

Socio-economic and Cultural Processes Associated with Domestic Violence in Rural Nigeria: A Study of Uzo Uwani Local Government Area of Enugu State

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Abstract: *Although the pervasiveness of domestic violence against women in Nigeria is well documented, specific risk factors, particularly among rural dwellers, are not well understood. This study was based on cross-sectional survey design. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques were used. In depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with married women from four rural villages in Uzo-Uwani Local government of Enugu state, Nigeria. The study examined domestic violence, and explored the pathways through which socioeconomic and cultural processes may influence women's vulnerability to violence in marriage among rural dwellers.*

The sample size for the study was 490 respondents. Questionnaire and in-depth interview were the instruments for data collection. The questionnaire was administered to 450 married women of reproductive age while 40 women who were not part of the survey were interviewed. The findings show that 56% of the 450 women surveyed had experienced domestic violence, while 42% did not in the past one year. According to the qualitative data, women with more education and income are less vulnerable to domestic violence. The findings further show that early marriage and low income made women less vulnerable to violence in marriage. Only education was associated with significantly reduced odds of violence. The odds were greater for women who contributed more money to the household.

Introduction

Domestic violence is common in rural Nigeria. Among rural married women in Enugu State surveyed in 1996, eighty six percent reported having experienced physical violence at the hands of their husbands. These women reported having experienced major violence such as, slapping, kicking, burns and use of weapons etc. (Ezeah, 1996). According to Ezeah (1996) domestic violence appears to be an important cause of maternal mortality in Nigeria

In Uzo-Uwani Local government area, violence against women is closely linked to the institution of marriage. Marriage related norms and practices reinforce women's relative powerlessness, often exposing them to domestic violence. Early marriage is generally prevalent in Enugu state. In fact Okeibunor (1995) reported a median age at marriage of 15 years in the state. This is lower in Uzo-Uwani Local Government Area. In the Local Government area, females are frequently married in childhood to older men who may be unknown to them. At the time of marriage, young women know little about marriage and sexuality, which can be a traumatic experience. It is permissible among the people for young married women to desert their husbands to "attain maturity". In this sense she is free to engage in prostitution at the end of which she is expected by her husband to return to him with some material gifts which can be regarded as "bride wealth". A woman's inability to produce

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substantial materials at the end of the “maturation” can trigger violence and an unending ridicule in the family.

Again, domestic violence is often used to establish and reinforce gender roles early in marriage, and very young women may be particularly vulnerable and unable to resist. Studies show that there are connections between violence and gender inequality in Nigeria (Ezeah, 1996). Men often use violence to enforce their dominance and non-egalitarian gender norms, particularly in the initial year of marriage. Studies also show ambiguous relationship between women’s economic empowerment and domestic violence. On the one hand, economic empowerment reduces a woman’s risk of domestic violence by making her life more visible and by increasing her perceived value in the family; and conversely, if women’s economic empowerment results in her acting more assertively, her husband may respond with violence.

The present study is based on survey data collected from four rural villages in Uzo-Uwani local government area of Enugu State in 2004 to document the types and severity of violence against women in marriage; and to explore the potential social determinants of domestic violence in the rural area and the pathways through which social economic and cultural processes might influence women’s vulnerability in marriage. Key assumptions guiding this work are that marriage is an important site for the negotiation and expression of gender roles and relations and that the prevailing marriage system and practice in Nigeria need to be understood in the context of strategies developed by individual and families for economic survival.

Girls’ education has been promoted extensively by the Nigerian government and by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Yet, the proportion of girls enrolled in formal and informal schooling has not appreciated dramatically in Uzo-Uwani local government area. Again, women have increasingly become economically active, many participating in income generating schemes or seeking paid employment outside the house in many parts of Nigeria, which entails a departure from traditional gender norms mandating women’s seduction. This scenario is largely the case in Uzo-Uwani local government area. This study is thus situated in Uzo-Uwani local Government area to examine the interplay of socio-economic and cultural variables on domestic violence

The Problem

Intimate partner violence is the most prevalent form of gender-based violence worldwide (Heise and Gotle, 2002). Domestic violence has been directly linked to numerous kinds of immediate and long-term physical and psychological injury to women (Daiz-Olavarriteta, et al., 2002; Ezeah, 1996). Such violence may contribute to unwanted pregnancies and may increase the risk of sexually transmitted infections among victims by compromising their ability to dictate the terms of their sexual relationships. Moreover, domestic violence is a common problem during pregnancy and has been associated with increased risk of miscarriage premature labour and low birth weight (Valadares; et al: 2001).

