Intimate Partner Violence against Women and the Social Construction of Masculinity in Oron, South-Coastal Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study explores intimate partner violence against women and the social construction of masculinity using data from focus group discussions with 46 men in Oron, a semi-urban community in south-coastal Nigeria. Findings indicate that intimate partner violence is a socially-accepted male behaviour as well as a mechanism for curbing transgression of traditional gender roles by women. It is anchored on the religious tenet of male headship, and is aggravated by decline in men's capacity to perform their traditional roles as bread winners for the household due to poverty and unemployment. Findings further show that men recognize that they are not passive victims of socio-cultural forces, but human agents who enact and challenge cultural traditions. Their awareness of the negative effects of intimate partner violence on women's health and the family, and recognition of the roles of different sectors of the society in responding to the problem provides leverage for policy and interventions addressing intimate partner violence in Nigeria.

Keywords: culture, gender, intimate partner violence, masculinity, women.

1. INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a problem of global magnitude. A review of population-based surveys show that between 10 to 69 percent of women have been physically assaulted at least once by an intimate male partner (Schuler and Islam 2008). The most common form of IPV the world over is physical abuse of women by their spouses or other intimate male partners (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottomoeller 1999). IPV is part of a pattern of abusive behaviour and control rather than an isolated act of physical aggression. It takes different forms, including psychological abuse, such as constant belittling of the woman by her spouse, intimidations and humiliations, sexual coercion, as well as other behaviours that demonstrate men's dominance and control over women such as isolating a woman from friends and relations, monitoring her activities, and various forms of deprivations.

IPV is associated with negative health consequences, including injuries, gynecological disorders, mental health problems, adverse pregnancy outcomes and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), such as HIV/AIDS (Heise, Ellsberg

and Gottemoeller 1999). Women who have experienced sexual abuse are much more likely to utilize family planning services clandestinely, and to have a partner refuse to use condom to prevent disease (Garcia-Moreno and Watts 2000). Survivors of IPV are more likely to practice high-risk sexual behaviour, experience unintended pregnancies and suffer sexual dysfunction (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller 1999). Victims of IPV average more surgeries, physician and pharmacy visits, hospital stays and mental health consultations than other women (Heise 1998). IPV is a major cause of death among women of reproductive age in developing countries (Heise, Pitanguy and Germain 1994).

IPV is most common within cultures where gender roles are strictly defined and enforced; where masculinity is closely associated with toughness, male honour or dominance; where punishment of women and children is socially accepted, and where violence is a standard way of resolving conflicts (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller 1999). Young women (Schuler, Hashemi, Riley and Akhter 1996; Koenig, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy and Campbell 2003; Nadved and Persson 2005), uneducated women (Islam, Mailman, Acharya et. al. 2004; Schuler, Hashemi, Riley and Akhter 1996), women whose husbands are uneducated (Koeng, Stephenson, Ahmed, Jejeebhoy and Campbell 2003), women from poor households (Bates, Schuler, Islam and Islam 2004), and women who earn income independent of their spouse, and contribute to household livelihood (Bates, Schuler, Islam and Islam 2004; Nadved and Persson 2005) are at greater risk of experiencing IPV.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the toleration of violence against women for transgressing gender roles is widespread. The reported prevalence of IPV in the region ranges from 20 to 71% (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottomoeller 1999; Ezechi et. al. 2004). This is believed to be under-estimation because of poor reporting and lack of standardized methods of estimation (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottomoeller 1999). African societies are patriarchal in nature and women have limited decision making power and access to resource, and this increases their vulnerability to IPV (Takyi and Dodoo 2005). Egalitarian decision-making in the household and equality in contribution to household welfare are associated with reduced acceptance of IPV (Mann and Takyi 2009).

