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## **Mariticide in Nigeria: Interrogating the Place of some Theories of Intimate Partner Violence**

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### **Abstract**

*Mariticide has become a very worrisome criminal behaviour in Nigeria following many reported cases, especially in first half of 2020. While it has been speculated that the stress on family life due to economic and social impact of COVID-19 pandemic is a major factor in the general escalation of domestic violence, this paper explored alternative explanation by interrogating theories. The frustration-aggression hypothesis being the adopted framework was used to explain how women being violated in marriage could launch back severe attacks on their husbands, as well as how unfavourable economic, social, and other unmet expectations in a marriage could lead to a spouse (wife) aggressive behaviour and resultant mariticide.*

**Keywords:** Mariticide, interrogating, theories, intimate, partner, violence.

### Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) also known as Domestic Violence (DV) has become a national topical issue(Oti, Paul & Duru, 2017), and in recent times media reports abound on deaths occasioned by such violence. In primordial times, marriage as an existential rite was highly celebrated and usually viewed as a thing of joy and self-fulfilment for growing persons. This dream of every eligible man and woman has suddenly become viewed with sense of foreboding (Oti, Paul & Duru, 2017). This perception of marriage came as a result of spates of domestic violence embedded in contemporary marital relationships. Consequently, Odumakin (2006) cited in Oti, Paul, and Duru (2017) stated that it has practically become a daily occurrence in Nigeria. Aldridge and Brown (2002) had argued that individuals who engage in spouse abuse increase their violence toward partner, which can culminate in the death of either the assaulter or the victim.

A few years ago, intimate partner violence was perpetrated largely by males, but in recent times, women, particularly wives have been on the news for killing their husbands. Technically referred to as mariticide, this criminal act has been reported

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among virtually all ethnic groups in Nigeria. According to Enahoro (2017) in his submission concerning this current trend in mariticide in Nigeria,

With unavailability of marriage guidance counsellors, marriage therapist and Clinical psychologists, the unwillingness of family and friends to get involved in other people's relationships and the characteristic philandering of African men, and the assertiveness of the modern African woman, cases of wives murdering their husbands can only be expected to increase ([www.dailytrust.com](http://www.dailytrust.com))

However, most documented reports in the literature are of the opinion that uxoricide – the act of husbands killing their wives seems to be more prevalent (Mensah, 2008; Belfrade & Rying, 2004; Wilson & Daly, 1994). Furthermore, the position of some theories of *intimate* partner violence such as the circle of violence theory, (Walker,1979, and feminist theory (Holtzworth-Munroe, Mecham ,Rahman & Marshall,2002) is that men are more while women are at the receiving end. But, the evidence in Nigeria marital community has controverted and contradicted the stated positions of these theories with respect to intimate partner violence and resultant homicide considering the high rate of mariticide in Nigeria. However, the frustration-aggression hypothesis also known as frustration-displacement theory (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer & Sears, 1939; Miller, 1941; Berkowitz, 1969) aptly suggests aggression (mariticide) is a product of frustration. This theory was also explored in this paper to explain the high incidence of mariticide in Nigeria. Based on the foregoing, the aim of this paper is to interrogate these theories with respect to intimate partner violence, particularly mariticide in Nigeria.

### **The Concept of Mariticide**

The word mariticide is a form of homicide. It is the opposite of uxoricide (the act of husbands killing their wives). Mariticide is derived from the Latin word "maritus" meaning husband and "cide" from "cedere" meaning "to cut , to kill ".Essentially, it literary means killing one's husband or boyfriend. It could also refer to a woman who has killed her husband. Also, according to Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2016), mariticide made up 30% of total spouse murders in the United States. This data does not include proxy-murder conducted on behalf of the wife. Also, a social studies researcher who reviewed cases of mariticide in Iran found 22 percent of murders committed within the family involved women killing their husbands and 28 percent were men who killed their wives (Saba ,2010).Furthermore, Federal Bureau of Intelligence data from mid-1970s to mid-1980s found that for every 100 who killed their wives in the United States, about 75 women killed their husbands indicating a 3:4 ratio of mariticide to uxoricide (Wilson & Daley,1994).Indeed, women have been involved in husband killings even from the primordial times, but in Africa, women killing their husbands were not as common until recent times when reports of husband killing became alarming. Incidentally, in Nigeria, the issue of husbands dying in the

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hands of their wives who ab-initio swore to love them for eternity has been on exponential increase ,with the kitchen knife being the most used tool of murder(Aborishade & Shontan, 2017; Onyegbula, 2020).