In the light of mounting evidence of its varied and harmful immediate and secondary effects, domestic violence is increasingly being recognized not only as an issue of human rights but also as a serious public health concern (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002). Numerous studies have identified possible determinants that trigger intimate partner violence. Most of these studies are, however, salient across diverse cultural and social contexts. There is no single theory that explains domestic violence. For example, the feminist approach contends that society is structured in patriarchy. Within a patriarchal social order, men maintain a privileged position through their domination of women, and their monopoly of social institutions. Women are relatively disadvantageous in a social system that ensures and perpetuates their subordination by men and predominately male institutions (Renzetti, 1994). On the other hand, the systems approach sees the family as a dynamic organization made up of interdependent components, the behaviour of one member and the probability of a reoccurrence are affected by the responses and feedback of other members. This lack of a single theoretical perspective may limit efforts to better understand intimate partner violence and how to effectively prevent the phenomenon.

In an attempt to address the theoretical limitations, Heise (2002) proposed an ecological framework which suggests that intimate partner violence arises from the interplay of some social and economic factors. The framework draws on cross-cultural literature to identify specific factors associated with spouse abuse at each level of the social ecology. There is the need for empirical information to properly understand how the various factors are interrelated and how they may interact with one another to influence women's risk of violence particularly in rural areas. This is the focus of the current study.

Research Questions

The following research questions are put forward to guide the study:

- (1) What is the nature of violence against women in Uzo- Uwani L.G.A?
- (2) What are the social factors influencing violence against women in Uzo-Uwani L.G.A.?
- (3) What are the cultural factors influencing violence against women in Uzo-Uwani L.G.A.?

Literature Review

Violence against women is a manifestation of historical unequal power relations between men and women in public and private lives. A woman's experience of violence is shaped by many factors, such as economic status, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, age, religion, and culture (U.N, 2007). Various studies from diverse perspectives of violence against women show that it occurs within the broad context of unequal power relations between men and women. Patriarchy and men's control over women is indicated as one of the factors influencing violence against women. Men use violence on women when their authority is threatened.

Culture is also used to justify violence against women through claims that such practices are part of “culture”. Yet, culture is not static or homogeneous, it evolves and can change. Women not only suffer from negative aspect of culture, but also benefit from positive values and practices (U.N, 2007). Again, lack of economic independence reduces women’s capacity to act and increase their vulnerability. Restriction on women’s control over resources can constitute a form of family violence (Heise, 2002).

Methodology

Area of Study: The data were drawn from four villages in Uao- Uwani local government area of Enugu State, Nigeria. These villages are, Nrobo, Abbi, Ugbene-Ajima and Nimbo. The reason for selecting these villages is because they are typically rural in nature. It can be observed that the villages have very low mean educational level for women. Also, early marriage is highly practiced in the area. In addition the villagers are poor but not unusual for rural Nigeria.

Instruments: two types of instruments were used to gather data for this study, qualitative and quantitative components.

Qualitative Components: The qualitative data come from semi-structured in-depth interview of 40 women, and from four focus group discussions conducted among married female villagers in the study area. Participants were selected to represent different groups of interest such as poor women, women, or mothers of women, who married at a relatively young or old age and women considered relatively and economically empowered or poor. All participants were briefed in advance on the nature of the interview and they provided oral consent to participate in the study.

The qualitative instrument examined the social, economic and cultural processes underlying early marriage, gender inequality and violence within marriage. To explore the range of potential social and economic factors shaping women’s experiences of marriage including violence, the respondents were asked open-ended questions about the processes of marriage formation and about their perceptions of what influenced it, women’s status within marriage, especially whether and how they perceived women’s circumstances in marriage and changes over time in marriage.

