

# Gender Based Violence in Akungba-Akoko of South-Western Nigeria: Are Men Victimized?

Emmanuel Abiodun Fayankinnu

Department of Sociology,  
Adekunle Ajasin University,  
Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.

Email: Emmanuel.fayankinnu [AT] aaua.edu.ng

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**ABSTRACT---** *The crux of this paper is to ascertain if males who are in intimate relationship experience domestic violence by women and the implications on their social well-being. The study relied on qualitative and quantitative data collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and questionnaire respectively. The systematic random sampling technique was used to select 146 males and 112 female who are in intimate relationship. Qualitative data collected was sorted, transcribed, and reported verbatim while quantitative data were presented in simple frequency and percentage distributions.*

*Findings revealed that the male respondents most experience verbal violence, sexual violence, and physical violence from their female partners. Thus, victimized males are vulnerable to poor social and psychological health leading to loss of identity and gender identity. The paper concludes with some policy options.*

**Keywords---** Verbal Violence, Sexual Violence, Social Well being, health status

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This study examines Gender Based Violence (GBV) in a traditional community of south-west Nigeria with the objective to ascertain whether males who are in intimate relationship particularly with a female can be vulnerable to domestic violence from their partner. This study is germane given that in the past, researchers have focused on females who are victims of domestic violence from their male partner thereby neglecting males who may also be victims of domestic violence from an intimate partner. A plausible explanation for the increased interest demonstrated by researchers on female victims of domestic violence in the past is hinged on the feminization of Gender Based Violence (GBV) propelled by feminist involvement in advocacy programmes that canvasses against all forms of discrimination directed at the female gender.

The feminization of GBV is situated within the purview of the Violence-Against-Women perspective that views women rather than men to be victims of violence in the family (Cook, 2009). In other words, males in intimate relationships (with females) are believed to be exclusively perpetrators of domestic violence, whereas, in situation(s) where females perpetrate violence, it was only for defense and inconsequential (Jafe, Lemon, and Poisson, 2003; Akinbulumo, 2003; Ellis and Dekeseredy, 1996; Kurz, 1995; Yllo, 1993; Dobash and Dobash, 1992). This line of thought appears to have engendered policies that neglect men and render them vulnerable to violence by women (Minaker and Snider, 2006; Sarantakos and Lewis, 2001).

However, emerging studies (e.g., Dutton, D.G., & Nicholls, T.L., 2005; Kessler et al., 2001; Nicholls & Dutton, 2001; Popovich et al., 1994) have challenged this view and argued that both females and males are almost equally violent against each other. For example, Population-based studies conducted in Namibia and Tanzania revealed that 3.4% and 13.4% of males respectively, reported to have experienced sexual violence from a female (Ganju, 2004; Krug, 2002). Similar studies in South Africa and Cameroon indicated that 11% of males and 29.9% of males respectively, reported forced sexual initiation (Krug, 2002). In another study that investigated how college-students in romantic relationships abuse themselves, Hines and Saudino (2003) found that 35% females compared to 29% males reported to have perpetrated physical aggression while 12.5% males reported to have experienced physical aggression in comparison to 4.5% females. Yet, in a different study conducted among a clinic sample of 97 couples seeking marital counsel, Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Vivain (1994) found more wives (64%) than husbands (61%) as aggressive; 25% of the husbands and 11% of the wives were identified as mildly aggressive, and 36% of husbands and 53% of wives were found as severely aggressive. The study showed further that in cases where a disagreement erupts, 65% of husbands' under-report aggression and 35% of husbands were over-reporting; while 57% of wives were under-reporting aggression and 43% of wives were over-reporting aggression.

In spite of how instructive the above findings are, there is still scanty of literature on domestic violence against men particularly in Nigeria (Barker and Ricardo, 2005). The few available data is likely an under-representation of

domestic violence against males given that males are less likely than females to report their experience of violence from their partner for reasons associated with fear of being ridiculed, social-cultural stereo-types that stigmatize male sexuality, and the belief that they are capable of handling the issue themselves without the interference of a third-party (Fayankinnu, 2012, 2010; Jejeebhoy and Bott, 2003).

