

**PREVALENCE AND PATTERNS OF GENDER VIOLENCE: MAJOR
VARIABLES IN THE EXPOSURE TO HIV/AIDS AMONG WOMEN IN
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study was carried out among 183 women in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. The study was designed to examine prevalence and patterns of gender violence and its relationship with sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS among women. Four research questions and two hypotheses were raised. Frequency counts and percentages, Pearson's r and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to analyze the data. The results show that cultural belief, traditional values and superstitions were responsible for acts of violence against women in Nigeria. Others are non-assertiveness and fear of marriage breakup. The study revealed that the most prevalent form of violence against women is physical (78%), closely followed by sexual violence (42%). Polygyny (78%) and cultural belief, traditional values and superstitions (75%) were responsible for the exposure of women to HIV/AIDS in Nigeria. The first hypothesis which states that there will be a significant difference in the perception of gender violence based on type of occupation was accepted and the second which states that there is a significant relationship between prevalence of gender violence and exposure to HIV/AIDS was also accepted. To curb the incidence of gender violence, the study highlighted the need for cultural reorientation, socialization, assertiveness training and legislation. The position of this paper is that violence in all its ramifications is unacceptable, that no Nigerian woman deserves to be physically battered, deprived of sex (as punishment), forced into coitus, or made to suffer psychologically.

Key Words: Gender Violence, Exposure to HIV/AIDS, Culture, polygamy and Women.

Introduction

Women, whether married or single, are often exposed to income inequality in household and people, especially women all over the world are now more sensitive to the issues of gender than hitherto known (HRD, 2004 & Laver and Laver, 2004). Because of power and economic inequality, men usually employ force or violence to subdue women, and violence in its simplest form is applying extreme force. Studies have shown that around the world, at least one woman in every three has been beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller, 1999 & WHO, 2003). Experts also posit that violence against women is an ancient phenomenon that occurs in all culture and human groups (UNIFEM, 2007). “Gender-based violence” provides a new context in which to examine and understand the long-standing phenomenon of violence against women. It shifts the focus from women as victims to gender and the unequal power relationships between women and men which is created and maintained by gender stereotypes, as the basic underlying cause of violence against women. However, the primary inequality that gives rise to gender-based violence is the power inequality between women and men. Suggestion of condom use by the female partner, for example, is often met with suspicion, hostility, even violence from her male partner (Eun Young, 2006). McGeary (2001) (cited by Eun-Young, 2006) reported that women who venture to discuss condom use may be beaten by their partners, who label them as whores.

Violence is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position in which it is difficult, if not impossible, to protect themselves from HIV (Davidson 2006). Violent sex or rape increases a woman’s biological vulnerability to HIV by causing bleeding and tearing of the genital area, creating passageways for HIV to enter into the bloodstream (Davidson, 2006). Violence against women has been a major focus of global attention since the early nineties and it cuts across tribal, religious and ethnic confines. Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller (1999) notes that one of the most common forms of violence against women is abuse by their husbands or other intimate male partners. This study, while not undermining this assertion is geared towards examining gender violence as a major variable in the spread of HIV among women in Nigeria. Experts, the world over belief that HIV is spread in three major ways. The first is sexual contact with others that are infected. The second way is through contact with infected blood, and the third way is from an infected mother to her unborn baby before and during birth, as well as from breast milk (UNAIDS/WHO, 2007).

Gender violence results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (UN declaration on the elimination of violence against women, 1993). According to the Population Report (1999), there is increasing consensus, as it reflects in the UN declaration that abuse of women and girls, regardless of where and how it occurs, is best understood within a “gender” framework because it stems in part from women’s and girl’s subordinate status in society. Violence against women and girls is a gross violation of women’s human rights and it is an obstacle to equality, growth, development, progress and peace. The unequal power relation between men and women has invariably led to domination over and discrimination against women by men. Information on the amount of gender violence in families’ shows that it is not a rare phenomenon and it represents according to Laver & Laver (2004), an alarming example of the failure of supportiveness. Due to the enshrined culture of silence, only few cases of partner violence are reported to the police. Studies have observed that due to cultural norms and the need to preserve the age-long practice, incidence of gender violence are often not reported to the police except occasionally to the in-laws, family and friends. Studies have confirmed that there is gender violence especially wife battery in Nigeria. (FMOH/ WHO, 1999 & Odujirin, 1993). Violence against women takes many forms such as domestic violence (physical, sexual & physiological), rape and sexual abuse (Watts & Zimmerman, 2001). Women all over the world and especially in Africa are particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of violence.

Eliminating all kinds of violence against women was one of the key objectives of the Platform for Action adopted by the UN fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing (1995). The conference advocated for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. Though the thrust of this paper is not to evaluate the 1995 Beijing conference, the question that comes to mind is how far has the objectives of the conference being met, especially by the less developed economies of the world?

