

## The Public Perception of the Impacts of Domestic Violence Against Women

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### Abstract

*This paper investigates the impacts of domestic violence against women in Benin City. The study adopts the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all men and women in Benin City, Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique, a sample of one hundred and seventy five participants was selected. The data collected was analyzed using the Cronbach alpha formulae for internal consistency reliability, coefficients of 0.85. The descriptive statistics; the mean and standard deviation were employed. Results showed public perception of domestic violence against women in Benin City with the test value of 2.88. Domestic violence influences separation/divorce with a test value of 2.65. The psychological effects on women account for a test value of 2.78 and the physical health issues account for a test value of 2.99. Recommendations were made based on the findings that: Constant awareness-raising as a significant approach in responding to the issues of domestic violence against women should be encouraged by helping professionals. Assistance provision for victims, interventions measures with abusers and the proper interpretation of policies in response to the phenomenon.*

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Violence, Gender based violence, Abuse, Public perception.

### 1. Introduction

Conflict is an inevitable phenomenon in human social life, this is because as long as people live together disagreement must arise, and this disagreement has been a major contributor to the rising incidence of domestic violence. Domestic violence is an aspect of conflict in human relations, since it reflects to a large extent disposition and temperament (Jewkes, Flood & Lang, 2015). People have seen conflict as a bad omen in the society because of the value attached to it, in the real sense, conflict as a concept and as a human phenomenon is natural (Dokpesi, Ibiezugbe & Obaro, 2003). Human reactions either encourage violence or discourages it, and humans possess a complex and unique biological make-up which makes them very rational, self- calculative and defensive (Fawole, 2003; Lila, Gracia & Garcia, 2013). With the infra-humans, man has the tendency to show some elements of self-centeredness, greed, jealousy, wickedness and hatred towards his fellow humans. Violence in its entirety has become a global phenomenon which has eaten deep into the marrow of the family and society as a whole, to the extent that it is sometimes not seen as a societal ill, but rather accepted as a normal occurrence (Osaghae & Iborbor, 2003). Hence domestic violence against women as prevalent all over the world represents violation of women's rights and a major public concern (Arinze-Umobi, 2008).

Violence affects millions of women worldwide and it cuts across all geographical, regional, national, religious and socio-economic barriers, impeding the woman's right to participate fully in the society. The World Health Organization (2007) revealed that between 15% and 71% of women and children in its 10-country study, which include nations as Japan, Ethiopia, Serbia, Montenegro and Brazil had experienced domestic violence. Moreover the widespread prevalence of domestic violence is not limited to a particular country or region; it is a global phenomenon. The survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) estimated that an average of 22% of European women have been victims of physical and/or sexual violence and 33% of women had experienced physical and/or sexual violence across countries, since the age of 15. It is also instructive to note that though it is a global phenomenon, studies have shown that its prevalence in Sub-Sahara Africa ranks high even in comparison with levels in other developing regions (United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, 2006). Research on the demographic and health survey in Nigeria indicates that 28 per cent of all women in Nigeria have experienced physical violence (Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005).

According to the WHO (2015), domestic violence against women is violence; behavior, within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. Jewkes (2002) substantiates that domestic violence is the inflicting of

physical injury, sexual, psychological or economic violence by a family member or intimate partner, irrespective of whether they lived together or not. To Okolo (2004), violence could be everywhere in the world today and violence against women is different from context, even though there have been great change overtime. Domestic violence can happen to anyone irrespective of the age, race orientation or gender (Onobumeh, Oronsaye & Oshodin, 2015), take a number of forms, including physical, emotional, economic, sexual, financial, neglect, which can range from subtle, coercive forms in self –defense or retaliation to marital rape and to physical violent abuse such as acid throwing that result in disfigurement or death (McQuigg, 2011).

Violence against women is a complex phenomenon that needs to be understood within the wider social context and within the social and cultural norms that permeate it (Jewkes, 2002; Flood & Pease, 2009). A growing number of researches have acknowledged the perceived role of the public about domestic violence and the responses towards tackling the phenomenon (Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Frye, 2007; Gracia, Garcia, & Lila 2009; Gracia, 2014). Research shows that these attitudes condoning violence against women are still widespread (Frye, 2007; WHO, 2015). The importance of addressing public attitudes towards violence against women is illustrated by an increasing body of research showing the influence that these attitudes may have in aspects such as incidence and reporting rates, public and professional responses and the victims' own responses (Fawole, 2003; Flood & Pease, 2009; Aihie, 2009; Lila, Gracia, & Garcia, 2013). Given that domestic violence remains not only a social or public health problem, but a largely unreported misconduct (Gracia, 2014); the importance of addressing insouciances towards domestic violence against women becomes even more visible. Hence, an in-depth of the public perception regarding violence against women could help gain knowledge of the contexts that contribute to its occurrence and the measures of intervention.

