

Education, Male Child and Childlessness as Predictors of Spouse Abuse Among Rural and Urban Igbo-Nigerian Women

L'ÉDUCATION, LES GARÇONS ET L'INFÉCONDITE SONT COMME DES PRÉDICTEURS DE VIOLENCE CONJUGALE CHEZ LES FEMMES DES RURALES ET URBAINES IGBO-NIGÉRIANE

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Abstract

This research work investigated education, male child and childlessness as predictors of spouse abuse among Ibo-women living in the rural and urban areas in Nigeria. The purposive sampling was used to select 331 married women, with age range of 22-66, and all living in Imo state. The spouse rape inventory (Sri) developed by Uwaoma, Udeagha and Madukwe, (2011) was used to collect data. The multiple regression analysis of the SPSS II version 15 was used to analyze data. The researchers found education and residential area as significant predictors while male child and childlessness were not significant predictors of spouse abuse. The discussion highlighted the role of education in equipping women with the knowledge of their sexual rights and skills on how to cope with marriage based problems especially when they live in the rural areas.

Key words: Education; Abuse; Spouse Abuse; Male Child; Childlessness

Résumé

Ce travail de recherche a étudié l'éducation, les enfants de sexe masculin et l'infécondité comme des prédictors de violence conjugale chez les Ibo-femmes vivant dans les zones rurales et urbaines au Nigeria. L'échantillonnage raisonné a été utilisé pour sélectionner 331 femmes mariées, avec la gamme d'âge des 22-66, et tous vivent dans l'État d'Imo. L'inventaire viol conjoint (Sri) développé par Uwaoma, Udeagha et Madukwe, (2011) a été utilisé pour recueillir des données. L'analyse de régression multiple de la version SPSS II 15 a été utilisé pour analy-

ser les données. Les chercheurs ont constaté domaine de l'éducation et résidentiel des prédictors significatifs tout enfant de sexe masculin et l'infécondité sont pas des prédictors significatifs de violence conjugale. La discussion a souligné le rôle de l'éducation à équiper les femmes de la connaissance de leurs droits sexuels et des compétences sur la façon de faire face à des problèmes de mariage à base surtout quand ils vivent dans les zones rurales.

Mots clés: Education; Violence; Violence conjugale; Enfant de sexe mâle; Infécondité

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INTRODUCTION

Spousal rape or marital rape is non-consensual sex in which the perpetrator is the victim's spouse. This is one out of many violent and abusive acts that take place within intimate partner relationships like marriage. Varied names have been given to such violence e.g. spouse abuse, *domestic violence*, *family violence*, *partner violence*, *intimate partner abuse*, and *battering* but they do not differentiate between men and women (Gelles, 1995). These terms imply that men are as likely as women to be victims of spouse abuse and suggest that women and men initiate assaults on their partners at approximately the same rate (Straus and Gelles, 1986), and roughly equivalent victimization rates have been found for married and dating couples (Straus, Gelles, and Steinmetz, 1986; White and Koss, 1991). In recent times, there has been a shift in thought as research globally has shown a greater percentage of women as victims of these acts when compared to men. For example, a National Crime Victimization Survey

in the United States (Bachman, 1994) found that women were ten times more likely to be injured by their male partners than vice versa. The National Violence against Women Survey (Tjaden and Thoennes, 2001) also found that 20.4 percent of women, as opposed to only 7 percent of men, were physically assaulted by their intimate partner at some point in their relationships; thus, women were almost three times more likely to report being victimized by their husband or boyfriend. This type of information supports the shift from gender-neutral terms to terms such as *violence toward women*, *woman abuse*, *wife abuse*, or *violence against wives* (Gelles, 1995).

The Rome Statute defines the crime against humanity of rape in Article 7(1)(g) of the Elements of Crimes:

“1. The perpetrator invaded the body of a person by conduct resulting in penetration, however slight, of any part of the body of the victim or of the perpetrator with a sexual organ, or of the anal or genital opening of the victim with any object or any other part of the body.