Quantitative component: The quantitative data come from a survey administrated through a questionnaire to 450 women of reproductive age (15-49 years) in the four villages. The survey covered a range of topics related to women’s social, economic, and physical well-being, including their capacities and access to resources, empowerment, marriage characteristics, experiences of domestic violence and health outcomes. The questionnaire was pretested in areas comparable but not adjacent to the study sites.

Results:

Qualitative Findings

Many women recognized and were dismayed by the increasing practice of early marriage in Uzo-Uwani Local government area. The women are usually married very early to desert their husbands and attain majority. In this process of "maturity" they practice prostitution. It is expected that on return to their husbands the women should bring in material gifts such as cash, household equipment, building materials, buy cell phones, clothes etc. According to many respondents, women are highly ridiculed and vulnerable to maltreatment if the economic resources they bring back are perceived as meagre. On one hand, the respondents tacitly accepted the practice of prostitution but on the other hand they condemned the maltreatment meted to women who fail to return enough material recourse at the end of the voluntary absence from their marriage. As a 42 year old women explained: "If a woman fails to return enough material gift, a husband may beat her or usually say that he will marry another girl who will be capable of providing meaningful gifts.

Despite their condemnation of this practice most women seemed resigned to it, as they believed it affords young women the opportunity for "adequate socialization" and experience before settling down in marriage. As a 33 year old woman with no education or income explained, "If a girl brings in gifts, then she has a stronger position before her husband and in in-laws home. Her mother in-law cannot psychologically torture her, nor can her husband beat her. If they do, then she can say, "Did I come here empty-handed?" This means that the gifts can raise a woman's stay and improve her security in her husband's home. The practice is therefore perpetuated reluctantly, and often with considerable shame, by families to help ensure that their daughters live well in their marital homes.

Many women mentioned increasing education level as a major change in recent years, and an important determinant of her experiences. The participants suggested that education can improve the circumstances in which women enter into marriage, for instance by allowing them legitimate reasons to postpone marriage; by improving their marriage potential and, therefore, their prospects for marrying a "good" man. Although many women expressed strong desire to educate their daughters, the apparent social and, increasingly economic imperative to marry daughters early is likely to compromise girls' educational attainment and undermine the potentials for her increased education to translate into delayed marriage.

Many of the respondents perceived education as also improving women's status and opportunities in the households, thereby affording them more freedom and less dependence. This is in agreement with Ezeah (1996) that education has both direct effects on women's status and indirect effects that operate through increased earning potentials.

The participants further argued that education can also help a woman speak on her own behalf and defend herself, regardless of personal earning or family wealth. As one uneducated 30-year-old

woman said, “not only daughters of wealthy father can speak for themselves. Those girls with education who are aware can protest when their situation is bad”.

One employed woman with a secondary education believed that educated women’s assertiveness can be contagious. She said, “The act of protesting has ... due to ... education. But not all who are protesting are highly educated. When I, am educated woman, protest against my husband’s misbehavior, then my neighbor..., who has studied only up to elementary, think... she will... protest against her husband’s as I protest. (She will think) why should I tolerate such oppression?”

Again, some women maintained that education could translate into at least the potential for employment or earnings; the earnings would then afford women greater status and rights in the home and protection from abuse. A 38-year-old woman with a source of personal income noted, if a woman earns, income, then she has to be treated as an equal to her husband, because both are earning members of the family. In that case, the husband cannot beat her”.

Only very few women suggested that with education women have opportunities for independence from marriage. If they cannot change the nature of the marriage, they can leave it. As one educated respondent explained: “if women are educated, they can get jobs and the will be happy... because they themselves are independent. They do not need to tolerate the torture and oppression of their husbands. If a woman thinks she can get on, she can leave her husband”

Survey Findings

The quantitative findings are presented and analyzed in this section with frequency counts and simple percentages.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

S/N	Demographic characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
1.	<u>Age at Marriage:-</u>		
	Below 14 years	300	66.6
	15-30 years	98	21.7
	30 years and above	52	11.5
2	<u>Level of Education Attained:-</u>		
	No formal school	315	70
	Completed Primary education	75	16.6
	Completed Secondary education	50	11.1
3.	<u>Religion:-</u>		
	Christianity	279	62
	African Traditional religion	146	32.4
	Other	25	5.5

4.	<u>Economic contribution to household:-</u>		
	None	294	65.3
	Nominal	39	8.6
	More than nominal	117	26

Table 1 shows that 300 (66.6%) of the respondents married below 14 years, while 315(70%) received no formal education. Only 117 (26%) that contributed nominal income to household activities reported violence.

