



Perceived Predisposing Factors of Spousal Abuse among Couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State

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Abstract

The study examined the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. Four research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of fifteen thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five (15,775) couples in Owerri Municipal Council. A two-stage sampling technique was used in selecting three hundred (300) respondents as the sample size, out of which 295 copies of the questionnaire were properly filled and used for the study. The structured questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. Data generated were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation as well as inferential statistics of ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. The result revealed that majority of the couples attested to the research questions confirming to the predisposing factors of spousal abuse: communication-related factors ($\bar{x}=3.32$), relationship-related factors ($\bar{x}=3.20$) and communication-related factors ($\bar{x}=3.46$). Also, the result of the study revealed that the hypothesis postulated was significant. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended among others that couples should learn to imbibe virtues such as tolerance and self-control and resolve marital issues amicably instead of unnecessarily criticizing their partners. Government should employ preventive interventions such as increasing the educational status of women which can help break the cycle of spousal abuse.

Keywords: Spousal abuse, Predisposing factors, Couples

Introduction

Man is a social being who is always interacting with other human beings and such relationship could be short-lived, lasting, superficial or intimate. Life is all about relationship, intimacy, companionship and communion (Uloho, 2016). From observed experience, many intimate relationships culminate into marriage. According to Okorodudu (2010), marriage is a sacred and permanent divine contract that is enacted when two adults of the opposite sex decide on their own accord to exchange their formal consent to live a life of love, to care for one another and promote growth and development of their union. Marriages appear to be contracted for various reasons such as companionship, procreation and fulfilment of couples' expectations. The glitz associated with marriages in Nigeria (traditional and church) seems to suggest that married life is always blissful. Sadly enough, what transpires after such ceremonies, as Uloho (2016) observed, are disappointments, frustrations and dissatisfactions to the point of divorce. Some of such dissatisfactions may have cropped up due to spousal abuse which could be physical, verbal and economic.

Spousal abuse is a global problem of enormous proportion. Although men are sometimes victims, the vast majority are women. There were several cases of spousal abuse in different parts of Nigeria. Toluwani (2017) reported that between January and September



of the year under review, a total of 852 of such cases occurred in Lagos State alone. This depicts the prevalence of spousal abuse in some part of Nigeria. Udobang (2018) disclosed that a National Demographic and Health Survey revealed that about a third of all Nigerian women have experienced some forms of physical violence such as battering, marital rape and murder in the hands of their spouses.

Spousal abuse is the use of coercive power by husband or wife on the partner. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic and spiritual abuse. Spousal abuse is a pattern of abusive behaviours that are experienced by partners in intimate relationship such as marriage. This pattern of abusive behaviours is exhibited in various ways, including physical abuse or threats (such as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects); sexual abuse; emotional abuse; verbal controlling or domineering; intimidation; stalking; passive/covert abuse (e.g. neglect); and economic deprivation (Siemieniuk, Krentz, Gish, & Gill, 2020). While most people consider spousal abuse to be comprised of physical and sexual assaults, there is evidence that fewer people regard social, psychological and financial abuse as constituting spousal abuse (VicHealth, 2019). The World Health Organisation (2019) categorized spousal abuse as an intimate partner violence.

Identified risk factors for spousal abuse include history of abuse in childhood, low education, alcohol and drug use, stress, communication challenges between partners, unequal power in relationships, unemployment status of male partners, gender inequitable masculinities and harmful attitudes to gender relations that result in female disempowerment and marginalization (WHO, 2014). Spousal abuse can happen anywhere but certain factors seem to increase its likelihood. These include the age of the mother (the younger the mother, the more likely she will become a victim), poverty and unemployment, alcohol, substance abuse. Personality factors (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism). It is perceived that women who lived with heavy drinkers were five times more likely to be assaulted by their partners than those who do not live with drinkers. Spousal abuse which happen to be a silent killer, social ill and a public health problem particularly among women in most countries especially in Africa particularly in Nigeria is caused by several variables which ranges from husband factors, wife factors, family members, community/societal beliefs, tradition, social system/pattern and economic background (Ekpu, 2015; Ojedokun, & Bello, 2015).

