

PATTERNS OF SPOUSAL HOMICIDE IN NIGERIA: PREVALENCE, PROPHYLAXES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY

Chukwuemeka A. F. Okoye

Chidozie Edwin Nwafor

Collins Umeoji

Paschal Chukwuma Ugwu

&

Amaka Rachael Okafor

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State Nigeria.

Corresponding author:

Chukwuemeka A. F. Okoye

Caf.okoye@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper was an in-depth analysis of patterns, causes and solutions of spousal homicide in contemporary Nigeria society. In recent times, the marital milieu has witnessed spates of killings on both the sides of men and women, who were once happily married as husband and wife. This analysis was approached through a thorough review of trends of spousal murder as reported in Nigerian Newspapers from 2016 to 2020. The analysis found that several factors such as jealousy, self-defense, suspicion of infidelity, spousal abuse, poor anger management, fear; among other factors were the common precipitating factors in spousal homicide. The analysis further showed that both genders were culpable in this phenomenon but husbands were more likely to kill a spouse more than their wives. Also, most of these killings were perpetrated in the residential homes of the couples. The analysis also found that spousal homicide transcends age, educational qualification and financial status. In order to deepen the study, qualitative research method was used to unravel the phenomenon. Sixty married participants (30 men and 30 women) whose ages range from 35-50 years with mean age of 40.1 and standard deviation of 1.4 were selected and interviewed in Awka. Thematic and descriptive statistics were adopted for data analyses. 11 themes of causes and 7 themes of solutions of spousal homicide emerged. Based on the foregoing, approaches on how to ameliorate homicide and implications of this trend in spousal homicide on psychotherapy practice in Nigeria were discussed

Keywords: Spousal Homicide, Causes, Patterns, Solutions, Psychotherapy, Practice, Implication.

Introduction

The marriage institution is experiencing a challenging period in contemporary Nigeria; going by the incessant cases and reports of spousal homicide. According to Onyebula (2020) in the last few years, a number of spouses have been sent to their early graves through the hands of the one that once cuddled and professed love to them. In recent times, observation has shown that spousal homicide has become a regular feature in Nigeria newspapers and social media (Enahoro, 2017). Majority of these murders involve couples or spouses who were legally and traditionally united in marriage as husband and wife.

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 live a life of love, to care for one another and promote growth and development of their union. Indeed, it is supposed to be a union mutually entered into by the couples for their own benefits and interests. Consequently, Onoyase (2018) further averred that marriage appears to be contracted for various reasons such as companionship, procreation, and fulfillment of couples' expectations.

Essentially, marriage life is expected to be a blissful experience. However and unfortunately as Uloho (2016) observed this expected bliss gave way to disappointments, frustrations, and disaffections; to the point of spousal abuse. In some cases, these abuses usually lead to spousal homicide or murder, as was the case with most marriages in Nigeria (See Aborishade & Shontan, 2017; Enahoro, 2017; Onyebula, 2020). Thus, the aim of this paper was to undertake in-depth analysis of patterns and causes of spousal violence in contemporary Nigeria society and its implications for psychotherapy practice.

Review of Related Literature

Several studies have been done on trends, patterns and causes of spousal homicide across the globe; with very few carried out in Nigeria.

Mensah (2008) in a study provided literature on lethal spousal violence in non-western societies through the analysis of seventy two spousal killings that were reported in newspapers during 1990- 2005. The findings showed that husbands were five times more likely to kill a spouse, as were wives, and that sexual jealousy and suspicions of infidelity were most common causative factors in uxoricides. Maricides were fueled by anger towards a husband who planned to take additional wife or by an instrumental need to replace a husband with a new lover. Analysis of data further revealed a predominance of poor and working class victims and assailants. Also, the crimes always occur in the

common dwelling place of the couples and jointly owned farm, or in cases involving separation, in the wives natal home or farm. The study also found that a plethora of methods were used in carrying out these murders including shooting with gun, hacking with a cutlass, or machete, hitting with a blunt object, and beating with personal weapons.