2. The invasion was committed by force, or by threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power, against such person or another person, or by taking advantage of a coercive environment, or the invasion was committed against a person incapable of giving genuine consent.” (Rome statute, 1998)

It has been recommended that this definition be incorporated fully into Nigerian domestic law so as to maximize the protection of the human rights of women and girls and to ensure the right to redress and of reparations in cases of rape. In Nigeria, the provisions of the Criminal Code and Penal Code defines rape as unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl without her consent or with her consent where it was obtained by force or against her will or by personating her husband restricts the commission of rape to penile penetration. On the other hand, Sexual assault is defined to mean penetration of the vagina, the anus or urethra of any person with any part of the body of another person or an object manipulated by another person except for hygienic or medical purposes. While crimes of rape in Nigeria are for the most part individual crimes which cannot reach the threshold for crimes against humanity of a ‘widespread or systematic attack on a civilian population with knowledge of the attack’, the definition of rape in the Elements of Crime to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is the most advanced definition available to international lawyers. Nigeria was one of the nations of the world in which marital or spousal rape constituted exception to rape as an offence; S.282 Penal Code provides that sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife is not rape. However, in recent times and under well spelt out circumstance husbands can be penalized for raping their wives in certain jurisdiction.

The circumstances that should constitute spousal rape are:

- i. Where there is Judicial separation between the husband and

wife - either decree nisi or absolute.

- ii. The existence of non-molestation agreement to the effect that ‘there shall be no sexual connections between the wife and husband who are living apart and the violation of such agreement.

- iii. Where the woman signifies in a clear, unambiguous way that she has withdrawn her express or implied consent granted at the time of the marriage contract.

- iv. When a husband is infected with contagious disease and forces his wife.

- v. Where the husband makes unusually excessive and unreasonable demands.

- vi. Where the husband cruelly, humiliatingly and in an undignifying way forces his wife into submitting to sexual intercourse.

Rape is criminalized in the *Sharia* penal laws which were introduced from 1999 and are now in force in 12 states in northern Nigeria. The definitions of rape, however, do not conform to the principles underlying the Rome Statute definition, do not provide sufficient protection or redress for women and girls who have been raped, and also discriminate against married women and girls (AIN, 2005). Under the Kano *Shari* Penal Code Law the criminal offence of rape carries different penalties according to the marital status of the perpetrator. Rape is punishable by death by stoning if the perpetrator is married and caning (100 lashes) and up to life imprisonment if the perpetrator is unmarried.

Theories of Spouse Abuse

The marital rape exemption law as conceptualized by England’s Sir Mathew Hale and later adopted by the American legal system was given birth to by several English common law theories some of which were *the feudal doctrine of covertures*, *marital unity theory*, *chattel theory*, and *implied consent or irrevocable consent theory*.

- 1) *The Doctrine of Covertures (Connerton, 1997)*. This was premised on the theory that a woman lost her legal identity upon the marriage to her husband and that she was inferior to men as a citizen. The legal status and power of a citizen was determined by one’s land ownership. Since women were forbidden from owning land due to their role as child bearers and, therefore, were viewed incapable of defending land, they had no legal status or political power. Ironically, under the covertures theory, a wife was recognized as being under the protection or “cover” of her husband. Yet by Sir William Blackstone’s account, “a husband ... had the right to chastise his wife and beat her if she misbehaved, allowing him to maintain order within the family.”

- 2) *The Marital Unity Theory (Blackstone, 1765-1769 cited by Connerton, 1997)*. This is a derivative of the doctrine of covertures which further promoted the domination and subordination of women. Also known as the “unities theory,” this doctrine also perceived the wife as relinquishing any legal rights upon marriage, but went further to postulate that a woman became one with her husband at the time of marriage, as if the woman’s entire being were enveloped by the man’s. This theory was articulated by Sir William Blackstone. According to him, “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated

into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything” The husband, considered to be the embodiment of the unity and the only legally recognized existence, could do no wrong to his wife, for a wrong to his wife would be merely committing a wrong upon himself. Thus, this merging theory, that in actuality subsumed the woman’s identity, supported the concept that “a man could no more be charged with raping his wife than ... with raping himself,” which is a physical impossibility. This doctrine served to legitimize the belief that through marriage, a woman became the husband’s property, purportedly in the name of marital harmony and family relationship.

