

## **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN A SEMI-URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD**

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### **Abstract**

There are no published studies on impact of neighbourhood on domestic violence in Sango-Ota. This is the first study to examine formal and informal control method and the influence of family structure and socio-economic status on the occurrence of domestic violence in Sango-Ota. A closed-ended questionnaire with two open-ended questions was administered to married couples and other consenting adults at three selected neighbourhoods in Sango-Ota. A research question and one hypothesis were tested. The study tried to find out whether formal and informal control methods are effective. The research hypothesis states that there is a significant combined contribution of socio-economic conditions, family structure and years of marriage to incidences/occurrences of domestic violence in Sango-Ota. Of the 84 participants that reported cases of domestic violence, about two-thirds (61%) reported to their family members while 17 (21%) reported to close family friends. Only 4 (5%) participants had the courage to report to the law enforcement agency, in this case, the police. Risk factors identified to precipitate domestic violence are years of marriage ( $\beta = -.205$ ;  $t = -2.792$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and the prevailing socio-economic status of the family ( $\beta = .437$ ;  $t = 6.052$ ;  $p < .0005$ ). The findings show a low level reportage of cases of domestic violence. Higher socioeconomic status was found to be protective against domestic violence. Our findings also highlight the potential role of broader contextual or community-level interventions in reducing domestic violence in settings such as Sango-Ota which is a semi-urban area. We found evidence that improvements in the socioeconomic status of the participants will lead to significant reductions in the incidence of domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Sango-Ota, Neighbourhood, Socioeconomic status, Police

### **Introduction**

Violence against women and girls continues unabated in every continent, country and culture. It takes a devastating toll on women's lives, on their families, and on society as a whole. Most societies prohibit such violence — yet the reality is that too often; it is covered up or tacitly condoned' (UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 2007).

Domestic violence has been identified as an issue of global concern (Adekeye, 2008; UN, 2006). While the level of violence against Nigerian women remains poorly mapped, pilot studies conclude it is "shockingly high' (Eze-Anaba, 2005; Media Deliver Now (n.d.)). In a report, more than two-fifths of women (43%) and almost one third of men (30%) agree that a husband is justified in beating his wife for certain reasons (National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), 2008). For the past two decades, the role of contextual and community level factors in shaping risk of domestic violence has also recently been the focus of increased attention (Heise, 1998; McQuestion, 2003). Violence against women occurs in all social and economic classes, but women with low socio-economic status are more likely to experience violence (Adekeye, 2008). As noted by Abama & Kwaja (2009), more research is needed to fully understand the connections between poverty and violence against women. It is clear that poverty and its associated stressors are important contributors. A number of theories about why this is so have been explored. Men in difficult economic circumstances (e.g. unemployment, little job autonomy, low socioeconomic status or blocked advancement due to lack of education) may resort to violence out of frustration, and a sense of hopelessness, a condition akin to displacement in psychoanalysis. According to Birdsall, et.al (2004, as cited by Abama & Kwaja, 2009), poor women who experience violence may have fewer resources to escape violence in the home.

Violence towards women like other forms of violence against women in Nigeria has received little attention due to cultural, legal, and misinterpreted religious endorsements on it. Nigerian women confront a male dominated power structure that upholds and entrenches male authority in the home. Cultural institutions, particularly religion, are often cited for their role in violence against women. The frequency with which women, the family, and the

home are seen to overlap with culture indeed, to be the main vessels for the maintenance and continuation of cultural and religious traditions is quite striking (Abama & Kwaja, 2009). In Nigeria, domestic violence is believed to be a family affair and should be treated as such. The implication is low media reportage. Also, security agencies do not see it as demeaning to women, hence, their apathy towards domestic related violence. Just like in other parts of the world, all forms of domestic violence are employed to gain and maintain total control over the victim, and most men deploy it against partners (Shija, 2004). Violence is a major obstacle to growth and development. It is estimated that one in every five women faces some form of violence during her lifetime, in some cases leading to serious injury or death (Adekeye, 2008; Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, 1999 & WHO, 2003).

“Violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria combined” (World Development Report, 1993). As defined in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, violence against women is a prevalent harm to the basic rights, freedoms, health, and welfare of women. It occurs in many settings and at many hands, including those of relatives, acquaintances, employers, and the state. Yet until at least the early 1990s, most forms of violence directed specifically against women were met with silence not only by the state but also by much of the human rights community (Human Rights Dialogue, 2003). Domestic and intimate partner violence includes physical and sexual attacks against women in the home, within the family or within an intimate relationship. Women are more at risk of experiencing violence in intimate relationships than anywhere else. Violence against women and girls is a problem of pandemic proportions (Lawson, 2003; Dutton, 2006). At least one out of every three women around the world has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime, with the abuser usually someone known to her (UN, 2006).

Violence against women in particular hinders progress in achieving development targets in Nigeria. Despite the growing recognition of violence against women as a public health and human rights concern, and of the obstacle it poses for development, this type of violence continues to have an unjustifiably low priority on the international development agenda and in planning (Abama & Kwaja, 2009). “Violence against women is as serious a cause of death and incapacity among women of reproductive age as cancer, and a greater cause of ill-health than traffic accidents and malaria

combined.” As defined in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, violence against women is a prevalent harm to the basic rights, freedoms, health, and welfare of women. It occurs in many settings and at many hands, including those of relatives, acquaintances, employers, and the state (World Development Report, 1993). Pervasive patriarchal norms and values lie at the core of this issue. Regardless of their constitutional equality and legal position as equal citizens, culturally women are treated as dependents of, or “minors” under the custody and protection of, men. Thus, violations of women’s rights by men who are responsible for them and care for them are not seen as violations or are not treated seriously.

Researchers have long established a link between neighbourhood disadvantage and violent crime rates (Sampson, 1986; Sampson & Groves, 1989; Wright & Benson, 2010), but only recently on domestic violence (Benson, Fox, DeMaris & Van Wyk, 2003; Lauritsen and Schaum, 2004; Benson, Wooldredge, Thistlethwaite & Fox, 2004). These experts, in their bid to establish a link between neighbourhood disadvantage and domestic violence, have long relied on, and in contemporary times extended ideas drawn from social disorganization theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942; Bursik, 1988; Sampson, Morenoff & Earls, 1999; Sampson & Wilson, 1995). Although theory explaining the relationship between neighbourhood disadvantage and domestic violence is not yet well developed, several plausible hypotheses have been advanced (Fox & Benson, 2006). Studies have shown that strong anthropological evidence exists indicating that community-level cultural and contextual variables are important in determining levels of domestic violence across cultures (Counts, Brown, & Campbell, 1999; Levinson, 1989). Domestic violence is a widespread social problem (Adebayo, 1992; Adekeye, 2008; Archer, 2002; Okpeh, 2002), but due to cultural considerations especially as it manifest in a culture of silence and low reportage by media and victims, it is extremely difficult to obtain a reliable data on the incidence and prevalence of domestic violence in most neighbourhoods. Equally unreliable are the data based on official documents (police and hospital records) and this is because instances of abuse are never reported or under-reported. Issues of violence at home in Nigeria, are believed to belong to the private realm, something that should be shielded from public consumption or outside enquiry. This culture of silence reduces the shame attached to the victim rather than condemning the perpetrators of such crimes (Adekeye, 2008).

