

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE FACED BY WIDOWS IN RURAL AREAS OF AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

¹Nkan, V. V. & ²Asa, U. A.

¹Department of Home Economics, Nutrition and Dietetics

University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, NIGERIA

²Department of Agric. Economics and Extension

University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, NIGERIA

Corresponding email/phone number: aiteevin@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Violence against women is one of the most pervasive human rights violations globally that deny women equality, security, self-worth and the right to enjoy fundamental freedom and peace. Widows in Nigeria, especially the ones in the rural areas, are subjected to various forms of violence. This study assessed domestic violence faced by widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Specifically, the different types of domestic violence prevalent among the widows and the factors that predispose them to the domestic violence were ascertained. A pre-tested questionnaire was used to elicit information from 400 widows in the rural areas selected using a two-stage sampling procedure; and data obtained from the widows were analyzed using descriptive statistics and factor analysis. Results from the study revealed that 79.5% of the widows had formal education with 48.3% being employed. The average age of the widows is 45 years and the most prevalent types of domestic violence faced by the respondents are psychological/emotional abuse (30.1%), economic abuse (25.5%), sexual violence (16.0%), traditional/cultural violence (15.3%) and physical violence (13.5%). The factor analysis result revealed that socio-cultural factors, children-based factors, legal factors, economic factors and psychological factors were the major factors that predispose widows in the study area to domestic violence. It is recommended that the state government should make laws that protect women from harmful socio-cultural factors such as discriminatory traditional laws regarding inheritance and being inherited by the deceased husband's kin which predispose widows to domestic violence.

Keywords: Widows, domestic violence, rural areas, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Around the world, at least one out of three women is beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused during her lifetime (Yusuf, Arulogun, Oladepo and Olowo-keere, 2011). Violence against women is one of the most pervasive human right violations which deny women the right of equality, dignity and fundamental freedom (UNIFEM, 2010). The level of violence against women in Nigeria is increasing by the day with two out of every three women in certain communities experiencing violence in the family (Oluremi, 2015). Violence threatens the security of freely engaging in daily activities and free movement; thereby restricting women's ability to participate in income generating activities, depriving them of much needed household income and the ability to carry out their additional responsibilities of providing for the family and the security of their families (Ashimolowo and Otufale, 2012). Domestic violence against women, in particular, constitutes a great problem to the family and the society at large (Alokan, 2013). Forms in which domestic violence exist include: physical violence involving the intentional use of force against another person – hitting, slapping, grabbing, biting, choking, burning, twisting of body part, throwing things at, forcing the

ingesting of unwanted substance and murder (Alo, Odusina and Babatunde, 2012; Chebogut and Ngeno, 2014); sexual violence – the violation of an individual’s bodily integrity by any unwanted sexual intimacy, forced nudity, unwelcome sexual behaviour whether physical, verbal or non-verbal behaviour which limits reproduction rights (Mbote and Kamau, 2005); psychological/emotional violence – includes behaviour that is intended to intimidate, humiliate or undermine an individual’s sense of self –worth. It includes threats of abandonment, confinement, isolation, stalking and verbal expression (Uwayo, 2014); economic violence – the perpetrator has complete control over the victim’s money or other economic resources thus causing financial dependence. It also preventing a victim from finishing education and obtaining employment (Sood, 2015); and cultural violence – discriminatory laws regarding inheritance, property rights, use of communal lands, maintenance after widowhood, definition of sex roles within relationships, belief in inherent superiority of males, customs of marriage (bride price/dowry) and accepting violence as a means of resolving conflict (Uwayo, 2014).

Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that misinterpretation of religious tenets, cultural practices and norms indirectly sanction violation against women; moreover, when the violation occurs within the enclave of the home as is often the case (Khan, 2000). Domestic violence that occurs in private within the family affect the physical and psychological wellbeing of women; and as such, it erodes the position of women both at home and in the society at large (Alokan, 2013). This study therefore aims at strengthening research on domestic violence with emphasis on domestic violence faced by widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. Widowhood discrimination is one of the ways widows are abused in families (Chukwu, Scent, Emeka, Obi and Kalu, 2014). Specifically, the study described the demographic characteristics of widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria; determined the types of domestic violence prevalent against widows in the study area; and ascertained the factors that predispose widows to domestic violence in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The research was carried out in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Akwa Ibom State is located within the South-Eastern axis of Nigeria, wedged between Cross River, Abia and Rivers States on the sandy Deltaic plain of the Guinea Coast. The Atlantic Ocean lies on the southern margin of the state and stretches from Ikot Abasi Local Government Area (L.G.A) to Oron L.G.A. The State lies between latitudes 4°31” and 5°33” North and longitudes 7°35” and 8°25” East. It occupies a total land area of 7,245,935km²; and has an estimated population of 3,920,208 (National Population Commission, 2006). A two-stage sampling procedure was used to select the sample for the study (400 widows). The first stage involved the simple random selection of four out of the six Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Project (AKADEP) zones in the State. The selected AKADEP zones were Etinan, Ikot Ekpene, Oron and Uyo. The second stage of the sampling procedure involved the purposive selection of one hundred rural-based widows from each of the four selected AKADEP zones. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that only rural-based widows were selected for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and means were used to describe the demographic characteristics of the widows as well as analyze the types of domestic violence prevalent against them in the study area. Factor analysis was used to ascertain the factors that predispose widows to domestic violence in the study area.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics: Data from Table 1 show the demographic characteristics of widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. The Table reveals that the average age of the respondents is 45 years – which is a relatively young age for persons to become widows; and that majority of the respondents (79.5%) were functionally literate. Asa (2015) also reported a high level of literacy among rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Majority of the respondents (77.5%) were not formally employed by any governmental or non-governmental organization/agency. Nevertheless, the widows were actively engaged in various income generating activities as reported by Okoro (2004) in a previous study. The average monthly income of the respondents (₦23,654.78) is relatively low. The relatively low income of the widows, which could be attributed to the high level of unemployment of widows in the study area, agrees with Asa and Solomon (2009) who reported a low income level among rural women in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Anele (2013) stated that Christianity is the main religion of Southern Nigeria which agrees with the finding in Table 1 which shows that most of the respondents practice Christianity as a religion.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency (n=400)	Percentage
1. Mean age = 45 years			
2. Educational status	No formal education	82	20.5
	Primary education	113	28.3
	Secondary education	153	38.3
	Tertiary education	52	13.0
3. Employment status	Employed	90	22.5
	Non-employed	310	77.5
4. Average monthly income (in Naira) =	₦ 23,654.78*		
5. Religion	Christianity	383	95.8
	Non-Christianity	17	4.3

Note:* =Naira (₦) is the Nigerian currency and 1.00 US Dollar is equal to 361.00 Nigerian Naira as at May 23, 2018.

Types of domestic violence against widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State:

Responses of the respondents to the question on the prevalent type of domestic violence against widows in the study area are depicted in Table 2. The respondents reported that psychological/emotional violence (30.0%) is the most prevalent type of domestic violence they face followed by economic violence (25.3%), sexual violence (16%), traditional/cultural violence (15.3%) and physical violence (13.5%) respectively. The low level of domestic violence against the widows may be due to the fact that physical violence against elderly persons is considered a taboo in most rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. Widows in the study area are viewed as elderly persons by virtue of their ages/former marital status. On the other

hand, psychological/emotional violence such as verbal abuse/assault occurs often within homes widows reside in the study area. The finding of Table 2 corroborates the studies of Etuk, Nwagbara and Archibong (2012) and Alo, Odusina and Babatunde (2012) that identified economic and psychological violence as the commonest forms of domestic violence against women in Nigeria.

Table 2: Types of domestic violence prevalent among widows in the study area

Types of violence	Frequency	Percentage
Physical violence	54	13.5
Psychological/emotional violence	120	30.0
Sexual violence	64	16.0
Economic violence	101	25.3
Traditional/cultural violence	61	15.3
Total	400	100

Factors that predispose widows to domestic violence in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State:

Based on the rotated component matrix for factors predisposing widows to domestic violence in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State as shown in Table 3, five major factors which explained 64.62% of the total variance contained in the original data set of twelve variables used in the society were derived. These five factors are:

Factor 1: Socio-cultural factors - This “component” or “factor” called socio-cultural factors emerged as the most important dimension of the factors and accounted for 19.04% of the total variance in the data set of twelve variables used in the study. Socio-cultural factors such as discriminatory marriage customs e.g. “buying” wives with dowries/bride prices which make women “commodities” of the husbands, the culture of widow-inheritance prevalent in the rural areas of the State, cultural definition of sex roles which place women at positions of disadvantage constituted major factors in the study area that predispose widows to domestic violence.

Factor 2: Children-based factors - These include factors such as childlessness of widows, lack of male children by widows and young/tender age of children of widows which tend to predispose them to domestic violence in the study area. The rural areas of Akwa Ibom State is a predominantly patriarchal society (Ekong, 2003) hence widows without male children are often viewed as lacking a “strong/real person” – a male child – to defend her from her “enemies”. This second factor accounted for 12.39% of the total variance in the data set of twelve variables used in the study.

Factor 3: Legal factors - These accounted for 12.30% of the total variance in the data set and include discriminatory inheritance laws/gender-based property rights in the study area which often do not protect widows in the study area from domestic abuse

Factor 4: Economic factors - Economic challenges faced by rural women in the study area such as high incidence of poverty among rural women, as reported by Asa and Solomon (2009), and

limited access of women to employment opportunities also constitute major factors that predispose widows to domestic violence in the study area.

Factor 5: Psychological factors - These include low self-esteem/loneliness/feeling of insecurity among widows in the study area which predispose them to domestic violence. These factors accounted for 9.75% of the total variance in the data set of twelve variables used in the study.

