyle habits that could jeopardise the coexistence of both husband and wife so that the man will not become an abuser based on his lifestyle.
2. Counselling that will correct the erroneous belief that a woman could be beaten as part of corrective effort by the man should be intensified in marriage counselling units before and after marriage. This will help dissuade the man from violent activities
3. More campaigns should be floated by government and Non-governmental organisations that are working on domestic violence so as to correct the cultural acceptance of spousal beating and to empower the woman in marital relationships
4. Education of the girl child should further be given pride of place in our social institutions so as to correct the disparity in educational status that could lead to domestic violence.
5. Men going into marriage should ensure that there is a means of sustaining the relationship financially so that it will not lead to jealousy that can degenerate into domestic violence.

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