Again, Robert and Marilyn (2014) did a review on the problems of domestic violence in Australia and in particular, focused on battered women who killed their abusive spouses. The study described the experience of domestic violence in terms of "the cycle of violence" (Walker, 1979) which appeared to operate in abusive relationships. Four precipitating circumstances were discussed to further describe the underlying psychological processes. Argument was further advanced for the admissibility of expert witness testimony to trials of battered women who kill as a means of providing insights and explanations not otherwise likely to be available in such cases.

Also, Wilson and Daly (1994) examined the pattern of spousal homicide in Canada between 1974 and 1992. Among the findings highlighted in the paper were that spousal homicide rates have remained stable with an average of 17 victims per million couples per annum over the period under review. Also, there was a substantial variation in provincial spousal homicide rates; about 3.2 women have been killed by their husbands for each man killed by his wife. Again, a married woman was 9 times as likely to be killed by her spouse as by a stranger over the period.

Furthermore, Belgrade and Rying (2004) in their study of characteristics of spousal homicide perpetrators in Sweden found that 20,000 cases of assault against women were reported to the police every year. All data on the perpetrators of spousal homicide in Sweden between 1990 -1999 were investigated ($n = 164$). A control group of all other perpetrators of homicide in Sweden during the same period, that is, cases of homicide not committed in the context of spouse violence ($n = 690$) were used. All verdicts as well as all materials in the police investigations, including interviews with all of the police investigators were analyzed. Copies of police examinations of the suspects and forensic reports from autopsies were also examined. Data on all registered criminality were collected from the National police register and in cases where the perpetrators had been subjected to forensic psychiatric examinations. Those reports were obtained from Swedish National Board of Forensic Medicine. In addition, the Psychopathy Checklist: Screening Version (PCL: SV) score were rated from the forensic psychiatric examination. They found that there was a four times higher suicide rate among the spousal homicide perpetrators (24%, $n = 40$) compared with the perpetrator in the control group (6%, $n = 39$) chi square = 55, 42 df = 1. P < 0.001). Consequently, the researchers opined that suicide ideation must be considered as an important risk-factor for spousal homicide. In 79% of the cases, the spousal homicide perpetrators were subjected to forensic psychiatric examinations. All except 5% were diagnosed with at least one psychiatric diagnosis, and 34% were sentenced to forensic psychiatric treatment. If it is assumed that the psychiatric morbidity

was high in the 24% of the perpetrators who committed suicide, then 80% of all perpetrated of spousal homicide during the study period can be characterized as mentally disordered. They also found that psychopathic perpetrators who generally are over-represented in most violent criminality were comparatively uncommon. Only 7 (4%) in the study group met the diagnostic criteria for psychopathy as measured with the PCL: 5V. The group of spouse killers studied here fits the dysphoric/borderline group of spouse assaulters. This is the group that may benefit from treatment.

Aldridge and Brown (2003) carried out a review to identify risk factors that determine whether an abusive relationship will end in eventual death. An extensive search revealed 22 empirical research studies on risk factors for spousal homicide. The circumstances of spousal homicide were described and salient risk factors were highlighted. In the United Kingdom, 37% of all women were murdered by their current or former intimate partners compared to 6% of men. The most common cause of an intimate partner's death in England and Wales was being attacked with a sharp implement or being strangled. By contrast, the most common cause in the United States for spousal homicide was being shot. Nine major risk factors were found that may help predict the probability of a partner homicide and prevent future victims.

Aborisade and Shontan (2017) examined some psychosocial factors precipitating spousal homicide in Nigeria. Utilizing a qualitative analysis of official demographic and offence history data, and in-depth interviews of 18 purposively selected offenders of spousal homicide in celled housing units in Kirikiri maximum, Kirikiri female and Ikoye Prisons revealed that childhood experience of violence and abuse is strongly connected with perception and perpetrators of violence in marital life. The events leading to the death of spouses suggested that the killings were accidental rather than premeditated. However, the uses of dangerous weapons were prevalent. Their study also presented a clear empirical evidence to suggest that qualitatively, men who kill their spouses do not differ greatly from those who use nonlethal violence

Patterns of Spousal homicide in Nigeria

In Nigeria, evidence abound that in the first and second quarters of 2017 alone, there had been 13 cases of spousal homicide. Also, Shuja (2014) as cited by Aborisade and Shontan (2017) reported that an average of 300 – 350 women was killed by their husbands or boyfriends in Nigeria annually. From the available evidence as reported by Enahoro, (2017); Onyegbula, (2020) and in other media outlets, there is no gainsaying that there has been an astronomical increase in the incidences of spousal homicide in Nigeria. However, not minding this gigantuan statistics, the killing of spouse has not received adequate attention in the academic space. Indeed, although it is a truism that intimate partner violence, also referred to as domestic violence, has been part of humanity right from

primordial times, but the rate has escalated tremendously in recent times, particularly in Nigeria.