- 3) *The Implied Consent or Irrevocable Consent Theory*. Sir Matthew Hale, who is credited with conceptualizing the marital rape exemption, posits that the woman, once married, gives herself up to her husband, thereby endowing the husband a “sexual entitlement to his wife.” Legally recognized as a single unit, the wife’s unwillingness to have sex with her husband was disregarded, and the sexual subordination of women was sanctioned. “Men’s acquisition of women as property was thus regulated by laws on rape.” In America, the marital rape exemption effectively precludes the prosecution of husbands for raping their wives, whether the rape is by force or the victim is deemed legally incapable of consenting by statute (Connerton, 1997). Though this law has been abolished in one form or another in the 50 states of the United States, there has been a resurgence as male statutory rapists are being given the option of marrying their pregnant teenage victims or go to prison, a situation which is seen as condoning statutory rape and child abuse in US. The endorsement of such a marriage condones statutory rape within the realm of marriage, and once again ignores the law when it is broken behind the bedroom door. Note that Statutory rape laws were adopted as strict liability offenses and the laws did not discriminate between men who thought the young girl was at the age of consent and those who did not; sexual intercourse with an underage female was a violation of the law regardless of consent. “It did not matter whether the victim looked older than the age of consent; that she consented, or even that she initiated sexual contact.” Consent was no defense. The marriage between an adult and a minor, acts to decriminalize statutory rape.

This study was guided by the theories mentioned above especially as they mirror, support and relate to male dominance and the cultural dimensions of the Ibo society found in this part of Nigeria.

Empirical review

Oladeji & Adegoke (2008) in their review of relevant studies reported that “many cultures hold that man has the right to control his wife’s behavior and that wives who challenge that right-even by asking for household money or by expressing the needs of the children – may be punished. In countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua, New Guinea, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, studies show that violence is frequently viewed as physical chastisement and as such the husband’s right to “correct” an erring wife” (Counts, et al., 1999; Armstrong, 1998; Gonzalez-Montes, 1998; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Michau, 1998; Osakue and Hilber, 1998; Schuler et al., 1996; Hassan, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995). Justification for violence thus, frequently evolves from

gender norms – that is, social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women (Counts, Brown and Campbell, 1999).

Typically, men are given relatively free reign as long as they provide financially for the family. Women are expected to tend to household chores, care for the children and show their husbands obedience and respect. If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her bounds or challenged his rights, then he may react violently (Oladeji & Adegoke, 2008). At the societal level studies around the world have found that violence against women is most common where gender roles are rigidly defined and enforced (Heise, 1998) and where the concept of masculinity is linked to toughness, male honour, or dominance (Counts et al., 1995; Sanday, 1981). Other cultural norms associated with abuse include tolerance of physical punishment of women and children, acceptance of violence as a means of settling interpersonal disputes and the perception that men have “ownership” of women (Moreno-Martin, 1999; Orpinas, 1999; Heise, 1998; Levinson, 1989). Worldwide, studies identify a consistent list of event(s) that are said to “trigger” violence. These include: not obeying her husband, talking back, not having food ready on time, failing to care adequately for the children of home, questioning him about money or girlfriends, going somewhere without his permission, refusing him sex, or expressing suspicion of infidelity (Armstrong, 1999; Visaria, 1999; Gonzalez-Montes, 1998; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Michau, 1998; Osakue and Hilber, 1998; Schuler, et al., 1996; Hassan, 1995; Zimmerman, 1995). All of these constitute transgression of gender norms.

A study by Oladeji & Adegoke (2008) on personal factors, situational factors and socio-cultural factors in predicting intimate partner abuse using 200 male and female participants from Oyo State of Nigeria revealed that the said factors significantly predicted intimate partner’s abuse. Specifically however, the researchers reported that personal factors were not significant in predicting intimate partner’s abuse while situational factors were the most significant predictors. Considering the studies reviewed here, it is not to the notice of the present researchers that any existing study especially in Nigeria, has considered childlessness, male child, level of education and residence area as possible predictors of spouse abuse among married couples in Igbo land.

Hypothesis

1. The extent of spouse rape would be significantly predicted by the level of education of wives.
2. There would be a significant difference in the degree of spouse rape found in marriages lacking male child (children) compared to marriages where male child is present.
3. There would be higher incidence of spouse rape within childless marriages than marriages with children

METHOD

Participants

331 participants were purposively selected from the rural and urban areas of Imo state. The adoption of the purposive non-probability sampling technique was to enable the researchers have reasonable representation of married women still having active sexual relationship with their spouses (husbands). The age range of the participants was between 21 – 66years with a mean age of 39.06 (SD= 8.29).