Stemming from the HIV/AIDS global estimates (UNAIDS/WHO, 2007), the high rates of HIV infections in women and young girls brings into focus the problem of violence against them. Studies in Ghana, South Africa and Rwanda, India, Bangladesh and Tanzania indicates that a large percentage of women have experienced one form of violence or another in their life (Dunkle et al., 2004; Fleshman , 2000; Maman et al.,2000 and van der

Straten et al., 1998). A search through literature and interviews with women (married and unmarried) shows that they suffer violence for reasons such as disobedience, talking back, refusing sex, not washing clothes, quarrels (i.e. in-laws), and not setting the table on time. This paper highlights the types of violence, factors responsible for gender violence, women's perception of their susceptibility to HIV/AIDS due to violence, and appropriate culturally acceptable means of curbing acts of violence against women in Nigeria. To achieve the objectives of this study, three research questions and two hypotheses were raised. The research questions are: What is/are the degree / prevalence of violence suffered by women in Nigeria? What factors are responsible for acts of violence against women in Nigeria? What types of gender violence are prevalent in Nigeria? and what factors are responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS among married women? The research hypotheses states that there will be a significant difference in the perception of gender violence based on type of occupation and the second states that there is a significant relationship between incidence of gender violence and exposure to HIV/AIDS.

Methods

Research Design

The survey research approach was adopted for the study.

Population and Sample

The population for the study consists of all married women in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria, while the sample consisted of 183 married women in Ilorin metropolis, comprising civil servants, teachers and artisans (traders). Stratified and simple sampling technique was used to select the participants. This is to cater for factors such as age, type of occupation, number of children, position in the husband's family, pattern or type of violence, sexual infections and incidence of violence among women.

Research Instrument

Interview and Questionnaires were used to elicit responses from participants. After a brief Interview, the questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. The questionnaire which is a self designed questionnaire, titled Gender Violence and HIV/AIDS (GVAHAQ) was used to elicit the needed information. Section A contains the demographic information. Section B deals with the factors responsible for acts of violence and types of gender violence prevalent in Nigeria while Section C deals with items on HIV/AIDS, gender violence, and perceptions of the participants towards gender violence and HIV/AIDS.

Validity and Reliability of the GVAHAQ

A self-developed questionnaire form titled Gender Violence and HIV/AIDS (GVAHAQ) was used to obtain relevant data for this study. Thirty-eight (38) items were initially generated through critical review of literature, views of colleagues and my students. After a preliminary study including expert opinions, the items were reduced to thirty-five (35), and after the pilot study was conducted, some restructuring were made to the scale thus reducing the number of items to thirty-two (32). The pilot study reports a test retest reliability coefficient of 0.86. The instrument has a divergent validity with the KABP (Ingham & Stone, 2006).

Procedure for questionnaire administration and collection of data

Participants were selected from three Ministries (of Education, Information and Justice), primary and secondary school teaching and non-teaching staff and market women (artisans and traders). No questionnaire form lost. Graduate students were on hand to serve as research assistants. They assisted with interpretation (for the artisans) where necessary.

Results

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using the t-test statistics for independent samples, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), frequency counts and percentages.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents against some background features

Background Factors n=183					
Features	N	%	Features	N	%
RELIGION			AGE		
Christianity	69	38	20-25	25	14
Muslim	98	54	26-34	40	22
AfricaTraditional Religion	13	7	35-50	81	44
No religion	3	1	51+	37	20
TYPE OF OCCUPATION			EDUCATIONAL LEVEL		
Civil Servants	52	28	None	19	10.4
Teaching	55	30	Primary	37	20.2
Trading (Business)	76	42	Secondary	17	9.3
SEROSTATUS			NCE/OND	19	10.4
HIV +	5	3	BSc/HND	57	31.1
HIV -	97	53	M.Sc.	34	18.6
No response	81	44	Ph.D	NIL	-

A review of Table 1 shows that majority of the respondents are Muslims (54%), 81 are in the 35-50 age bracket while about 60% had post secondary school qualification. Traders and business women made up 42 percent of the respondents. Others are teachers (30%) and civil servants (28%). Eighty one respondents failed to disclose their HIV status and of those who did, 5 are HIV positive while 97 disclosed HIV negative status.

Table 2: Prevalence of acts of Violence against Women in Nigeria

N=183 I was						
Prevalence of violence	Beaten	%	Verbally Abused	%	Forced to have sex	%
1-2 weeks ago	49	27	79	43	7	4
1-3months ago	20	11	49	27	20	11
4-6 months ago	48	26	86	47	29	16
one year ago	75	41	150	82	42	23
Never experienced	54	30	17	9	114	62

Table 2 shows the prevalence of violence against women in Ilorin metropolis. 82% of the respondents reported verbal abuse about a year ago, while 41% and 23% reported being beaten and forced to have sex in the last one year respectively. 54, 17 and 114 respondents reported they have never experienced beatings, verbal abuse or forced sex respectively from their husbands.