Consequently, an insight into this ugly and unwholesome phenomenon will be pertinent. For instant, a junior pastor in the Redeemed Christian church of God, Mr Akolade Arowolo murdered his wife Titilayo Omozoje in cold blood at their Isolo residence in Lagos, Nigeria. His reason for stabbing his wife multiple times was simply infidelity. Also, another cleric, Sunday Alfa, killed his wife for the flimsy reason that she turned down his sex advances because she recently gave birth through a caesarian section.

Again, Maureen Adejo, a banker was tortured and killed by her husband, not minding that their five year old son was present. The boy later reported that his mother has experienced series of abuse from his father prior to the incident. Furthermore, Mr. Mathias Eze, a former commissioner in the Enugu State Independent Electoral Commission (ENSIEC) shot and killed his wife in the presence of their daughter simply because she failed to make food for him.

Another man, Peter Odion, was said to have killed his wife for eating the food he cooked; after refusing to cook for him because she complained of headache and tiredness. Also, there was one Christian Agba who killed his wife by strangling for refusing to make love to him. Moreover, a laundry man, Henry Nnamdi murdered his wife after seeing her with a new smart-phone which he suspected was given to her by another man. In another incident, Janet Odeghgbe was set ablaze by her husband because she collected a glass of wine from another man at a party. Also, in Lagos, Lekan Sonde killed his wife Ronke due to suspicion of infidelity at their Egbada home. Furthermore, a young musical artist, Zainab Nielson and her three-year-old daughter were murdered by her husband and father respectively Mr. Peter Nielson, a Danish, in their Banana Island home in Lagos. In the same vein, Naomi Chidiebere was set ablaze by her husband when she quarreled with him for always coming home drunk. On the night in question, he was so drunk that it was only when he sobered up in the morning and tried to wake her from sleep that he realized what he has done.

In Benue State, a 42 year old fisherman, Ejiro Patrick was arrested by the Benue Police command for beating his wife to death during a heated argument at their residence in Tyomu community of Makurdi for the mere reason that the woman failed to account for five thousand naira from the family items she sold. In Bauchi State, a jealous man simply identified as Solomon stabbed his partner, Patience Zakari to death for picking a phone call from another man.

Also, another man, Victor Orji, said to be an internet fraudster allegedly set her partner Mariam Alabi ablaze in the Ojo area of Lagos State for infidelity. The woman later died at Igando General Hospital. Again, in January 19th, 2020, a 40 year old man, Olanrewaju

Bamidele of Bisodun village, Ofada in Obafemi-Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State allegedly beat and stabbed his wife, Adenike to death with a screwdriver following a misunderstanding between the couples.

Incidentally, the phenomenon of spouse homicide is not limited to the men alone. Women have also joined the fray. Social commentators are of the view that women are becoming perpetrators of spousal homicide in retaliation for a history of abuse; and for other sundry reasons.

With respect to women who murdered their husbands, Maryann Sanda, a legal practitioner stabbed her husband Haliru Bello to death in their Abuja residence after seeing a text message in his phone suggesting that he was engaging in extra-marital affairs. Another woman, Udeme Odibi, a lawyer murdered her husband Otiki Odibi in their Lagos home after observing that he did not will all his properties to her in his testament. Also, in 2017, another lawyer, Yewande Oyediran was sentenced to seven years imprisonment in Ibadan judicial jurisdiction, after she was found guilty of stabbing her husband, Lowo to death.

Lawrence Idoko was also stabbed to death by his wife Folashade Idoko, at their home in Ayetero, Ogun state, Nigeria for mere suspicion of infidelity. There was also a reported case of a child bride, 14 year-old Aisha Isah, who killed her 40-year-old husband Isiaka Usman by hitting him with a pestle over an argument. She accused the husband of not providing money for food after starving her for two days.