Domestic violence is not an isolated occurrence in families, but is broadly relevant to notions of risky family environment that may relate to children's adjustment problem or negative pathways in children's development. Domestic violence has significant effects not only on adult but also on children through direct exposure to it, changes in parenting, family relationship and multiple family problems such as parental depression & alcohol problems (Davies & Cummings, 2006; Aihie, 2009). Studies suggest that violent behavior often is caused by an interaction of situational and individual factors, which implies that abusers learn violent behavior from their family, people in their community and other cultural influences as they grow up, because they may have seen violence often or they may have been victims themselves (Obi & Ozumba, 2007; Gracia, 2014; Onobumeh et al., 2015;). No cause of domestic violence, however, justifies the actions of the abuser, nor should it be used as a rationale for their behavior (Goldsmith, 2016). Whilst in response to domestic violence against women, this study intends to find out the public perception of the social and cultural influences that tolerate or justify the phenomenon.

## **2. Statement of Problem**

Domestic violence is a global issue reaching across national boundaries as well as socio-economic, cultural, racial, and class dictions. This problem is not only widely dispersed geographically, but its incidence is also extensive, making it a typical and accepted behavior. Its continued existence is morally indefensible to its cost to individuals, law enforcement, to health system and to society, is enormous (Arinze-Umobi, 2008). Yet no other major problem of public health has been so widely ignored and so little understood (WHO, 2007). It has serious consequences on victims' physical health, including the women's reproductive and sexual health (Alokan, 2013; Onobumeh et al., 2015). These include injuries, other health problems, temporary or permanent disabilities, depression and suicide amongst others.

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to find out the public perception on the effects of domestic violence against women on the family. The specific objectives are:

1. To examine public perception on domestic violence against women in Benin City.
2. To determine whether divorce is an effect of domestic violence women
3. To determine whether depression is an effect of domestic violence women
4. To determine whether domestic violence affects the health of women.
5. To suggest possible solutions to the issue of domestic violence against women

#### 4. Research Questions

1. What is the public perception about domestic violence against women in Benin City?
2. Does domestic violence against women influences separation/divorce?
3. Does domestic violence influences psychological problems on women?
4. Does domestic violence influences women's physical health issues?

#### 5. Methodology

This study adopts the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all married men and women in Benin City, Nigeria. Using simple random sampling technique, a sample of one hundred and seventy five participants was selected. The instrument used for data collection is a twenty questionnaire, adopting the four point Likert format with options ranging from strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. The questionnaire was content validated by three experts in social work involved with domestic violence issues and then the comments and suggestions made by them were adapted in the final copy of the questionnaire. In other to determine the reliability of questionnaire it was administered to twenty participants who are not to form a part of the sample of study. After an interval of three weeks the instrument was re-administered to the same twenty adolescents, the data obtained from these two administrations were subjected to the Cronbach alpha formulae for internal consistency reliability, coefficients of 0.85 was obtained. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistic; mean and standard deviation at 2.5 criterion mean in order to determine public opinion on domestic violence against women and its impacts as presented in the tables below.

##### 5.1 Research Question 1: What is the public perception about domestic violence against women in Benin City?

**Table 1:** Public perception about domestic violence against women

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	I have seen women being maltreated by their husbands	175	2.78	1.15	Accepted
2.	Women are sometimes denied access to money by their husbands and therefore not financially capable to meet her needs	175	2.86	0.70	Accepted
3.	Women suffer from harmful and traditional practices	175	2.95	1.03	Accepted
4.	Most women sustain injuries due to hit/beatings from their partner/husband	175	2.93	0.96	Accepted
<b>Perception about Domestic Violence</b>		<b>175</b>	<b>2.88</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

N=175, Test mean=2.5

Aggregate mean=2.88 (Accept)

Table 1 reveals a calculated mean value of 2.88 and standard deviation of 0.96, with a test mean of 2.5, the mean value is higher than the test value. This implies that the public has positive knowledge of domestic violence against women. This is because the respondents accepted that women are maltreated or abused by their partners or husbands.

##### 5.2 Research Question 2: Does domestic violence against women influences separation/divorce?

**Table 2:** Influence of domestic violence on separation/divorce

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Most women decide to leave their due to an unsatisfactory marriage.	175	2.56	0.64	Accepted
2.	Women who are victims of violence no longer see their home as a safe place.	175	2.61	0.67	Accepted
3.	Some women silently suffered so much pain in their marriages, which they cannot cope with.	175	2.71	0.70	Accepted
4.	Violence is not an acceptable reason for divorce.	175	2.74	0.72	Accepted
<b>Separation/Divorce</b>		<b>175</b>	<b>2.65</b>	<b>0.68</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

N=175, Test mean=2.5

Aggregate mean=2.65 (Accept)

Table 2 shows a calculated mean value of 2.65 and a standard deviation of 0.68, with a test mean of 2.5. From this analysis, the mean value is higher than the test mean, which is indicative of divorce as an effect of domestic violence. Meaning that most victim's decision for separation and divorce is as a result of domestic violence experienced.

