

## **REPORTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON WOMEN. AN EXPLORATORY RESEARCH IN IGBOLAND OF NIGERIA**

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**Summary:** *Purpose:* Domestic violence happens in every culture and Igbo society is not an exception. It is a type of abuse where a partner chooses to maintain power and control over the other. Domestic violence comes in different forms and its types. These include: verbal, psychological, emotional, financial, physical, and sexual abuse, etc. Women in most cases are usually the victims of domestic violence in Igboland and part of the reason is that, Igboland is a patriarchal society.

*Methods:* A research was carried out in Igboland of Nigeria. We used *Domestic Violence Questionnaire* (DVQ) created by Pankajakshan Vijayanthi Indu and collaborators. A sample of 359 Igbo women voluntarily completed an anonymous questionnaire. The aim is to see how, culture, inequality, gender and power-system lead to domestic violence.

*Results:* The results reveal that large numbers of Igbo Catholic women experience both psychological and physical domestic violence. Particularly vulnerable are women in the rural areas and those separated or remarried.

*Conclusion:* The aim of this work is to promote the values of gender equality in Igboland.

**Key words:** Domestic violence, Inequality, Igbo women.

## Introduction

Igbo land is located in the south-east region of Nigeria. One peculiar thing about the Igbo society is that, it is a highly gender sensitive society. As a matter of fact, the nature of the Igbo society seems to be predominantly patriarchal. Therefore, there is persistent gender inequality and it is evident in the imbalance of power sharing between partners. In this context, women are oppressed and subordinated in most relationships they find themselves in. It is very unfortunate that the Igbo society is becoming more violent especially with regards to intimate partner relationships. This violence is often against women. So many Igbo women suffer domestic violence in silence and this has a negative effect on the individual's social, physical, and psychological wellbeing.

“Domestic violence has many names, including intimate partner violence. Additional terms that are or have been used include spouse abuse, domestic abuse, domestic assault, battering, marital discord, woman abuse, dysfunctional relationship, intimate fighting, mate beating, and so on” [McCue 2008, p. 2]. Many authors and researchers interchange domestic violence and intimate partner violence in their scholarly work [Nicolson 2019; Emezue 2020, p. 1-9; Fagbamigbe 2020, p. 122-134; Pereira 2020, p.1-11]. In this work, we shall examine domestic violence and attempt a definition for a better understanding of the problem, as there is however no consensus among intellectuals on the clear definition of domestic violence. “Domestic violence can be described as the power misused by one adult in a relationship to control another. It is the establishment of control and fear in a relationship through violence and other forms of abuse. This violence can take the form of physical assault, psychological abuse, social abuse, financial abuse or sexual assault. The frequency of the violence can be on and off, occasional or chronic” [Susmitha 2016, p. 603].

The purpose of this research work is to see how, culture, inequality, and gender power system lead to domestic violence [Ertan 2016, p. 47-76; Asay 2016, p. 349-360]. It is pertinent to mention here that, there are many theories that have tried to explain the existence of domestic violence [Sunitha 2016, p. 206-214; Nicolson 2019]. For instance, antisocial personality disorder has been used to explain the problem of domestic violence. Many perpetrators meet the DSM criteria for antisocial personality disorder (ASPD), which is characterised by “a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others”<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, domestic violence can occur because of the personality disorder on the part of one or both of the partners.

Furthermore, the theory of psychiatric disorders have been used to explain the issue of domestic violence. Psychiatric disorder in a partner can have a serious

<sup>1</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*, (5th ed), American Psychiatric Publishing, Washington 2013, p. 659.

impact on a couple's relationship. At times, the individual is out of control simply because of the imbalance in the brain. Again, the impact of marital or relationship stress on the individual's disorder, the effects of the disorder as a stressor on the partner's psychological well-being can result to a response that is out of the control of the individual [O'Hare 2021].

In addition, social learning theory of Albert Bandura has also been used to explain the concept of domestic violence. In 1978, Albert Bandura stated that "people are not born with preformed repertoires of aggressive behaviour; they must learn them. Most aggressive activities-whether duelling, military combat, or vengeful ridicule-entail intricate skills that require extensive learning. Virtually all learning resulting from direct experience can also occur on a vicarious basis by observing the behaviour of others and its consequences" [Bandura 1978, p. 12-29]. Therefore, domestic violence can be interpreted as the learned act by individuals in a given setting. When children learn this violence in the family and put it into practice when they become adults, we refer to it as intergenerational cycle of violence.

This article sustains that inequality in Igboland contributes to domestic violence. It is important to point out that a feminist theory has been used to explain the ugly nature of domestic violence. Our interest in this theory is that it "shares a fundamental theoretical assumption that society is a patriarchal social order. Patriarchy is a pervasive influence in the formation and maintenance of societal institutions. Structural factors in patriarchal society impede women's equal participation in public sphere. Women's inequality in the public sphere parallels that of the private sphere, and women experience male subordination of women in each sphere" [Weisberg 2019].