Instruments

The Spouse Rape Inventory was used for data collection. It is a 22-item likert type scale which generates information on the sexual abuse of wives by their spouses as grouped into, physical abuse, verbal abuse and emotional abuse. The instrument was developed and factorially validated in Nigeria by Uwaoma, Udeagha & Madukwe (2011) with a factor loading ranged between 0.48 – 0.98. The internal stability was estimated using Spearman-Brown Coefficient alpha at 0.84, and domain of validity estimated at 0.92.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri. An oral informed consent was elicited from participants after a brief interview (2mins) was conducted to ascertain the eligibility of the participants and at the same time debrief them on the purposes of the research. The inventory was administered to participants after their informed consent was obtained. Data were collected by researchers and the scale was administered on a face-to-face basis over a period of 3months. Though a written test, assistance was given to illiterate participants by administering the test orally to them. All eligible wives within the localities where the study was conducted were included in the study.

Design

A cross sectional survey study was employed.

Data analysis

The collected data were described using frequency and percentage distribution and analyzed with multiple regression using the SPSS II version 15.

RESULT

Table1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of All Study Variables

Variable	Levels	Frequency(N)	Percentage (%)
SRI Scores	22-43	239	72.2
	44-65	70	21.2
	66-87	19	5.7
	88-110	3	0.9
Residential area	Rural	70	21.1
	Urban	261	78.9
Level of Education	None	19	5.7
	Secondary	117	35.3
	Tertiary	195	58.9
Children	Childless	43	13.0
	Children	288	87.0
Male child	No male child	93	28.1
	Male child present	238	71.9

*N=331

The frequency and percentage distribution of all study variables are displayed in table1 above. From the result 239(72.2%) reported no form of spousal abuse, 70(21.2%) experienced mild abuse, 19(5.7) indicated moderate level of spouse abuse and 3(0.9%) manifested severe spousal abuse.

The table also indicated that for locality only 70 (21.1%) participants were rural dwellers while 261(78.9%)

dwelt in the urban areas. The result also revealed that 19(5.7%) of the participants had no education, 117(35.3%) received up to secondary education and 195(58.9%) schooled up to the tertiary level of education. Also out of the 331 participants, 43(13%) were childless, 288(87%) had children, 93(28.1%) had no male child and 238(71.9%) had male children.

Table 2
Multiple Regression Model showing Level of Education, Male Child and Childlessness as Predictors of Spouse Abuse

Model Summary						
A						
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	.294(a)	.086	.075	14.765		
ANOVA						
B						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6713.597	4	1678.399	7.699	.000(a)
	Residual	71072.070	326	218.012		
	Total	77785.668	330			
C						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	49.155	2.679		18.349	.000
	Male Child	-.443	.873	-.038	-.508	.612
	Childlessness	.465	.570	.060	.817	.415
	Level of education	-4.520	1.483	-.178	-3.047	.002
	Residence	-6.276	2.195	-.167	-2.859	.005

The value of adjusted R^2 is 0.075, which means that about 7.5% variation in the observed behavior in the dependent variable, spouse abuse, is jointly explained by the independent variables except childlessness and male child. The remaining 92.5% is captured by childless, male child and noise. Thus, this low R^2 indicates that the model is not a very good fit. The f-value of 7.699 with a p-value of 0.000, means that the overall fitness of the model is justified.

Result of the multiple regression analysis shows a significant negative relationship between the level of education and degree of spouse abuse experienced by Igbo women. The result shows that the higher the level of education the lesser the incidence of spouse abuse, which supports the first hypothesis.

According to the table, regression analysis also shows a low negative regression coefficient (-.038) between number of male children and spouse abuse. Contrary to the second hypothesis the number of male children existing in marriage did not predict significantly the level of spouse abuse in the marriage.

The finding shows that childlessness in marriage does not predict significantly the degree of spouse abuse. It also shows a low positive relationship (0.060) between

the number of children existing in a marriage and the incidence of spouse abuse in the marriage. However, further analysis to estimate the influence of a participant's residential area on the degree of spouse abuse experienced, showed that residence measured as rural and urban had a significant negative relationship (0.167) with the degree of spouse abuse a wife experienced in her marriage. This result reflects the fact that wives who reside in the rural area are less likely to experience spouse abuse than those living in the urban areas.

Discussion

Generally the results of this study revealed that while level of education and residential area were significant predictors of spouse rape, presence of male child and childlessness were not significant predictors. Specifically, the percentage results in this study have shown that more Igbo women are enrolling in formal education than usual. The percentage result revealed that only 5.7% of the research sample had no education, while the regression analysis indicated education as the strongest predictor of spouse abuse for Igbo women, leading to the acceptance of the first hypothesis that education would significantly predict the incidence of spouse abuse.