Also, a 23-year-old woman, Stella Peters, stabbed her husband Bala Haruna to death at their residence in Tejuosho Avenue, Surulere, Lagos over his refusal to sponsor their daughter's birthday party. Again, a teacher, Abimbola Olamide, stabbed her husband Dare Abimbola to death at their Ikorodu residence in Lagos, alleging self-defence as her reason for doing that. In Port-Harcourt, a man simply identified as Daniel was reportedly stabbed to death by his wife while he was asleep simply because the wife suspected that he was cheating on her.

From the analysis, it shows that both genders are culpable in spousal homicide, unlike previously when men are more likely to kill their spouse. Also, this phenomenon of spousal homicide seems to be more common among the middle and high class strata of the society. The analyses also showed that majority of the killings were perpetrated through stabbing with a knife. Further observation indicated that the patterns of the murders ranged from shooting with a gun, which is uncommon maybe due to restrictions placed on gun ownership in Nigeria; stabbing with a knife, strangling to death, setting on fire, hitting with an object, battering, torturing and beating to death, and through other unreported means. The analyses also revealed that all of these killings took place in the residential buildings of the victims.

Present Study

The researchers in an effort to unravel the current trend in causes and solutions to spousal homicide in Nigeria employed qualitative research method. In the present study, oral interview were used to elicit responses respondents on causes and solutions of spousal homicide in Nigeria.

Participants

Sixty married adults participated in the study. They were selected through purposive sampling technique. They comprised of men (30, 50%) and women (30, 50%). Their ages range from 35 – 50 years with mean age (40.1) years and standard deviation (1.4). Two inclusion criteria in the study were: every participant must be married for at least five year ago; participants must be living together with the spouse. Participants were selected from Anambra state government Secretariat complex.

Procedure

This study was approved by Ethical Review Board of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State Nigeria. Participants were given consent form to fill before interview section commenced. They were adequately informed of the purposes of the interview and need to answer correctly what they believed was right. They were equally informed that they were free to decline participation. Participants were interviewed individually and it lasted about 5 minutes for each participants. The interview was conducted in their various offices during break time 12 noon to 1pm. Before the interview commenced, researchers explained the meaning of spousal homicide to interviewees.

Measure

Two questions were formulated to elicit responses from participants. Participants were required to mention causes and solutions of spousal homicide in Nigeria. The questions are:

- (1) What do you think are the causes of spousal homicide in Nigeria?
- (2) What do you think are the solutions of spousal homicide in Nigeria?

Results

Thematic and descriptive analyses were adopted. After the interview, eleven (11) themes for question 1 emerged and seven (7) themes emerged for question 2. Themes that 85% of participants mentioned were selected.

In question 1, themes of causes of spousal homicide in Nigeria listed as follow: infidelity, emotional abuse, anger issue, lack of trust, jealousy, frustration, financial crises, greed, violence, unpreparedness to face marital challenges, forced marriage. See tables one and two for the themes of causes of spousal homicide and gender differences in percentages.

S/NO	Causes Of Spousal Homicide In Women responses	in %	
1	Infidelity	88%	
2	emotional abuse	94%	
3	anger issue	92%	
4	lack of trust	90%	Table 1, Showing the Percentages % of Responses by Men

S/NO	Causes Of Spousal Homicide In Men responses	in %
1	Infidelity	95%
2	emotional abuse	92%
3	anger issue	89%
4	lack of trust	96%
5	Jealousy	85%
6	Frustration	92%
7	financial crises	88%
8	Greed	85%
9	Violence	85%
10	unpreparedness to face marital challenges	85%
11	Forced marriage	85%

Table 2, showing the percentage of responses by Women

5	Jealousy	92%
6	Frustration	90%
7	financial crises	85%
8	Greed	85%
9	Violence	86%
10	unpreparedness to face marital challenges	85%
11	Forced marriage	94%

Also, in question 2, themes of solution to spousal homicide in Nigeria are as follows: avoid checking partner's phone and social media chats, both partners work and make financial contribution for family upkeep, learn to respect each other, choose marriage partner personally, dating for at least 3 years before marriage, visit marriage counselor twice yearly, and marriage must be contracted by mature individuals. See tables three and four the solutions and percentages by gender differences.