Table 3: Factors responsible for acts of violence against women in Nigeria

Factors	Frequency	%
Cultural beliefs, values etc	146	80
Low education	75	41
Non-assertiveness	133	73
Low earning power	60	33
Fear of breakup	101	55

Table 3 reveals the factors responsible for acts of violence against women in Nigeria. 146 respondents constituting 80% indicated that cultural beliefs, enshrined values and superstitions are the prime factors responsible for acts of violence against women in Nigeria. Seventy-three (73%) of participants indicated that non-assertiveness is responsible while 60 (33%) of the respondents indicated that it is due to low earning power. Other factors are fear of marriage breakup 55% and low level of education 41%.

Table 4: Types and prevalence of violence

Type	Frequency	%
Physical	142 (78)	
Psychological	37 (20)	
Sexual	78 (42)	
Economic	57 (31)	

Table 4 shows that 142 or 78% of respondents indicated that the most prevalent type of violence is physical while 78 respondents indicated that it is sexual. Other types of gender violence are economic violence (31%) and psychological (20%).

Table 5: Other factors responsible for exposure to, and spread of HIV/AIDS in Nigeria

Factors	Frequency	%
Polygamy	142 (78)	
Cultural beliefs	137 (75)	
Trust	101 (55)	
Ignorance	85 (46)	

Table 5 shows that polygamy as a form of marriage (of the 78%, 135 (74%) referred to polygyny as against 7 (4%) for polyandry) accounts for the spread of HIV/AIDS as evidenced by 78% of the respondents. Following closely is cultural beliefs, enshrined values and superstitions with 75%. One hundred and one (55%) respondents indicated that trust is responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS, while 46% indicated that ignorance is responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS among women in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1:

Table 6: Analysis of Variance by type of occupations

Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	df	F	P
Between Groups	101.875	50.567	2	0.33	<0.05
Within Groups	27156.451	154.088	180		
Total	27258.326		182		

Table 6 reveals that there is a significant difference on perception of gender violence based on types of occupation ($F_{(2,182)} = 0.33$; $p < 0.05$). This indicates that types of occupation influenced respondents' perception of gender violence. The hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Hypothesis 2:

Table 7: Correlation Analysis for Gender Violence and Exposure to HIV/AIDS.

Variables	No of cases	Mean	S.D	R
Prevalence of Violence	183	82.5	2.64	0.89*
Exposure to HIV/AIDS	183	76.5	2.60	

NB: * significant, $p < 0.01$

Table 7 shows that there is a positive and significant relationship between prevalence of gender violence and the exposure to HIV/AIDS. The correlation of 0.89 depicts a positive relationship. Based on this result, there is a significant relationship between prevalence of gender violence and exposure to HIV/AIDS. Hypothesis 2 was therefore accepted.

Discussion

Eighty one (81) respondents failed to disclose their HIV status and of those who did, 5 were HIV positive while 97 disclosed HIV negative status. The finding on prevalence of gender violence was quite revealing. Eighty-two percent (82%) of respondents reported verbal abuse about a year ago, while 41% and 23% reported being beaten and forced to have sex in the last one year respectively. In the past two weeks, forty-nine (49) respondents had been beaten, 79 verbally abused and 7 had been forced to have sex. Fifty-four (54), 17 and 114 respondents reported they have never experienced beatings, verbal abuse and forced sex from their husbands respectively. The result indicates a high prevalence of gender violence. One hundred and Forty-six respondents or 80% indicated that cultural beliefs and practices are predominantly responsible for acts of violence against women, and this presupposes that people hold culture and its derivatives in high esteem. However, the question to be asked is whether cultural beliefs and practices should be the excuse to perpetuate gender violence? An illustration according to Vetten and Bhana (2001) may help to provide the answer. They highlighted a case where members of her community beat a young South African woman to death after disclosing her HIV status as she was seen to be a disgrace to the community. It can be argued whether this is cultural practice or barbarism? "Culture" creates a scenario where women are often socialized into believing that sex happens to them (i.e. they are receivers) while men believe that sex is something that they do (i.e. they are providers or givers). Following culture is the issue of non-assertiveness of women in Nigeria. Seventy-three percent (73%) of the respondents indicated non assertiveness as being responsible for acts of violence against women. Petcheshy & Judd (1998); Gupta, Weiss & Mane (1996) and Gracia & Watts, (2000) reports that many women expressed concern about the infidelity of their partners and that they were resigned to their lack of control over the situation. Women from countries like India, Zimbabwe and Brazil among others report that revisiting the issue of their partner's infidelity can jeopardize their physical safety and family stability (Jejeebhoy & Cook, 1997; Kishor & Johnson, 2004 and Odujirin, 1993). When men do not take care of their sexual health, they expose themselves and their partners to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS (Development and Project Planning Centre, 2001 & WHO, 2000, 2003).