This article agrees with the feminist theory in the aspect that the study of the gendered nature of all relationships is generally at the heart of their premise. In fact, these gendered relationships are social creations which creates inequalities; women and men need to reject and change them. The inequality that this theory sustains can be seen in the division of labour between men and women. For example, in the workplace women are still hired disproportionately to occupy administrative positions (i.e., secretary, receptionist), while men retain a disproportionate share of the management ranks. By hindering women's access to institutional power, this system perpetuates gender inequality [Marsiglia, S. Kulis, S., S. Lechuga-Pena 2021, p. 137].

## **Method**

### ***Study Design***

This was an exploratory research design conducted to explore how a patriarchal society like Igboland influences domestic violence among Igbo Catholic women, who had experienced psychological and physical violence by their partners.

## ***Setting and sample***

This study used convenience sampling to select Igbo Catholic women who, all of which gave their consent to the survey. The sample was composed of 359 Igbo women. The age group in our questionnaire was distributed according to the following ages: 20-30 years (20,6%), 31-40 years (42,1%), 41-50 years (27,0%), over 51 (10,3%). All of them were Christians from the ethnic group of South-eastern Nigeria. The educational level is categorized into: Secondary (6,7%), Bachelors (61,0%), Masters (23,7%), PhD (8,6%). Employment status is as follows: Full-time (48,5%), Part-time (5,3%), Self-employed (26,7%), Student (5,3%), Unemployed (10,3%), other (3,9%). With regards to residence, while urban is (90,8%), rural is (9,2%). Level of income is in this fashion: Below average (27,9%), Average (62,7%), Above average (9,5%). Marital status appears in this manner: Married (85,5%), Divorced (,6%), Single (8,6%), Widowed (3,6%), Separated (1,1%), Remarried (,6%). Kind of relationship is as follows: Marriage (85,5%), Steady relationship (5,0%), Romantic relationship (2,8%), Long-distance relationship (6,7%).

## ***Measurements***

The presence of domestic violence was measured with the self-administered *Domestic Violence Questionnaire* (DVQ) created by Pankajakshan Vijayanthi Indu and collaborators [Indu 2011, pp. 218-223]. The DVQ consisted of 20 items and was designed with the intention of capturing the major dimensions of the concept of domestic violence: psychological (7 items) and physical, sexual violence (13 item). Each item was scored from 1 to 3 (1: never, 2: once or twice, 3: repeatedly). Cronbach Alpha of the psychological violence scale was  $\alpha=.90$  and of the physical violence was  $\alpha=.87$ .

In the last part of the questionnaire characteristics of the sample were explored. The socio-demographic variables included: gender, age group, tribe, religion, education level, employment status, residence, level of income, marital status, kind of relationship.

## ***Data collection***

Data was collected during the period from August to September 2020. The questionnaires were distributed in Igboland, it was done through computer assisted techniques. We decided to use online questionnaire to reach as many of our target population as possible. On the other hand, there is need to point out that there were a lot of other women that we could not reach either because they didn't have smart phones or because they weren't connected to the internet.

## Data analysis

The results were analyzed using Gnu PSPP statistical software (open source). The participants' general characteristics were analyzed with frequencies and percentages. Each scale reliability was assessed with Cronbach Alpha and the normal distribution of the main variables was confirmed before analysis. Differences in analyzed variables according to general characteristics were analyzed using analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests ( $p < 0.05$ ) and Crosstabs.

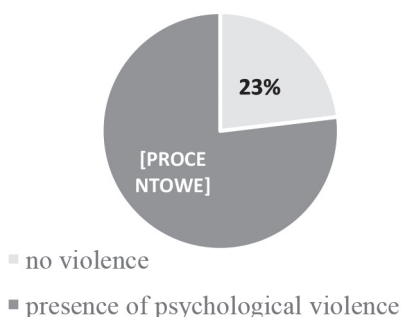
## Results

To check the severity of psychological and physical violence, the scores of the answers to the questions were divided into four levels: absence of violence, low, medium and high. Certainly, the distinction between levels of violence is a rather theoretical issue, because violence against women is simply violence. Nevertheless, it helps us to understand the gravity with which Igbo women suffer domestic violence. The data show that in general 76.9% of women suffer psychological violence (figure 1) and 49.0% suffer physical violence (figure 2). Table 1 shows the percentages of the 359 responses distributed over four levels.

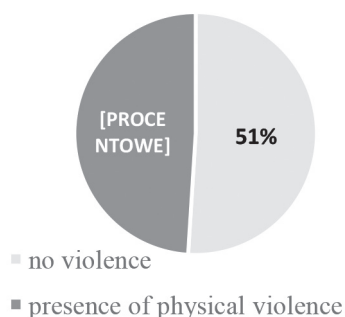
**Tabela 1. Crosstab. The levels of domestic violence among Igbo women (N=359)**

Levels of violence	Variables	
	Psychological violence	Physical violence
no violence	23,1%	51,0%
low	56,8%	35,1%
medium	15,6%	10,8%
high	4,5	3,1%
<i>Total</i>	<i>100,0%</i>	<i>100,0%</i>

**Figure 1. Presence of psychological violence among Igbo woman (N=359)**



**Figure 2. Presence of physical violence among Igbo woman (N=359)**



With the aforementioned analyses, we wanted to verify if there were statistically significant differences between the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. The univariate ANOVA (one way) analysis showed that there are no significant differences among age groups, levels of education, types of employment, levels of income and kind of relationship. The only two differences were found between the types of residence and marital status.