Table 3: Rotated component matrix for factors predisposing widows to domestic violence in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
1. High incidence of poverty among rural women				0.648	
2. Limited access to employment opportunities				0.741	
3. Low level of social capital among widows					
4. Discriminatory inheritance laws			0.830		
5. Low self-esteem/loneliness					0.659
6. Perception of superiority of males in the society					
7. Discriminatory marriage customs	0.981				
8. Widow-inheritance tradition	0.981				
9. Childlessness of widows		0.614			
10. Lack of male children of widows		0.612			
11. Lack of support from widows' families					
12. Young/tender age of children of widows		0.687			
Eigenvalue	2.285	1.487	1.476	1.337	1.170
Percentage variance	19.041	12.391	12.301	11.138	9.752
Cumulative	19.041	31.432	43.733	54.871	64.623

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The common feature of widowhood is the violence perpetrated against them at the hands of relatives. The study has shown that widows in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State are exposed to different types of domestic violence which included psychological/emotional violence, economic violence, sexual violence, traditional/cultural violence and physical violence. The factors identified as predisposing these widows to domestic violence are socio-cultural factors, children-based factors, legal factors, economic factors and psychological factors. Based on the findings, we recommend as follows:

- (1) Existing laws in Akwa Ibom State aimed at checking domestic violence against women should be effectively implemented to deter perpetrators from committing this heinous crime against womanhood and humanity in the study area.
- (2) Seminars and other forms of enlightenment campaigns should be organized by Governmental and Non-Governmental agencies in the State for persons in the rural areas of the State to cause the discontinuance of negative cultural practices and traditions that predispose women to domestic violence in the study area.
- (3) Increased employment opportunities and improved economic environment that enhances the income of widows in the study area should be effected by the Government of Akwa Ibom State since economic challenges such as high incidence of poverty and low level of employment are significant factors that predispose the widows in the study area to domestic violence.

REFERENCES

- Alo, O. A., Odusina, E. K. and Babatunde, G. (2012). Spousal Violence in South-West, Nigeria: Prevalence and Correlates. *Journal of Women's Health Care*, 1(2): 110
- Alokan, F. B. (2013). Domestic Violence Against Women: A Family Menace, 1st Annual *International Interdisciplinary Conference*, AIIC 2013, 24-26 April, Portugal. Pp 100-107
- Asa, U. A. (2015). Constraints to Mobile Phones Utilization by Rural Dwellers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Information and Communication and Technology Research*, 5(2): 28-34
- Asa, U. A. and Solomon, V. A. (2009). Livelihoods and Poverty Status of Rural Women in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Rural Sociology*, 9(2): 55-62
- Ashimolowo, O. R. and Otufale, G. A. (2012). Assessment of Domestic Violence Among Women in Ogun State Nigeria. *Greener Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(3): 102-114
- Anele, D. (2013). How Religion Underdeveloped Nigeria¹. *Vanguard Newspaper* Dec. 22 2013
- Chebogut, J. K. and Ngeno, G. K. (2010). "The Effect of Domestic Violence in the family in Kenya." The Kenya Association of Professional Counsellors Conference 5-7. www.kapc.or.ke/downloads/chebogut
- Chukwu, C. C., Scent, G.A.T., Emeka, J.O., Obi, C.U and Kalu, E.O. (2014). Violence Against Women in Igbo land and South-east Nigeria: A Critical Quest for Change. *Internal Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 6(2): 49-58
- Ekong, E. E. (2003). *An Introduction to Rural Sociology* (2nd Edition). Dove Educational Publishers, Uyo, Nigeria. 404p
- Etuk, G. R., Nwagbara, E.N. and Archibong, E. P. (2012). Working Women and Spousal Violence in Nigeria: Emerging Patterns and Strategies for Change. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 3(17): 272-277
- Khan, M. (2000) Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls. *Innocenti Digest* (6)
- Mbote, .P and Kamau, M. (2005). "Gender-Based Domestic Violence in Kenya" Federation of Women Lawyers in Kenya. Accessed March 2, 2014 from digitalcollections.sit.edu
- National Population Commission (2006). Population and Housing Census of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Analytical Report at the National Population Commission, Abuja, Nigeria
- Okoro, G. I. (2009). Perceived Effect of Oil Spillage on the Livelihood Activities of Women in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. M.Sc., Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Ibadan, Ibadan. 102pp

- Oluremi, F. D. (2015). Domestic Violence Against Women Against Women in Nigeria. *European Journal of Psychological Research*, 2(1): 24-33.
- Sood, S. (2015). Domestic Violence: Towards a New Theoretical Approach. www.aic.gov.au
- United Nation Development Fund for Women - UNIFEM (2010). Ending Violence Against Women and Girls. www.unicef.org/pacificislands/evaw.
- Uwayo, D. (2014). Factors Contributing to Intimate Partner Violence and the Effectiveness of Services available to help victims in Kisumu, Kenya. Independent Study Project (ISP) collection www.digitalcollection.sit.edu/isp_collection
- Yusuf, O. B., Arulogun, O. S., Oladepo, O. and Olowokeere, F. (2011). Physical Violence Among Intimate Partners in Nigeria: A Multilevel Analysis. *Journal of Public Health and Epidemiology*, 3(5): 240-247.