In any case, the few data available suggest that male victims of violence by women are likely to report low social well-being, high psychopathological health, depression, loss of self-identity, diminished self-confidence and increased anxiety. Thus, the issue of male victims in intimate relationship constitutes a significant problem that is worth investigating.

Investigating male victims in intimate relationship in Nigeria would add to existing literature, serve as a source of reference to others who may find interest in similar area of investigation, and be useful for developing policies that would protect the interest of males against violence from an intimate partner. In view of the foregoing, the specific objectives of this paper include exploring men experience of domestic violence from their partner, the implications on their social-well being, and coping strategies employed.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted among currently married men and women in Akungba-Akoko, South-Western Nigeria. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected for the study. To collect qualitative data, five (5) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) consisting of between 8 and 10 participants per session were conducted each with married men and married women. This translated to 10 FGDs in all (5 FGDs each for married men and married women). The FGD guide contained themes that seek to identify men experiences of acts considered violence from their partner, the implications of DV on men social well being, and coping strategies utilized. On the other hand, quantitative data were collected through the administration of a carefully designed and validated questionnaire in a face-to-face interaction with the respondents. The questionnaire contained respondents' demographic characteristics, types of violence against men by their partners, and coping strategies utilized by men.

A total of 258 respondents (men, 146; and women, 112) were selected using the systematic random sampling technique. Houses were numbered serially to provide a sample frame for the study. Then, the nth method was used to select each of the sample units in which every 3<sup>rd</sup> house was selected systematically. Caution was taken to ensure that none of the male respondents or the female respondents was married to each other. In other words, in all the houses selected, only one respondent was selected at a time. The justification for this is to guide against skewed results. Previous studies have shown that when partners who experience family violence are interviewed together, responses may be hampered for fear of subsequent victimization by either of the partner.

Quantitative data collected were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Analyzed data were presented in descriptive statistics, cross tabulation, simple percentage and frequency distribution. Data from the FGDs were sorted, transcribed and reported verbatim.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

A total of two hundred and fifty eight (258) respondents, consisting of one hundred and forty-six (146) males and one hundred and twelve (112) females participated in the study. The male age ranged between 23 and 61 years while females were between 19 and 54 years. The mean age recorded for males is 39.1 years while females are 33.00 years.

The respondents' educational status showed that more than 85.3% of the total respondents are literate. Men appear more likely to have a higher level of education than women. There were more literate males (87%) than females (79.8%). The variance is not surprising given that the Nigerian society is patriarchal, where preference for formal education is given to men than women. Analysis of the respondents' religious orientation shows that Christianity constitutes the single largest group of the respondents. This accounts for 69.8% of the total number of respondents. They are followed by Muslim respondents who make up 30.2%.

Ninety-four percent of the total respondents are still married, 1.9% is divorced, and 4.3% lost their spouse due to death (widows/widower). More than half (58.9%) of the entire respondents are in monogamous unions. Men who reported monogamous unions make up the largest group among the respondents. Interestingly, a fair proportion of the total respondents (41.1%) reported that they are in polygynous unions. In terms of the respondents' occupational status, 82.2% of the total respondents are employed while 17.8% are unemployed. However, when gender is taken into consideration, more males (25.3%) than females (8.0%) are unemployed (see table 1 in appendix I).

In order to ascertain if men are victimized by their intimate partners, they were served with a scale list that contained thirteen (13) acts and asked to indicate which of the act(s) they had experienced in the last twelve months.

Table 2 (see Appendix I) shows that with the exception of two acts (hot water bath and acid bath) not reported, the male respondents experienced the remaining eleven (11) violent acts and reported six out of them considered most violent, namely: abuses (curses) (93.1%) from their partner, being denied sex by partner (86.9%), nagging (82.8%), grabbing ones cloth by partner (66.4%), and murmuring (54.1%). The response rate for the remaining five acts was below 40%. Nevertheless, more than one in five males experienced and considered each of the following as violent: throwing of object at them (34.9%), being taunted about your sexual prowess (34.9%), being kicked (22.6%), being hit on the head (17.8%), being slapped on the face (14.4%), and being taunted about the size of their sexual organ (14.3%). In

addition to the foregoing findings from the questionnaire, the FGDs conducted with men also identified new forms of violence experienced by the male respondents, for example, the male respondents reported other violence experience to include their partners making demeaning remarks about them, challenging their authority, not being given adequate attention, being humiliated in the public, making expensive jokes about them, and being compelled when tired or ill to have sex.