The results represented in Table 2 indicates that physical violence prevails in the rural environment over the urban.

**Table 2. Differences between types of residence. Means of ANOVA one-way (N=359)**

Variables	Type of residence		F-value	p-value (p<.05)
	Urban	Rural		
Psychological violence (Range 13-39)	18,1	19,0	,696	,405
Physical violence (Range 7-21)	8,7	10,0	5,367	<b>,021</b>

The results represented in Table 3 showed that two types of marital status are particularly vulnerable: separated and remarried woman. Their means are statistically higher than other types of marital status indicating higher presence of the domestical violence among women.

**Table 3. Differences between types of marital status. Means of ANOVA one-way (N=359)**

Variables	Marital status						F-value	p-value (p<.05)
	Married	Divorced	Single	Widowed	Separated	Remarried		
Psychological violence (Range 13-39)	17,6	22,5	18,6	18,6	30,0	30,5	5,695	<b>.000</b>
Physical violence (Range 7-21)	8,7	9,0	9,0	9,2	16,0	11,5	5,453	<b>.000</b>

## Conclusion

This study shows that a large number of Igbo Catholic women experience both psychological and physical domestic violence. Particularly vulnerable are women in the rural area and those separated or remarried.

The issue of domestic violence in Igboland as a societal problem needs a collective effort. The Igbo people need to work together to help strengthen and support families so as to prevent abuse on women from occurring [Ugwuanyi,

Formella 2018, p. 40-54]. There are different strategies that the Igbo communities can adopt for preventing violence in a relationship. They include the following: primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

The primary prevention involves programmes, activities and policies that the Igbo people can implement to stop domestic violence before it occurs. “Secondary prevention measures targets individuals in order to decrease the problem’s prevalence by reducing its severity and its early manifestations. The focus here is on identifying the victims of abusive behaviour and offering them assistance so that they can deal effectively with abusive situations. Tertiary prevention measures attempt to minimize the problem’s course once it has been identified and started to cause harm” [Ahmed 2009, p. 21].

The research that was carried out in Igboland of Nigeria gives both the psychologists, Igbo community and academic scholars a clue on how best to prevent and deal with this ugly societal challenge. There should be programmes for creating awareness on the importance of gender equality and healthy relationship. In our own context, raising awareness will help to give voice to the women who go through this hideous experience. On the other hand, some programmes can be organised for those who have been abused.

We are aware of the limitation regarding the sample size which could be even more representative in reference to the population. We reiterate however that the study was only exploratory. The results obtained indicate that the topic needs to be explored with a series of subsequent studies. It would also be interesting to explore perceptions among Igbo men in Nigeria. Men equally suffer domestic violence and often they choose to remain silent because they are afraid that the society will not believe them. Again, it will be interesting if we carry out a research on a particular age of women or men in Igboland of Nigeria. Comparing both researches would help us to know the gender that suffers domestic violence more in Igbo society.

Above all, we need all hands on deck to work to achieve gender equality and a healthy relationship especially in marriages. Our desire was and remains to raise awareness through this work, that domestic violence creates an unhealthy relationship among couples. Gender inequality is one of the root causes of domestic violence as it increases the risk of domestic violence.

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## **ZGLASZANIE PRZEMOCY DOMOWEJ WOBEC KOBIEŃ. BADANIA EKSPLORACYJNE W IGBOLANDII W NIGERII**

**Streszczenie:** *Cel:* Przemoc domowa zdarza się w każdej kulturze, a społeczeństwo Igbo nie jest tu wyjątkiem. Jest to rodzaj nadużycia, w którym jeden partner decyduje się zachować władzę i kontrolę nad drugim. Przemoc domowa ma różne formy i rodzaje. Należą do nich: nadużycia werbalne, psychologiczne, emocjonalne, finansowe, fizyczne i seksualne i inne.



Kobiety w większości przypadków są zazwyczaj ofiarami przemocy domowej w Igboland, a jednym z powodów jest to, że Igboland jest społeczeństwem patriarchalnym.

*Metoda:* Badania przeprowadzono w Igboland w Nigerii. Został wykorzystany Kwestionariusz Przemocy Domowej (DVQ) stworzony przez Pankajakshan Vijayanthi Indu i współpracowników. Anonimowy kwestionariusz dobrowolnie wypełniło 359 kobiet Igbo. Celem było sprawdzenie, jak kultura, nierówności, płeć i system władzy prowadzą do przemocy domowej.

*Wyniki:* Wyniki pokazują, że duża liczba kobiet katoliczek Igbo doświadcza zarówno psychicznej, jak i fizycznej przemocy domowej. Szczególnie narażone są kobiety na obszarach wiejskich oraz osoby w separacji lub ponownie zamężne.

*Wniosek:* Praca pokazuje, iż należy promować wartości równości płci w Igboland.

**Słowa kluczowe:** przemoc domowa, nierówność, kobiety Igbo.