Spousal abuse is one the most common forms of violence worldwide which can lead to wide array of health consequences among survivors (Coll, Ewerling, García, Hellwig & Barros, 2020). Most psychologists, sociologists and criminologists are deeply concerned about the increase in violence in public places, a person's possibility of being beaten is much greater at home than outside home. In view of the importance of spousal abuse among couples as one of the issues that profoundly affects their social positions. To this end, this research will aim to assess the predisposing factors to spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council.

Spousal abuse is widespread in Nigeria especially in Owerri Municipal Council and has shown no sign of becoming less. Whenever it occurs it inflicts pain, on its victims including the children in the home, it disorganizes the family and destroys peaceful coexistence. In view of the above reports and observations, the statement of problem to this study arouses and stated as thus: What are the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council?



Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine the perceived predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council.

Specifically the objectives of the study sought to:

- 1) Determine perceived communication-related factor as a predisposing factor of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State.
- 2) Determine perceived relationship-related factor as a predisposing factor of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State
- 3) Determine perceived socio-economic related factor as a predisposing factor of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State.
- 4) Determine perceived predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study.

- 1) What are perceived communication-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State?
- 2) What are perceived relationship-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State?
- 3) What are perceived socioeconomic-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State?
- 4) What are perceived predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was postulated for the study:

- 1) There is no significance difference in the perceived predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education

Methods

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The descriptive survey research design is that survey which collects data from subject, analyze the data and describe the situation in its original form without altering the result obtained (Elendu, 2010). A descriptive survey basically deals with the use of primary data and its analysis for the purpose of description of a given and existing phenomenon. This design was successfully employed by Anolue and Uzoma (2017) in a related study when they surveyed prevalence, contributing factors and spectrum of intimate violence among married couples in Southeast Nigeria. This justified the use of similar design for a study of similar nature. The population of the study consisted of all the couples in Owerri Municipal. The population of the couples was a projected population of fifteen thousand, seven hundred and seventy-five (15,775) couples in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State (Owerri Municipal Council Registrar for Marriage (2020). A sample size of 300 married couples was drawn for the study. Two stage sampling technique was used to determine the sample size. Stage one involved the use of random sampling technique of balloting without replacement to select the 3 towns out of the existing 5 towns from the council. Stage two involved the use of random sampling technique without replacement to select (50 males and 50 females) from the three (3) selected towns to arrive at 300 as the sample size. A self-developed and structured questionnaire titled "Predisposing Factors of Spousal Abuse among Couples Questionnaire" (PFSACQ) was used as instrument



for data collection. Three experts from the Department of Health Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri validated the instrument. The experts' suggestions were used in producing the final draft of the questionnaire. Test re-test method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. Twenty copies of the questionnaire PFSACQ were administered to couples in Owerri North LGA because they share the same characteristics with Owerri Municipal Council. After two weeks, the same but fresh copies of the questionnaire were re-administered to the same couples. The two results were correlated using Spearman Brown Order Correlation Coefficient formula. A reliable index of .75 was obtained and adjudged reliable for the study. The questionnaire was divided into four sections namely; Sections A, B, C and D. Section A sought information on personal information. Section B elicited information on communication-related causes of spousal abuse, section C contained items on relationship-related factors while section D contained items on socio-economic-related causes of spousal abuse among married couples. The respondents responded to the options provided. The options were *Strongly Agreed (SA)*, *Agreed (A)*, *Disagreed (D)* and *Strongly Disagreed (SD)* which is a modified Likert Scale, with scoring of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation (SD), as well as inferential statistics of ANOVA. Mean scores above 2.5 was regarded accepted, below 2.5 was regarded as rejected.