A study conducted in Nigeria by Project Alert on violence against women revealed some very disturbing statistics about the

prevalence of domestic violence. Interview sessions were held with market women, women in other work places and with girls. Others were young women in secondary schools and in the university. Questions were centred on physical abuse in the family, rape and reportage of incidents of violence. The survey revealed that about 65% of the 45 women interviewed in work places admitted they had been victims of domestic violence. Fifty-six percent of the 48 women interviewed in the market had experienced the same type of violence. The thrust of this study is to investigate the nexus between neighbourhood and perpetuation of domestic violence with a view to establishing pragmatic alternatives that would curb the incidence of domestic violence in the selected research locations. To achieve the objectives of this study, one research question and one hypothesis were raised and tested. The research question was: Are formal and informal control methods effective? The research hypothesis states that there will be significant combined contributions of socio-economic conditions, family structure and years of marriage to incidences/occurrences of domestic violence in Sango-Ota.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participation was voluntary. Participants were educated on the aim of the survey. The study followed ethical guidelines by assuring the participants of strict confidentiality of their responses. Thus, informed consent was obtained verbally prior to questionnaire administration. The survey was undertaken between November 2010 and January 2011.

### **Method**

The study is a descriptive cross sectional survey of married couples, cohabitating couples, and adult individuals in heterosexual relationships, who are working in the formal and informal sectors in Sango-Ota. These include civil servants, teachers, artisans and traders. A sample of 236 participants from the initial 245, representing 96% response rate, were drawn from three selected neighbourhoods: Ijoko Ota (63/27%), Sango suburbs (97/41%), and Oju-Ore (76/32%). In order to select the participants, a purposive and stratified sampling technique was employed to cater for variables such as population, sex, age, occupation and other demographic considerations. For ease of data collection, three graduate students served as research assistants, they also assisted with interpretation of the research instrument (to Yoruba language) where necessary. More than 98% of the participants speak the Yoruba language which is the predominant language in South-west Nigeria. The mean age was 38 years (SD 5.4, range 24–55). After the process of informed verbal consent and

assent, the participants completed a 38-item (36 were close-ended while two items were open ended) self administered questionnaire between November 2010 and January 2011.

### **Instruments**

A 38-item questionnaire titled Communal Domestic Violence (CDV) was used to obtain the required information from the participants. The questionnaire was a well-structured non-disguised questionnaire which listed the questions in a pre-arranged order where the object of enquiry was revealed to the participants. The questionnaire was divided into two sections; section A and B. Section A sought information on the participants' socio-demographic data which included age, gender, religion, ethnic background, marital status, family structure, years of marriage, academic qualification and occupation. Section B was based on items measuring domestic violence especially as it relates to the prevailing social and economic conditions of the study population.

### **Validity and Reliability of the CDV**

The scale was self-developed and validated by experts in the field of psychology and sociology. The psychometric property of the instrument was ascertained by employing the following methods: estimating the test-retest reliability coefficient, Average inter-item analysis, and establishing the scale's content and divergent validity. Forty-three items were initially generated through critical review of literature, views of colleagues and students. After a preliminary study including expert opinions, the items were reduced to forty-one (41), and after the pilot study was conducted, some restructuring were made to the scale thus reducing the number of items to thirty-eight (38). The pilot study reports a test retest reliability coefficient of 0.79. The instrument has a divergent validity with the KABP (Ingham & Stone, 2006). The CDV has a Cronbach alpha of 0.82. The CDV was subjected to a test- retest reliability measure. The Pearson's  $r$  yielded 0.75 while the internal consistency reliability of the two administrations using the Average inter-item correlation yielded a reliability estimate of 0.79 and 0.81 respectively. Internal consistency analysis on our study sample (N= 236) produced an alpha of .82 for the entire scale, with all 38 items remaining intact.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

The data were analysed using SPSS (SPSS version 17 for Windows, SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL). In all 236 forms were coded and analysed. The data were expressed as both descriptive and inferential statistical methods, such as frequency counts and percentages,

and regression analysis to test the level of association or strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

## Results

The research instrument was administered to 245 participants but due to improper fillings, some were found not fit for statistical analysis. In all 236 forms were coded and analysed. Table 1 shows that married participants (188 or 80.1%) and those within 36 and 45 age bracket (147 or 62.3%) constituted the majority. There were more females (58%). As expected, Yoruba's made up about 98% of the participants, there were other participants from Edo, Imo, Delta and Borno states.

**Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants**

Characteristics	n = 236	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age Group</b>			
24-35 years		51	21.6
36-45 years		147	62.3
46-55 years		38	16.1
<b>Gender</b>			
Male		99	41.9
Female		137	58.1
<b>Marital Status</b>			
Married		188	80.1
Divorced		18	7.6
Separated		3	1.3
Cohabiting		27	11.0
<b>Years of Marriage</b>			
Less than 5 years		58	24.6
6-10 years		71	30.1
11-15 years		69	29.2
16-25 years		38	16.1
<b>Family Structure</b>			
Polygamy		97	41.1
Monogamy		139	58.9
<b>Socio-Econ Status (SES)</b>			
less than #15 000		44	18.6
#16000-25000		67	28.4
#26000-35000		87	36.9
above #36000		38	16.1

## Research Question

Are formal and informal control methods effective? This was conceptualized by asking the participants whether they ever had

the courage to report their spouse when they are assaulted, and if they do, to whom do they report these cases?

Table 2 shows that 84 (35%) of the participants reported instances of domestic violence perpetuated against them while 140 indicated they had never reported. Twelve (6) participants did not respond. Of the 84 that reported, about two-thirds (61%) reported to their family members while 18 (21%) reported to close family friends. Nine (11%) participants reported to religious leaders and only one participant indicated reporting to the spouse employer. Only 4 (5%) participants had the courage to report to the law enforcement agency, in this case, the police.

**Table 2: Formal and Informal Control Methods**

Ever Report cases of Domestic Violence	Frequency	Percent
Yes	84	35
No	140	59
No Response	12	6
If yes, to whom do you report to	Frequency	Percent
Family Members	52	61%
Close Friends	18	21%
Religious Leaders	9	11%
Police	4	5%
Employers	1	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

**Hypothesis Testing**

There will be significant combined contributions of socio-economic conditions, family structure and years of marriage to incidences/occurrences of domestic violence in Sango-Ota.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis on Domestic Violence**

<b>R</b>	= .465				
<b>R</b>	= .217				
<b>Adj R</b>	= .202				
<b>Std. Err.</b>	= 44.54344				
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	85617.234	3	28539.078		
Residual	309522.366	232	1984.118	14.384	.000
Total	395139.600	235			

- a. Predictors: (Constant), SES, Family Structure, Years of Marriage
- b. Dependent Variable: Domestic Violence

**Table 4: Relative Contribution of Independents Variables to the Prediction of Domestic Violence**



Model	Unstandardized Coeff.		Stand. Coeff	t	Sig
	B	Std. Err	Beta		
(Constant)	46.651	19.013		2.454	.015
Years of Marriage	-20.328	7.281	-.205	-2.792	.006
Family Structure	-.337	.189	-.129	-1.789	.075
SES	4.256	.703	.437	6.052	.000

**a. Dependent Variable: Domestic Violence**

In testing hypothesis 1, regression analysis was carried out on socio-economic status (SES), family structure and years of marriage as predictor variables and domestic violence as a criterion variable. Table 3 reveals that when all the predictor variables were entered into the regression model at once, there was a significant combined contribution of socio-economic status (SES), family structure and years of marriage ( $r = .421$ ;  $r^2 \text{ Adj} = .167$ ;  $F_{(3, 232)} = 14.384$ ;  $p < 0.0005$ ). In this study, 16.7% of the variation in the occurrence of domestic violence appears to be accounted for by the predictor variables. Table 4 reveals that family structure of all the predictor variables was not a strong predictor of the occurrence of domestic violence ( $\beta = -.129$ ;  $t = -1.789$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Socio-economic status was the most potent predictor ( $\beta = .437$ ;  $t = 6.052$ ;  $p < .0005$ ), closely followed by years of marriage ( $\beta = -.205$ ;  $t = -2.792$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