The negative nature of the relationship between education and spouse abuse reflects that the lower one's educational qualification the more incidences of spouse abuse experience. This finding can be explained by the fact that the less educated wives may be involved in poor interpersonal communication and as such find it more difficult to discuss their sexually related feelings, needs, worries and dissatisfaction with their husbands. Instead such women may prefer to suffer in silence as prescribed by culture and gender stereotypic roles. On the other hand, education appears to be an eye opener exposing the possessor to his/her fundamental rights and privileges. For the educated woman, she knows her sexual rights and exercises them in a civilized manner. It could also be possible that the spouses of these educated women are also educated and hence, accord the former their due respect and exercise their sexual passion in a mature and decent manner. Proper education accords the educated a sense of responsibility, self-control and a touch of decency and empathy.

This result shows that education has a necessary role to play in making sure that women experience some respite as far as rape is concerned. It is possible that education helps women either to cope with the problem sexual issues cause in marriage or devise means of preventing their occurrence in the first place.

Again, though the study involved more women from the urban area (78.9%) than rural area (21.1%) the regression analysis reflected that locality was a significant predictor of spouse abuse with those residing in the urban area experiencing less spouse abuse than those living in the rural area. Hence the second hypothesis of this study was accepted. The more experience of spouse abuse among the rural wives can be linked to several factors obtainable in rural villages but not present in the urban areas. Such factors include; the presence of extended family members who may encourage the woman not to just be submissive but also docile and ignorant of sexual issues on one hand while encouraging the man to be dominant and exploitative in sexual relations with his wife who is ordinarily considered as the man's property. Another factor is the fear of social networking in the rural areas. Unlike the urban residents, most wives living in the rural environment reside in their family houses at their home towns where everybody knows everyone. In this case any incidence of marital quarrel or spouse abuse becomes news that will be spread at every group gathering within the community (e.g. market place, family/kindred meetings, farms, local palm wine drinking joints & restaurants). As a result, the fear of becoming the topic of discussion among peers tends to stop married women from exposing their husbands. This silence and lack of punitive measures against abusive spouses reinforce the behavior and lead to continuous experience of spouse abuse by the victims.

Another influential factor is cultural, religious, political and social punishment that is meted out on any woman who dares to accuse her husband of such acts. The Ibos say "a wife would always lose a case against her husband, even when the husband is at fault". The Igbo society is organized in such a way that the husband is always right and wives are to always render apologies to their husbands whether they are at fault or not. Failing to do so can always lead to expulsion of the wife from her marital home by the husband and his kinsmen. Married women in the rural areas tend to be more submissive than their urban counterparts. Cultural and religious norms are more tolerated by the rural dwellers than the urban dwellers that tend to be better exposed, acquainted with more technologies and prolonged access to their rights. On the other hand, urban residents are living away from home and this factor alone gives the women more room for self expression and development.

Male child syndrome and childlessness in marriages were not significant in the study. For the Ibos, our participants, childlessness and absence of male child are synonymous. Only 13% of the sample population was childless while 87% had children. Also 28.7% had no male child while 71.9% had male children. Due to the low percentage of participants in the categories of no male child and childlessness, their views became insignificant. Again there is a negative relationship between male child syndrome and spouse abuse as shown in the result of regression coefficient. This implies that the more the number of male children the lesser the spouse abuse. However, the regression coefficient shows a positive correlation between spouse abuse and childlessness. This implies that as the years of childlessness increase the degree of spouse abuse increases.

Limitations of the Study

1. There was obvious unwillingness by most women approached during the course of this study for participation. Some minutes were spent to assure them of the confidentiality with which the information they provided would be used.
2. The presence of cultural inhibitions that seem to invisibly demand silence on such issues as this contributed to a number of uncompleted questionnaires noticed during data organization.

CONCLUSION

Due to the peculiarity of the Igbo culture particularly as it pertains to male dominance, spouse abuse is seen as a silent hurt that kills like cancer. For the fact that it is not freely and openly discussed does not in any way indicate its absence. This study examined four out of the numerous variables suspected to fuel spouse abuse among the Igbo people of Nigeria and found that education and locality correlate strongly with spouse abuse while childlessness and male child do not. Culture, religiosity, fear of losing one's marriage, public ridicule, avoidance of shame, low economic status inter alia are reasons in support of the

present findings. The implications of the findings indicate sustenance of the girl child education, empowerment of women and an overhauling of the family system to foster gender friendliness and respect for relationships.

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