Seventy-eight (78%) of the respondents indicated physical violence while 42% indicated sexual. Others are economic (31%) and psychological or emotional (20%). Most men do not think twice before physically assaulting their wives i.e. slapping, punching, kicking, hitting, etc. these are to account for some of the reasons why many women do not negotiate safe sex,

thus exposing their body to the dreaded virus (Durojaye, 2004). Another common type of violence is sexual. Nduwimana's (2004) notes that husbands rape their wives or force their wife to have sex even when she is not interested or in the mood or suspecting the husband has sexually transmitted infections. This action leads to abrasion, which according to Fleishmen (2003) is a free license for the deadly virus to do damage by having a 'thoroughfare' into the blood stream. Other types of violence, as indicated in this study, are economic; whereby the women may not be given enough money for material needs (Human Development Report, 2004) and lastly, it may be psychological or emotional as the case may be, which may invariably lead to stress and depression related issues. Another finding of this study centers on the factors responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS among women in Nigeria. Not surprisingly, 78% of respondents chose polygamous marriages (74% for polygyny and 4% for polyandry), as the factor responsible for exposure and spread of HIV among women in Nigeria. Polygyny, which allows a man to have more than one wife and having multiple sexual partners', increases the likelihood of contacting HIV/AIDS (Population Reports (1999), hence, women are vulnerable at this point because they cannot forever refuse their husbands sex even if they are suspecting he has the virus. Trust (55%) was also identified in this study as a factor in the exposure to, and spread of HIV/AIDS among women. Women find intimacy in their relationship to be more important than protection against HIV (Sobo, 1995). The idea of monogamy including assuming their partner's fidelity increases women's susceptibility to the virus (AIDS Research Institute, 2004). Hence, trust may be responsible for the exposure to HIV/AIDS among women in Nigeria.

Another interesting finding of this study shows that there is a significant difference between respondents' perceptions of gender violence based on type of occupation. The result reveals that there is a partial significant difference on perception of gender violence based on types of occupation ($F_{(2,182)} = 0.352; p < 0.05$). Further analyses showed that respondents' perception differs due to factors ranging from level of education, economic freedom, assertiveness and religious values. Some women interviewed confessed that canning, slapping, pushing, kicking are normal things men do and hence, they do not consider them as "violence", while some women, especially the educated ones, consider all these as physical violence, including unwarranted yelling at them. This very aspect needs further research to really ascertain the perception of women in other occupations (clergy, homemaker, career women, and executives among others) towards violence against women and girls.

The second hypothesis shows that there is a positive relationship between prevalence of gender violence and spread of HIV/AIDS. The correlation of 0.89 depicts a positive and significant relationship. It is obvious that HIV/AIDS is a global epidemic. Women, children and young people are fast becoming the predominant group infected and affected by HIV/AIDS. Gupta (2001) notes that in Sub-Sahara Africa, women have a higher number of new HIV/AIDS cases than men. In the same vein, Dunkle et al. (2004) reports that women who are beaten or dominated by their partners are more likely to become infected by HIV than women who live in non-violent households. This goes to confirm the result of the second hypothesis. The respondents agreed that a high prevalence of violence, especially sexual is capable of exposing them to the threat of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

To reduce the prevalence and incidence of gender violence in Nigeria, there is the need cultural reorientation, socialization, assertiveness training and legislation. Ending physical and sexual violence requires long-term commitment and strategies involving all segments of the society. Legislation can help because passing and enforcing laws, which recognize women's legal rights, and one that punishes offenders will contribute in no small measure to reducing the incidence of gender violence. Cultural reorientation is needed. There should be a plan to change people's beliefs, attitude and general mindset concerning acts of violence against women, girls and children generally. According to Population Report (1999), it is only when women gain their place as equal members of society will violence against them no longer be an invisible norm, but a shocking aberration. There is no gainsaying the fact that violence against women is a menace and an aberration. This study has shown that the fear of violence prevents women from insisting on the use of condoms or other safer sex methods. In addition, it was discovered that violence, especially forced sex increases a woman's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS because of abrasions due to lack of lubrication. Most women do not go for HIV test or when they go, some fail to return for the result because they are afraid that disclosing their HIV positive status may result in physical violence or divorce. This study concludes that gender violence is unacceptable, that no woman deserves to be beaten, sexually abused, or made to suffer emotionally.

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