Results

Table 1: Response of communication-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples (n=295)

S/N	Communication-related factors predisposing spousal abuse	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Ineffective communication between partners	3.13	0.832	Positive
2	Poor communication skills	3.02	0.765	Positive
3	Incompatibility of the couples in communication	3.58	0.893	Positive
4	Absence of communication between partners	3.56	0.868	Positive
	Grand Mean	3.32	0.840	Positive

Table 1 shows the mean responses on the communication-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. The result revealed that couples in Owerri Municipal Council agreed that ineffective communication between partners, poor communication skills, incompatibility of the couples in communication and absence of communication between partners are communication-related factors that predispose couples to spousal abuse. This is because the grand mean value of 3.32 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation showed that the respondents are homogenous in their responses.

Table 2: Response on relationship-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples (n=295)

S/N	Relationship-related factors predisposing spousal abuse	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Sex refusal from the female partner	3.20	0.827	Positive
2	Frequent disagreement	3.31	0.838	Positive
3	Male dominant relationship	2.81	0.726	Positive
4	Female dominant relationship	3.41	0.842	Positive
5	Unhealthy possessiveness and/or jealousy	3.29	0.818	Positive
	Grand Mean	3.20	0.810	Positive



Table 2 shows the mean responses on the relationship-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. The result revealed that couples in Owerri Municipal Council agreed that sex refusal from the female partner, frequent disagreement, male dominant relationship, female dominant relationship and unhealthy possessiveness and/or jealousy are relationship-related factors that predispose couples to spousal abuse. This is because the grand mean value of 3.20 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation showed that the respondents are homogenous in their responses.

Table 3: Response on socioeconomic-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples (n=295)

S/N	Socioeconomic-related factors predisposing spousal abuse	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Young age of the couples	3.45	0.835	Positive
2	Poverty	3.52	0.852	Positive
3	Violent behavior in childhood	3.45	0.842	Positive
4	Alcoholism	3.48	0.819	Positive
5	Lack of time for discussions	3.42	0.858	Positive
	Grand Mean	3.46	0.8412	Positive

Table 3 shows the mean responses on the socioeconomic-related factors predisposing spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State. The result revealed that couples in Owerri Municipal Council agreed that young age of the couples, poverty, violent behavior in childhood, alcoholism and lack of time for discussions are socioeconomic-related factors that predispose couples to spousal abuse. This is because the grand mean value of 3.46 is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation showed that the respondents are homogenous in their responses.

Table 4: Responses on the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples based on level of education (n = 295)

Level of education	N	Mean	SD	Remarks
Non-formal education	nil	0.0	0.0	nil
Primary education	86	2.53	0.607	Positive
Secondary education	132	2.65	0.688	Positive
Tertiary education	77	2.93	0.731	Positive

Table 4 shows the mean responses on the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education. The results indicate that couples in Owerri Municipal Council, agreed on the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples irrespective of their level of education. This is because their grand mean values respectively fall within the level of agreement and their standard deviation showed homogeneity in their responses.



Table 5: ANOVA analysis on the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education (n=295)

Level of education	N	Mean	SD	F	df	Sig.	Decision
Non-formal education	nil	0.0	0.0	22.385	3	0.041	Significant
Primary education	86	2.53	0.607				
Secondary education	132	2.65	0.688				
Tertiary education	77	2.93	0.731				

From the ANOVA analysis in Table 5, the statement of hypothesis 1 is rejected; implying that there is a significant difference in the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education. This is because, the p-value (Sig. = 0.041) is less than 0.05 alpha level.

Discussion

The finding in table 1 revealed that the respondents agreed to the communication-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The respondents agreed that ineffective communication between partners, poor communication skills, incompatibility of the couples in communication and absence of communication between partners as communication-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The findings agreed with Choi and Hyun (2016) who found that dysfunctional communication may act as a risk factor of spousal abuse. It implies that improvement in communication skills can significantly reduce conflict and discrepancies and it may encourage mutual respect and equality in marriage, which in turn will reduce the possibility of spousal abuse. This argument was further supported by (Walker, Bowen, Brown, & Sleath, 2018) who suggested that better communication techniques are one of the strategies for managing the antecedents and triggers associated with spousal abuse.