### **Cases of Mariticide in Nigeria**

Several cases of mariticide have been recorded in Nigeria in recent years. Some of the most gruesome ones are as follows:

A 47 years old lawyer allegedly killed her husband by ripping off his intestines and genitals with a kitchen knife at their home at Diamond Estate, Sango-Tedo, Lagos, Nigeria. The couple had been married for three years after the deceased divorced his first wife. His offence was because he did not will all his properties to her. Police report said the victim's body was found with his stomach ripped open, exposing his intestine on his bed. On November 19, 2017, another female lawyer allegedly stabbed her husband multiple times at their Abuja residence, which led to his death. On that faithful day, Police report had it that she murdered her husband for the mere reason that she suspected him of cheating on her. The incident elicited a lit of media attention as both husband and wife were children of prominent Nigerian politician and career civil servant respectively (Enahoro, 2017)

Also, an assistant director in the Oyo state ministry of justice was alleged to have stabbed her husband, a France- based business man to death on February 2 ,2016 at their home situated at number 3, Adiniyi layout, Abidi -Odon, Akobo, Ibadan. Witnesses alleged that she had stabbed her husband twice on the same day before dealing a fatal wound to the neck at the third attempt (dailytrust.com). Again, a 28 years old woman used a kitchen knife to kill her husband. He died from the wound sustained in the throat after a quarrel at their residence in Bayelsa state. She committed the heinous crime in the couples' bedroom and was sighted by neighbours while attempting to dump the body on the road-side.

Again, a mother of four who worked with the Rivers state primary health board was arrested for killing her husband through hired proxies. She was discovered to have started having an affair with one of the killers of her husband. She accused her husband of physical abuse and sexually molesting her. She also alleged that her husband abandoned her and their children and moved in with another woman in Port- Harcourt (Okonoboh, 2014).

Furthermore, a lady allegedly killed her husband by squeezing his scrotum until he died. She committed the crime at Ukhiri community in the Ikpoba-Okhai Local Government Area of Edo state, Nigeria. She was said to have often engaged the deceased in quarrels over accusations of infidelity. Also, a 20 years old lady stabbed her husband to death in Nsugbe, Anambra state, Nigeria. She had a scuffle with her husband aged 35 years, and stabbed him on his chest with a sharp kitchen knife, which eventually led to his death. Another man, Lawrence Idoko was killed by his wife through stabbing at their home in

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Ayetoro, Ogun state, Nigeria. She accused him of infidelity. Again, a 14 years old child-bride allegedly murdered her 40 years old husband by hitting him on his head with a pestle over a disagreement concerning feeding money (Onyegbula,2020).

Reports also had it that another woman of 23 years old stabbed her husband to death at their residence in Tejuosho avenue, Surulere, Lagos over his inability to provide money for their daughter's birthday. It was also reported that a teacher allegedly stabbed her husband to death at their Ikorodu residence in Lagos, Nigeria. She claimed to have done that in self- defence. Furthermore, in November, 2009, a Nigerian woman was reported to have bludgeoned her billionaire husband to death and later set his corpse ablaze. Also, another victim who was married to six women was raped to death by five of his wives. They alleged that he was paying undue attention to the sixth wife who presumably was younger. In December 2013, an indigene of Akwa- Ibom state was allegedly murdered by his wife and her pastor boyfriend. In the same December 2013, another woman was accused of killing her husband over one hundred Naira upkeep money in Ilorin, kwara state (news.af.feednews.com).