In order to guide against a skewed result, the female respondents were asked to indicate the type of domestic violence they perpetrated against their partner in the last twelve months. The females mostly perpetrated five of the acts against their male partners. These include denying their partner sex (88%), abusing their partner (81.2%), nagging at their partner (63.3%), murmuring (54.6%), and grabbing the cloth of their partners (54.6%). The response rate for the remaining six acts is below 30%. Findings from the FGDs held with the female respondents corroborated the findings from the questionnaire and revealed other violence perpetrated against males. These include constant nagging at their partner, retorting and grumbling at their partners and neglect of partners' feelings, and having bitten their partner.

A careful analysis of the foregoing indicates that the male respondents most experienced verbal violence (abuses) from their partners (93.1%), followed by sexual violence (denial of sex) by partner (86.9%), and lastly, physical violence (grabbing partners cloth)( 66.4%). This is consistent with previous studies that show that females perpetrate more verbal violence against males. A plausible explanation for the pattern of this result is hinged on the fact that the first two types of violence (verbal and sexual) are subtle in nature and makes it possible for perpetrators to victimize their partners undetected. The subtle nature of such violence perpetrated by females against males also constitute in part, why male victims often under-report cases of violence by a female because there is often no tangible evidence to substantiate the case before the jury. Thus, males remain vulnerable to violence from their partner.

In contrast, the female respondents reported that they most perpetrated sexual violence (denying their partner sex – 88%), followed by verbal violence (abusing their partner – 81.2%), and physical violence (grabbing partners cloth – 56.2%). Comparing the responses of both female and male respondents, an inference that can be drawn is that the male respondents reported that they experienced more verbal violence (93.1%) from their partners compared with female report of higher perpetration of sexual violence (88%). DeSouza and Fansler (2003) earlier observed a similar variation in respondents' response rate. They observed a similar rate of female faculty reporting sexual violence, but found a lower level of sexual violence admitted by students. In this study, a possible explanation for the variation of report may be that male experiences of violence differ from that of females. Thus, acts that males experienced and considered most violent may differ from acts that female perpetrate and considered most violent against males.

#### **4. IMPLICATIONS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON MALES IN AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP**

Finding relating to the consequences/implications of domestic violence on men was basically collected from the FGDs conducted with the males. The FGDs revealed that men who experience domestic violence from their partners manifest low social and psychological health which adversely affected their well-being. For example, the male respondents reported that due to the violence directed at them by their partner, they engage in extra-marital affairs as a coping strategy, thereby exposing them to health hazards such as getting infected with Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDs. Domestic violence is capable of inducing low self-esteem for male victims, and regretting ones' existence given one's failure in marriage. The male respondents also reported that their experiences led to a decline in their commitment towards their job which subsequently reduced their performance and in some cases, attracted sanction from the authority in their workplace. These findings corroborate the findings of Straus and Gelles (1997). The following are some excerpts from the FGDs:

**Implications of domestic violence on males**

**Male, aged 46 years**

*I use to have a sweet social life with people around me, particularly, with my family and relatives. However, since my wife started nagging and abusing me, things have changed from worse to worst. I hardly have friends or relative visiting me at home anymore and this have continuously left me in perpetual misery.*

**Male, aged 50yrs**

*I have been experiencing domestic violence for the past 11 years and this has affected my health drastically. I seldom sleep well in the night because of the tension in my system especially my head. You will not believe that I have been having constant headache and this make it difficult for me to be able to organize myself. Added to this, I have even developed high blood pressure.*

**Male, aged 39yrs**

*.....experience has taught me that it is better to be unmarried than marry a woman who never allows you have peace of mind. Well as for me, I cool my nerves with a girl friend of mine before going home. She is incomparable to my wife because she cares for me and gives me attention when needed.*

**Male Aged 36yrs**

*In many of the cases that I have been abused by my wife, my reaction is not always pleasant. Throughout that day, I keep to myself or go home late.*

**Male, Aged 29yrs**

*I am engaged in extramarital affairs because my wife usually turns down my sexual advances. To this effect, I have caught STIs a couple of times.*

Source: from authors FGDs

## 5. CONCLUSION

The author admits the limitation inherent in this study particularly as it relates to the sample size. The study recognizes that the sample size used in this study may not be adequate for global generalization and that with a larger sample; some variations in findings may be obtained. However, the study serves to complement other researchers that may be interested in investigating issues relating to domestic violence directed against males.