**Discussion**

Little attention has been devoted to finding out the nexus between domestic violence and neighbourhood context in Nigeria. This study revealed that domestic violence is a problem precipitated by several factors such as years of marriage and socio-economic status. Also, the rate of reportage is considerably low especially to the law enforcement agents. Responses from the open-ended section of the questionnaire revealed that most participants perceive the police as generally slow to responding to issues concerning domestic violence. This shows a success of the informal control method as compared to the formal control method. The criminal justice system in our country provides almost no protection for women from violence in the home or community. According to Eze-Anaba (2005), the police and courts often dismiss domestic violence as a family matter and refuse to investigate or press charges." Years of "corruption and under-resourcing in the police force" over the years had left little public faith in its integrity or capacity, causing many victims to avoid the police. This finding shows the strength of the informal control method as encapsulated in traditional institution especially the extended family and very close family friends. The trust that is often displayed by family members may explain why participants prefer the informal to the

formal control method of reporting cases of violence, threat to life and abuse to the office. This may not be unconnected with what Esen, as cited in Obayan (1995) refers to as 'undisclosing nature' of the Nigerian family. Because of fear of stigmatization, families in the Nigerian context prefer to shield from outsiders information that may attract negative feeling to them.

This study shows that socio-economic status was the most potent predictor of domestic violence. The higher the socio-economic of the family, the lower is the incidence of domestic violence. This finding is in tandem with other studies. For example (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997; Schuler, Hashmi, Riley, & Akhter, 1996) argues that there is a possible link between women's status and empowerment and domestic violence. These studies revealed that increased socio-economic status as reflected by women's control over resources or membership in group-based savings and credit programs is associated with significantly lower rates of domestic violence. Studies conducted during the last decade have identified a number of individual- and household-level risk factors for domestic violence. Higher socioeconomic status levels and higher levels of education among women have generally been found to be protective factors against women's risk of domestic violence (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997; Kim & Cho 1992). Studies from the United States have revealed significant associations between contextual variables reflecting neighbourhood poverty and risk of domestic violence (Cunradi, Caetano, Clark, & Schafer, 2000; O'Campo, Gielen, Faden, Xue, Kass, & Wang, 1995). Some other studies, however, revealed that increased women's empowerment may actually exacerbate the risk of violence, at least in the short run (Koenig, Ahmed, Hossain, & Mozumder, 2003; Hindin, & Adair, 2002). This study thus shows a possible linkage between domestic violence and family structure, years of marriage and the community's socio-economic status.

### **Conclusion**

A meaningful development and improvements in community socioeconomic development levels will lead to significant reductions in the risk of domestic violence. As enunciated by Domestic Violence Awareness Handbook (n.d.), too many people continue to believe that domestic violence is a private matter between a couple, or people cohabitating rather than a criminal offense that merits a strong and swift response. Even today, the victim of a domestic assault runs the risk of being asked, "What did you do to make your husband angry?" This question implies the victim is to blame for this abuse. Reports from police records, victim services, and academic studies show domestic violence

exists equally in every socioeconomic group, regardless of race or culture (Domestic Violence Awareness Handbook (n.d.)). It is recommended that police personnel should be well trained to be functional and efficient in their understanding, attitude and response to issues concerning domestic violence. At the neighbourhood level, sensitization campaigns targeted at men and women should be promoted as this will raise the awareness level and improve women's assertiveness skills. There should also be support centres for women that will serve as a counselling centre and health centre. The centre is also expected to offer career guidance, alcohol treatment services for women that are addicted to drugs and alcohol due to depression, and free legal services to battered women.

### **Limitation**

The findings cannot be generalized to all the families in Sango-Ota as it is only true of those that participated in the study. People's willingness to respond to questions on domestic violence is a private and delicate matter, which may be under-reported for the sake of perceived social correctness, especially by men, who, as the principal aggressors, might be expected to underreport violent behaviours. However, it must be assumed on good faith that the strict anonymity and confidentiality of the study, as well as the thorough introduction of the research topic to the participants could have encouraged accurate and honest self-disclosure.

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