Indeed, there are several cases of reported and unreported mariticide in Nigeria, which the authors are constrained by space to present here. Evidently, there is no gainsaying the fact that the incidence of mariticide in Nigeria has increased exponentially and this has become a societal problem (see Onyegbula, 2020; Enahoro, 2017; Aborishade & Shontan, 2017; Okonoboh, 2014)

### **Perspectives on Theories of Intimate Partner Violence in Relation to Mariticide in Nigeria**

Several theories have been posited by scholars to explain the causes of intimate partner violence ranging from learned helplessness theory(Seligman, 1975); circle of violence theory(Walker, 1979); feminist theory (Holtze-Munroe, Mecham, Rehman, & Marshal,2002); and frustration -aggression hypothesis (Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mourer & Sean, 1939; Miller, 1941; Berkowitz,1969) among others. But, this analysis will focus on circle of violence theory and frustration-aggression hypothesis.

#### **The Circle of Violence Theory**

Walker (1979) postulated the cycle of violence theory to explain the incidence of intimate partner violence (IPV). To create this theory, Walker employed the battered women's testimonies. He was of the argument that those women experience abuse at different times and different ways. This cycle of abuse usually occurs in three phases. The first phase is called tension building phase. In this phase there is a gradual escalation of tension. Walker characterised this phase by a frequency of continuous struggles and violent acts. This phase has unlimited duration. It can linger for weeks, months, or years. All through this phase, there are incidents involving jealousy, shouting, or small fights. The victim views these insults as isolated incidents that are under control. The aggressor experiences sudden mood shifts and they become at trivial

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things. They are frequently tense and often irritated. The victim tries to appease and calm the aggressor, because they do not want to create more problems. They believe that if the aggressor calms down, it will end the conflict. The victims tend to blame themselves and justifies the aggressors' behaviour. Indeed, whenever there is an incident of minor aggression, tension increases in the aggressor. The victims' apparent passivity intensifies the aggressor and they do not make any attempt to control their emotions.

The second phase is the acute violence phase, which is the shortest of the three phases. Violence erupts in this stage. There is a lack of control, which is why the physical, psychological, and sexual aggression occurs. The victim experiences disbelief and anxiety and they tend to isolate themselves. They often feel powerless with respect to what has happened. They usually delay for several days before seeking help. The third stage is the reconciliation or honeymoon phase. In this stage, the aggressor usually become remorseful and asks for forgiveness, and promises the victim that it will never occur again. They employ manipulative techniques and strategies to make sure that the relationship does not end. When the victim accepts gifts, invitations or promises, this does nothing but reinforces the violent behaviour of the aggressor. The tension that built up during the tension building and acute violent phases has disappeared. In this phase, it is difficult for women to expose the situation they are going through. This sudden change in attitude makes the victim think it was a one-time event that will never happen again. This victim wants to believe that the aggressor will never do anything like that again. The fact that the abuser seems calm reinforces the belief that they can change. Their loving behaviour is proof of that. This phase ends as small incidents begin again which will later escalate. Indeed, it is plausible to argue that this cycle of violence usually leads to bottled up emotions in the victims which are bound to explode in the unforeseen future. It is believed that at a point in their marital relationship, the victim might not be able to endure this cycle of violence any further and her attempt to her self from further abuse may result to mariticide. This is due to the fact that repeated cycle of violence may have led to psychological breakdown and resistance. It may also create pressure for freedom that may lead to rational choice to kill the abuser(husband) and become free.

### **The Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis**

Frustration-aggression theory of aggression was originally propounded by Dollard, Miller, Doob, Mowrer, and Sear (1939), but was further developed by both Miller (1941) and Berkowitz (1969) respectively. It is a theory that endeavoured to explain aggression from the point of view of frustration. Indeed, the theorists opined that aggression is the outcome of "blocking" or "thwarting" or frustrating a person's efforts to reach or attain a goal. In essence, the theory strongly argued that when a person's effort at reaching a goal or achieving his/her heart desires is thwarted, the person might react with aggression or violence. In the views of Dollard and his colleagues, frustration