Other researchers may take advantage of the limitation in this study and examine larger samples, employ bivariate statistical tools, such as correlation and regression, to test for relationships between variables identified.

The paper concludes that males in intimate relationship constitute victims of verbal violence, sexual violence in the hands of their partners. These forms of domestic violence render it difficult to provide conclusive evidence against females as culprits, thereby letting them off the hook. Thus, as powerful as males are in an intimate relationship, they are still powerless. Hence, to protect males from further victimization from their female partners, it is suggested that efforts be geared towards instituting a definitive advocacy programme that emphasizes and encourages male victims to report cases of domestic violence to the appropriate quarters. The rationale behind this is that if females know that males are most likely to report cases of violence, they are likely to be discouraged from victimizing males for fear of being sanctioned.

The study also underscores the fact that more attention should be given to domestic violence experienced by men. This could be achieved through advocacy programmes such as seminar presentations based on family issues with the objective to organized and orientate partners. More researche should be conducted in the area of violence against male by females. To this end, researchers should employ additional quantitative tools to test relationships that may exist between variables as identified in the study. Socio-cultural beliefs that men cannot be abused be modified through public awareness campaigns and government should enact legislations that sanctions perpetrators alike- men and women – for domestic violence in intimate partner relationships.

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Appendix I

**Table 1 Demographic Characteristic of Respondents**

Sex	Educational Attainment				Total %
	No formal education	primary	secondary	Tertiary	
Men	19(13%)	40(27.4%)	51(34.9%)	36(24.7%)	146(100)
Women	19 (17%)	24(21.4%)	46(41.1%)	23(20.5%)	112 (100)
Total	38(14.7)	64(24.8)	97(37.6)	59(22.9)	258(100)

Sex	Religion		Total %
	Christainity	Islam	
Men	99(67.8%)	47(32.2%)	146(100)
Women	81(72.3%)	31(27.7%)	112(100)
Total	180(69.8)	78(30.2%)	258(100)

Sex	Marital Status			Total
	Married	Separated	Widow/widower	
Men	139(95.2%)	5(3.4%)	2(1.4%)	146(100)
Women	103(92.0%)		9(8.0%)	112(100)
Total	242 (93.8)	5(1.9)	11(14.3%)	258(100)

Sex	Marriage Type		Total %
	Monogamy	Polygyny	
Men	91(62.3%)	55(37.7%)	146(100)
Women	61(54.5%)	51(45.5%)	112(100)
Total	152(58.9)	106(41.1%)	258(100)

Sex	Occupational Status		Total %
	Unemployed	Employed	
Men	37(25.3%)	109(74.4%)	146(100)
Women	9(8.0%)	103(92.0%)	112(100)
Total	46(17.8%)	212(82.2%)	258(100)

Source: from author's survey

Appendix II

***Male reported Experiences of Domestic Violence from their Female Partner and Female Reported Perpetration of Domestic Violence against their Male Partners.***

<b>s/n</b>	<b>Domestic violent acts</b>	<b>Male report experiences</b>	<b>Female perpetration of domestic violence</b>
1	abuses (curses)	136(93.1%)	91(81.2%)
2	being denied sex by partner	127(86.9%)	99 (88%)
3	nagging	121(82.8%)	71(63.3%)
4	grabbing ones cloth by partner	97(66.4%)	63 (56.2%)
5	murmuring	79(54.1%)	61(54.6%)
6	throwing of object at the male	51(34.9%)	24 (21.4%)
7	Being taunted about your sexual prowess	51(34.9%)	26 (23.2%)
8	kicking	33(22.6%)	11(9.8%)
9	Hit on the head	26(17.8%)	09(8.0%)
10	slap on the face	21(14.4%)	19(16.9%)
11	being taunted about your sexual organ	21(14.3%)	11(9.8%)
12	Hot water bath	00 (00%)	0 (0%)
13	Acid Bath	00 (00%)	0(0%)

Source: from author's survey