The finding in table 4 revealed that the respondents agreed to the relationship-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The respondents agreed that sex refusal from the female partner, frequent disagreement, male dominant relationship, female dominant relationship and unhealthy possessiveness and/or jealousy as relationship-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The findings are expected and not surprising. This is in agreement with Aldarondo and Sugarman (2016), who revealed that low levels of relationship increased the risk of spousal abuse. Couples who had more frequent disagreements or exhibited a more hostile disagreement showed higher levels of spousal abuse. The results in in congruent with Coleman and Strauss (2013) submitted that male-dominant and female-dominant couples were prone to spousal abuse among couples. Male-dominant couples were most likely to have experienced a high degree of conflict and vice-versa.

The finding in table 5 revealed that the respondents agreed to the socioeconomic-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The respondents agreed that young age of the couples, poverty, violent behaviour in childhood, alcoholism and lack of time for discussions as socioeconomic-related factors that predispose spousal abuse among couples. The findings are expected and not surprising. This is in agreement with Schuler, et al (2016) who revealed socioeconomic factor influencing spousal abuse among couples. Poverty brings unnecessary annoyance particularly among men. When a man has no money any little



circumstances can easily trigger his annoyance particularly demand from the wife. When such annoyance is not controlled, abuse or violence can set in.

Findings in Table 6 revealed that the respondents with different levels of education responded positively to the predisposing factors of spousal abuse. Also, the respondents differ in their attestation to the predisposing factors of spousal abuse based on their levels of education. However, table 7 showed that there is significant difference in the predisposing factors of spousal abuse based on their levels of education. This is expected and not surprising as it agrees with Onogbogi et al. (2015) who showed that there are differences in the responses to predisposing factors of spousal abuse men based on level of education. This could be attributed to effect of education on information one acquires. The study revealed that the odd of women experiencing spousal abuse was 3 times higher among those with no formal education or primary education than among those with secondary or tertiary education.

Conclusions

The respondents agreed to the communication-related, relationship-related and socioeconomic-related factors that predispose couples to spousal abuse. From the responses, it confirms that there is significant difference in the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples in Owerri Municipal Council, Imo State based on level of education.

Implications of the Study

Findings of the present study affirmed the predisposing factors of spousal abuse among couples. There is the need to create awareness to underscore the fact that spousal abuse in the home serves as a breeding ground for violence in the larger society, hence community's response has become imperative to reduce it to the barest minimum. Many of the present methods for intervening in domestic disturbances where men are the primary aggressor are dysfunctional, that is refusal to recognize female to male violence is evident in the injustices and practices of the current legal system and failure to protect men and women from violence and abuse by their spouses.

However, prevention is better than cure, it is important to identify and control the factors influencing spousal abuse. Routine screening of women for spousal abuse who are always in the receiving end in early identification of victims and perpetrators and assessment of the magnitude of the problem in this environment. Hence, the need to train Community Health Care Workers (CHCW) in various rural communities in Nigeria on gender based issues and on routine counseling in spousal abuse is therefore of utmost importance. Thus, government, educators, and social workers can play a significant role in developing collaborative, multidimensional, and culturally sensitive preventive health programs in educating the public against spousal abuse.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researchers hereby recommend the following:

- 1) Spouses should develop mutual respect for themselves and thus refrain from taking their partners' money without permission.
- 2) Couples should have a thorough understanding of their partners so as to avoid issues that may trigger off anger and thereby prevent wanton destruction of properties jointly owned.
- 3) Couples should learn to imbibe virtues such as tolerance and self control and resolve marital issues amicably instead of unnecessarily criticising their partners.
- 4) Married persons (especially male spouse) should desist from the practice of ridiculing or snobbing their wives but regard them as people who deserve some form of respect.



- 5) Government should employ preventive interventions such as increasing the educational status of women can help break the cycle of spousal abuse.
- 6) State government should establish counselling centres in various communities in the state.
- 7) Professional counsellors (especially marriage counsellors) should be employed to man such centres so as to handle marital issues that could lead to spousal abuse.

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