Table 3, showing men responses of solution to spousal homicide in Nigeria

S/NO	Solutions to Spousal Homicide in Nigeria	Responses of %
1	Avoid checking partners' phone number and social media chats	96%
2	Both partners work and make financial contribution for family upkeep	94%
3	Learn to respect each other	94%
4	Choose marriage partner personally	90%
5	Dating for at least 3 years before marriage	85%
6	Visit marriage counselor twice yearly	85%
7	Marriage must be contracted by mature individuals.	88%

Table 4, showing women responses of solution of Spousal Homicide in Nigeria

S/NO	Solutions to Spousal Homicide in Nigeria	Responses of %
1	Avoid checking partners' phone number and social media chats	95%
2	Both partners work and make financial contribution for family upkeep	88%
3	Learn to respect each other	92%
4	Choose marriage partner personally	90%
5	Dating for at least 3 years before marriage	92%
6	Visit marriage counselor twice yearly	90%
7	Marriage must be contracted by mature individuals.	88%

From the analysis, it was observed that the causes and solutions of spousal homicide in Nigeria are multifaceted. It is pertinent to note that factors mentioned by the interviewees in the present study were in tandem with the ones discussed in the literature.

Discussion

One of the major factors was spousal jealousy. Majority of the spouses who gave reason for killing their partners were suffering from jealous rage or what marriage counselors referred to as morbid jealousy. The analysis also implicated infidelity as a factor in spousal murder. Observation showed that most of the perpetrators cited infidelity as the reason for the killing their partner. Violence was also isolated as a precipitating factor. Some of the women who killed their husband have endured a history of abuse from their husband. As a result of this over-stay in violent marriages, they resorted to murder to regain their freedom. Greed was also observed as a causative factor for spousal murder. The case of the woman who killed her husband for not willing all his properties to her is a case in point. It was pure greed that fueled the crime. Also, in some of the incidences, there is an element of madness, hopelessness, frustration and emotional trauma. Unresolved frustration among couple's could cause hopelessness and emotional trauma, which usually lead to aggressive behavior and irrational conducts.

It could also be argued that low self-esteem and undiagnosed schizophrenia are some of the factors that aid to escalate the situation. Anger was also identified as a risk-factor for spousal murder. Some of the perpetrators killed their spouse in a spate of uncontrolled anger. Their anger blinded their sense of reasoning and rationality to the extent of not understanding the legal implications of their actions. Spousal homicide could also be viewed as a psychological issue that comes about as a result of spouse battering and in the effort to defend themselves, any of the spouses might lose their life. Also, societal bias, stigma and religious doctrines are responsible for spousal murder. In Nigeria society, marriage is seen as for better, for worse issue. The society usually do not entertain divorce after consummation of marriage vows; those absconds from their matrimonial home are usually stigmatized in our society. Also, almost all the religious doctrines discourage divorce and will always encourage couples to remain in their marriage; notwithstanding what the person is going through. This line of thought and position is a recipe for spousal homicide. Unpreparedness for the reality of married life is another factor. The perception by the spouses that marriage is filled with blissful experience without the realization that it could also be stressful and stormy is a factor. Thus, many of the couples are not prepared for the uncertainties and challenges that are embedded in married life and this is a potent factor for spousal homicide.

From responses of respondent to solutions of spousal homicide in Nigeria, the issue of partners staying away from spying each other will tremendously reduce or perhaps stop it entirely. Checking call records and social media chats in another partner's phone increases suspicion and may arouse anger. Equally, respondents mentioned financial solution to the quagmire. They canvassed for both parties working and contribute willingly for family upkeep as one of the key solutions to family conflict and spousal homicide. Furthermore, respect is reciprocal. Thus, was listed as one of the solution to family conflict and spousal homicide. When partners respect each other, they are bound to live in peace. When people choose their marriage partners themselves, they will be obliged to adjust and manage the outcome. Personal selection of a partner was noted as a significant factor that enhances self-esteem and life satisfaction (Uloho, 2016).