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is the condition which exists when a goal-response suffers interference; while aggression is an act whose goal-response is injury to an organism. Indeed, the major focus of the theory is the relationship between frustration and aggression, although it also attempts to give reason why people also scapegoat (Whitley & Kite,2009). Berkowitz later expanded the hypothesis by positing that negative affect and personal attributions has a role to play in whether frustration instigates aggressive behaviour (Berkowitz, 1989). Stemming from this theory, it could be plausible and pertinent to argue that many married women may have experienced frustration in their marriages as a result of unmet expectations. Such expectations could range from financial deprivations, failure to find happiness in marriage, social positions of women with respect to African values, lack of sexual satisfaction, family abuse, socio-economic hardship, among others. These unmet expectations may have created frustrations and inadvertently subsequent aggressive reactions. Essentially, when such aggression is not inhibited or consciously controlled, it may have the potential to result in mariticide.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Having observed the position of the foregoing theories with particular reference to intimate partner violence, the authors adopted the frustration-aggression hypothesis as the theoretical framework for the analysis. This is based on the scientific truism that it aptly explains the relationship between frustration and aggression, nay mariticide. This is because mariticide could be said to be an extreme form of family violence. There is no gainsaying the fact that frustration is among the environmental factors promoting aggressive behaviour. Indeed, when a marriage or relationship has troubles, or challenges, women are bound to worry, and become sad; they get frustrated. These are negative emotions, which could predispose one to aggressive or violent behaviour. Furthermore, by nature women are given to vulnerable emotions; which anger, frustration and aggression are components. Therefore, a with vulnerable emotion could rationally or irrationally commit mariticide.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The two theories that formed the basis of this analysis posited the causes of intimate partner violence. But, with respect to this paper, the frustration- aggression hypothesis became the anchor for further analysis in the effort to explain the reasons for increasing incidence of mariticide in Nigeria. Several families are under stress as a result of the socio-economic downturn of the country. Indeed, families under stress are clearly bound to have a higher risk for abuse and family violence. The level of violence will be more manifest when the wife is frustrated. This is due to the fact that aggression is generally viewed as a normal response to frustration (Steinmetz & Straus, 1974). Also, it has been stated that an increase in the amount of verbal aggression would undoubtedly lead to an increase in the amount of physical aggression (Straus, Gelles & Steinmetz, 1982; Long & McNamara, 1989). Therefore, the high incidence of mariticide in Nigeria,

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without an iota of doubt is as a result of frustration endemic in most marriages in the country.

It could be further argued that most modern Nigerian women are not given to hardship and deprivation like their forebearers. In fact, they show very low threshold for enduring hardship. Indeed, observation has shown that whenever a man (husband) fails in his traditional and paternal responsibility of providing for his family, he is bound to lose his respect, particularly from the wife. In most cases, these women tend to be verbally aggressive. If par chance the man makes effort to enforce his authority as the man of the house, the wife may construe it as abuse and some of them (wives) may react with aggression and violence. Some of these aggressive tendencies might be extreme, thereby leading to mariticide.

In conclusion, the paper examined the incidence of mariticide in Nigeria by exploring the position of cycle of violence theory and frustration-aggression hypothesis with respect to intimate partner violence. The analysis anchored the argument on the fact that frustration leads to aggression and therefore concluded that most mariticide in Nigeria could be traced to the level of frustration prevalent in that marital relationship. Based on the foregoing, the authors recommended thus:

1. Marriage counselling should be made a compulsory aspect of marriages intermittently, in order to discover or rather uncover when frustration starts setting in in a marriage relationship. This could be an avenue for the partners to ventilate bottled-up emotions which may explode in the form of mariticide.
2. Men should endeavour to treat their wives fairly, with respect and provide and carter for their material and emotional needs. This is in order to stem the frustration that may arise following prolonged socio-economic hardship and years of emotional abuse.
3. Again, women by nature are said to be open to vulnerable emotions when under stress or when abused. Therefore, abusive husbands should desist from such in order not to activate these vulnerable emotions that could precipitate violence and mariticide.
4. Finally, the frustration-aggression hypothesis also addressed the issue of scapegoatism. Therefore, we recommend that women (wives) should learn to vent their spleen on other objects, rather than their husbands who might change from their alleged abusive ways in the future. This is also to avoid “had I known” and the consequences of their aggression. There is no justification for mariticide whatsoever.

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