### 5.3 Research Question 3: Does domestic violence influences psychological problems on women?

**Table 3:** Psychological problems on women

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Domestic violence makes women feel frightened and uncertain about their children's future.	175	2.92	0.78	Accepted
2.	Some victims of domestic violence feel helpless and hopeless	175	2.60	0.66	Accepted
3.	Most victims get excessively worried about their security after being abused.	175	2.82	0.72	Accepted
4.	Victims of domestic violence have low confidence.	175	2.80	0.69	Accepted
	<b>Depression</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>0.71</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

N=175, Criterion mean=2.5      Aggregate mean=2.78 (Accept)

Table 3 shows a calculated mean value of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 0.71, with a test mean of 2.5. From this analysis, the mean value is higher than the test mean, which is indicative of how domestic violence influences psychological problems on women. Meaning, violence against women impacts on victims' emotional well-being, as a number of women experience depression, hopelessness, helplessness, low self-confidence and anxiety.

### 5.4 Research Question 4: Does domestic violence influences women's physical health issues?

**Table 4:** Women's physical health issues

S/N	Items	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1.	Women suffer chronic body pains due to domestic violence.	175	3.50	0.78	Accepted
2.	Women are sometimes vulnerable to bacterial and viral infections due to sexual violence.	175	3.00	0.68	Accepted
3.	Most women sustain harmful injuries such as bruises, broken bones due to physical abuse from their partners/husbands	175	2.77	0.65	Accepted
4.	Victims who are pregnant suffer severe pregnancy complications after due to beaten by their partners/husbands.	175	2.69	0.78	Accepted
	<b>Women's physical health related issues</b>	<b>175</b>	<b>2.99</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>Accepted</b>

N=175, Criterion mean=2.5      Aggregate mean=2.99 (Accept)

Table 4 shows a calculated mean value of 2.99 and a standard deviation of 0.72, with a test mean of 2.5. From this analysis, the mean value is higher than the test mean. This implies that domestic violence impacts on the health of abused women. Meaning that; women suffer from several health issues as a result of domestic violence at home.

## 6. Discussion

From the analysis of the data collected for the study, it was revealed that the public perceived the prevalence of violence against women and the varying impacts of the phenomenon in Benin City. These effects include separation/divorce, psychological and physical health related issues. This finding supports the findings of Gracia, Garcia and Lila (2009) that there is the positive opinion and perception of the public (Oyediran & Isiugu-Abanihe, 2005) on the notion of domestic violence against women in Nigeria. The finding also supports WHO (2013) that harmful practices against women uphold violence against women in varying societies. This finding is also consistent with the study of Aihie (2009) and Alokun (2013), which found that domestic violence in private or within the family affects the marital stability, as well as the physical and psychological well-being of the women. The findings thus revealed that domestic abuses against women leads to separation or split-up of the couples. This is in agreement with the work of Berry and Bradley (2000) that domestic violence can result to the woman not feeling safe and not trusting, which might also end in a separation or divorce. This implies that the more women are abused the more marital relationship are likely to be severed and couples separated or divorced.

The result also shown that domestic violence against women; influences their psychological or emotional problems. This is in line with Alokun (2011) and Tually, Faulkner, Cutler and Slatter (2008) that a partner who is abused experience psychological issues as they might feel intimidated, stressed, anxious, shame, guilty, fear, confusion depressed feeling of intense low self-worth and inadequacy, and very lonely and might feel less able to cope with parenting and life. This is indicative of the emotional problems women live with after abuse, which could be devastating for them. Moreover, this finding reveals that domestic violence is related to the physical health issues experienced by

women. This is supported by Onobumeh et al. (2015) that domestic violence against women has a serious health implication, such as bruises, immediate injuries from the assault, broken bones, internal bleeding or even death. Similarly, WHO (2002) confirmed that women victims of family and domestic violence experience a range of consequences including physical injury and chronic health issues. This finding suggests that domestic violence does not only affect social, economic functioning, it causes physical injury and undermines the psychological and emotional well-being of the victims and the society as a whole.

## 7. Conclusion

Given the analysis and interpretation of data, it reveals that separation/divorce, physical health and psychological issues are related impacts of domestic violence against women. Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that domestic violence has negative impacts on women, given the emerging separation/divorce, physical and health as well as the emotional issues experienced. This has made it seem that the prevailing issue of domestic violence and its consequential contexts on women cannot be ignored, but need understood and tackled effectively. The results of this study offer significant evidence in support of the need to improve victims' circumstances and address attitude that allows the phenomenon of domestic violence against women.

## 8. Recommendation

Based on the aforementioned findings, recommendations are made that:

- Social workers and counselors should encourage couples to develop positive attitudes on how to cope in marital relationships without violence.
- Constant public sensitization and awareness-raising on domestic violence and its consequential impacts on women and the entire family should be encouraged, by helping professionals both governmental and non-governmental.
- Encourage assistance provision for abused women, stabilize their households and ensure safe family environment for their children.
- There is the need for service providers to engage in continuous behaviour modification therapy for abusers in order to address behavioural problems that causes violent behaviour.
- Laws and policies protecting the rights of women should be properly interpreted in response to the phenomenon of domestic violence.

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