Table 2: Nature of Violence by rural married women

S/N	Nature of Violence	Frequency	Percentage
1.	<u>Violence ever?-</u>		
	Any	252	56
	Minor	117	26
	Major	81	18%
2	<u>Violence in the past year?</u>		
	Any	189	42%
	Minor	162	36
	Major	99	22
3.	<u>Violence during pregnancy?</u>		
	Any	86	19.1
	Violence worse during pregnancy	14	

Table 2: shows that 56% (252) of the respondents reported ever having experienced domestic violence; and 18% of the women reported having experienced major violence such as kicks, burns, or use of weapons. Forty two percent of the women had experienced violence in the past year. Twenty two percent of the respondents said that they had experienced some episodes of major violence in the past year. Six percent of the respondents had experienced violence during pregnancy, and 3% of the respondents said that violence they experienced during pregnancy seemed worse than usual. The proportion of women who reported experiencing domestic violence in the past year was significantly higher among women married very early than among other women who were not married early.

Discussion

The findings in this study show that there is a high rate of early marriage and low level of educational attainment by rural women in Uzo- Uwani Local Government area. Again, there is general poverty,

low status of women in the area. It was found that women who have substantial income have the risk of violence more than those that contribute minimally to the household income. In essence, women's economic resources increase the risk of violence when men perceive their authority and gender roles threatened. Again, lack of financial resources in the family can precipitate violence. This is in line with U.N.2007; Hoffman, Demo and Edwards, 1994 studies. Furthermore, the observed negative association between level of education and domestic violence seem less ambiguous, but its implication is limited. The odds for domestic violence are only for women who have at least some level of education suggesting that modest increase in educational attainment substantially reduces their risk of marital violence (Heise, 2002). This study, has several important implications. First, although the villages in the study are typically rural, they were not selected randomly. The generalizability of the results is limited. Also because the study is based on a cross sectional design, cause and effect relationships could not be established. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, we tried to demonstrate the interplay of complex socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's risk of violence in rural Nigeria. Despite the observed limitations, the study tried to contribute to the understanding of the prevalence of the phenomenon of domestic violence in Uzo-Uwani Local Government area, Nigeria.

Despite the limitations, we believe this study contributes to our understanding of the prevalence of the phenomenon of domestic violence in Uzo-Uwani local government area of Enugu state. The data investigated the prevalence and severity of physical abuse in this study can be compared with findings from other parts of Nigeria. By integrating qualitative and quantitative data, we can begin to understand the interplay of complex socio-economic and cultural factors that influence women's risk of violence in Nigeria.

Women whose income is substantial enough make them more than marginal contributions to the household budget may be at increased risk of violence. The observed positive association between women's financial contribution to the household and the odds of domestic violence may, again reflect in the balance of power between husband and wife that leads to violence. However, it may also reflect a degree household socio-economic status in this study. This study, like other previous research, indicates an association between poverty and domestic violence. This study shows that women who earned money and contributed meaningfully to the household budget typically were in the most economically deprived families. In the context of deprivation, women's economic contribution may increase the risk of violence by undermining male authority and established gender role. This is supported by the qualitative data suggesting that men's inability to provide economically for their families may place women at increased risk of maltreatment. Some of the respondents in this study derived conflict over scarcity as precipitating violence, a findings supported by Hoffman (Demo and Edwards 1994).

The observation of a negative association between women education and domestic violence seems

less ambiguous, but its implication is limited. The odds for domestic violence were reduced only for women who had at least some level of education suggesting that the modest increases in educational attainment available to the majority of female in rural Nigeria will not substantially alter their risk.

The expectation expressed in the qualitative data that women's education would lead to higher status and security through increased economic participation appears less realistic in the light of the quantitative results. Furthermore, the findings indicate that education cannot be assumed to improve the terms under which women enter marriage.

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