Establishing intimate relationship before marriage between intending marriage partners creates room for familiarization and understanding the psychological and personality make-up of each other is a critical factor in marriage outcome. 92% of women and 85% of men participants agreed that dating for at least 3 years before marriage will stop spousal homicide in Nigeria. Also, marriage partners stated that visiting marriage counselor increases marriage satisfaction. 85% of men and 90% of women interviewees agreed that visiting marriage counselor twice yearly will stop spousal homicide in Nigeria. In Africa, marriage is perceived as a sacred institution; hence should be contracted by mature individuals who are ready to swim in the voyage of marital challenges. Coincidentally, 88% of both men and women agreed that mature individuals getting married will stop spousal homicide.

Implications of Spousal Homicide for Psychotherapy Practice

The following implications were explored for psychotherapy practice in Nigeria.

- (1) Health care professionals should upgrade their competence in knowledge regarding intimate partner violence, particularly in their ability to effectively assess the dangers observable in families presenting with domestic violence cases.
- (2) Policy makers should consider making laws that would make it compulsory for all intending couples to access mental health services and be certified before engaging in marital relationship. This will enable those with mental health issues to be isolated and treated before they could be allowed to marry.
- (3) All universities in Nigeria training mental health professional should in-cooperate in their curriculum the need for greater skill in assessing intimate partner violence and effective intervention procedures for handling such issues.
- (4) Advocacy for the inclusion of domestic violence issues in the professional training programs of psychology and other mental health discipline must be encouraged given the patterns of spousal homicide in Nigeria.
- (5) Legislations should be put in place making it mandatory and compulsory for perpetrators of spousal homicide to assess psychotherapy, even when they have been convicted and sentenced for the crime.
- (6) Also community-based intervention program for intimate violence offenders should be established, which must be managed by psychologist and other certified mental health professionals in order to reduce the risk-factors and increase protective factors for violent behavior against women and men in intimate relationships.

Conclusion

The paper undertook in-depth analyses of the patterns of spousal homicide in contemporary Nigerian society, with focus on its implication for psychotherapy practices. The analyses showed that the pattern of spousal homicide in Nigeria is multifaceted with both genders being culpable. Also, the medium of this ugly phenomenon are varied with stabbing to death appearing to be the most prominent method. Also, many factors were implicated as the precipitating factors for spousal violence. The study also, explored some implications of spousal homicide for psychotherapy practice.

References

Aborisade, R. A. & Shontan, A. R. (2017). Killing the beloved: Psychosocial factors precipitating spousal homicide in Nigeria. *IFE PsychologIA*, 25 (2) 23-33

Aldridge, M. L. & Brown, K.D. (2003). Perpetrators of Spousal Violence: A review of Trauma
Violence and Abuse 4 (3) 265 -265 -276.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838003004003005>

Belfrage, H. & Rying, M. (2004). Characteristics of Spousal homicide perpetrators: A study
of all cases of spousal homicide in Sweden 1990-1999. *Criminal Behaviour and
Mental Health, 14* (2)121-133

Enahoro, E. (2017). The new trend in spousal murder. *Daily Trust. December 5, 2017*

Mensah, A. (2008). Spousal homicide in Contemporary Ghana. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 3*
(8) 209 – 216

Okorodudu, R. I. (2010). *Fundamentals of marriage and family counseling* (1st Ed). Abraka,
Delta State University Press

Onoyase, A. (2018). Prevalence of spousal abuse among married persons in South-East
Nigeria: Implication for Counseling. *International Journal of Psychological
Studies, 11*(1) 7-14

Onyegbula, E. (2020). In cold blood. Vanguard Thursday, Febuary 20, 2020, pp 23-25

Robert, H. & Marilyn, V. (2014). Domestic violence and spousal homicide: The admissibility
of expert witness testimony in trials of battered women who kill their abusive
spouses. *Journal of Family Studies, 1*(1) 24-32.

Uloho, S.O (2016). Spiritual wellbeing, sexual satisfaction and marital djustment of married
persons in Delta and Edo States. *Unpublished Ph. D Dissertation. Delta State
University, Abraka.*

Walker, L. (1979). *The battered woman*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Wilson, M. & Daly, M. (1994). Spousal homicide. *Juristat, 14*(8) 1-14.