In many African societies it is a prerogative of men to chastise their wives (Ofei-aboagye 1994). In these societies IPV is sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, or through misinterpretation of religious tenets (Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi 2009). A study using data from the demographic and health surveys (DHSs) in 17 sub-Saharan African countries show that women are more likely to justify IPV than men (Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi 2009). Age (the aged), socio-economic status (the affluent), educational attainment (the educated) and media exposure were associated with negative attitudes towards IPV. Societal attitudes towards IPV are among the key factors sustaining the practice in African societies, and changes in attitudes are essential in addressing IPV in the region.

IPV is a major problem in Nigeria, the most common form being physical violence. About 28% of Nigerian women between the ages of 15–49 years have experienced physical violence since age 15 (NPC/ICF 2004). A study shows that 42% of male respondents reported violating their wives, while 23% of female respondents reported experiencing IPV (Fawole, Aderonmu & Fawole, 2005). Another study reported a 28% prevalence of violence during pregnancy among women attending post-natal clinic in southwestern Nigeria (Olagbuji et. al., 2010). A study of IPV among women living with HIV/AIDS in northern Nigeria show that of the 67% who disclosed their status to their partners, 22% experienced IPV following disclosure (Iliyasu et. al., 2011). Age, educational status, alcohol use, and tolerance of IPV have been identified as predictors of IPV (Fawole, Aderonmu & Fawole, 2005; Nelson, 2014; Illika, 2005). Although it is widely recognized that IPV is a gender-based violence, few studies investigate the link between socio-cultural definitions of gender and IPV in Nigeria. This study seeks to contribute to filling this gap through a qualitative exploration of IPV against women and the social construction of masculinity in a Nigerian community.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Simplistic definitions of 'gender', such as 'socially-defined appropriate roles of men and women in society', do not capture the complex and tenuous nature of gender. While such definitions acknowledge that gender is socially-constructed based on biological criteria (e.g the sex organs), the relationship between biology and cultural processes are more complex and reflexive than they suppose (Rossi 1984). The usefulness of these conceptualizations are further limited by the fact that, while they eschew essentialized notions of gender based on a naïve biological determinism, they retain a conception of sex-linked behaviours and traits as properties of individuals (West and Zimmerman 1987). Thus, they fail to grasp the fact that roles are situated and mutable, rather than fixed and continuous identities. Furthermore, as Thorne (1980) has pointed out, conceptualizing gender as a role makes it difficult to assess its influence on other roles and limits its explanatory usefulness in analysis of power and inequality.

Gender is a set of social and cultural practices that influences the lives of men and women in society. Constructed through 'prescribed processes of teaching, learning, emulation and enforcement', gender is 'one of the major ways that people organize their social life' (Lorber 1994). It is the 'routine grounds of everyday activities', a familiar part of daily life which is recognized when its conventionalized expressions are spurned or interrupted. West and Zimmerman (1987) understand gender ethno-methodologically as 'a routine, methodical accomplishment' enacted through 'a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micro-political activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine "natures"'. They further argue that gender is an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale

for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions in society. Gender is therefore not an expression of 'essential sexual natures' of men and women. It consists of a configuration of conventionalized behaviour which display 'the culture's idealization of feminine and masculine natures' (Goffman 1976). The accomplishment of gender is influenced by specific social circumstances and is appreciated by others in relation to these circumstances.

As an emergent property of social interaction, gender is 'constantly created and recreated… out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life' (Lorber 1994). The boundaries of gender are permeable, allowing individuals to move from one gender to another, but the sex categories to which individuals belong are predetermined and fixed. Although gender is 'accomplished' by individual men and women, the process of such accomplishment is structured by existing institutional arrangements and patterns of interactions. Gendered social arrangements are 'justified by religion and cultural productions and backed by law' (Lorber 1994). The most powerful mechanism for perpetuating the moral hegemony of the dominant gender ideology is the invisibility of the processes involved in its production (Foucault 1972; Gramsci 1971). The institutionalization of the processes of its production renders gendered social arrangements 'natural' and 'normal', thereby legitimating hierarchical arrangements. As West and Zimmerman (1987) observed, 'in doing gender, men are doing dominance and women are doing deference'.

The concept of 'masculinity' is used to name 'conduct which is oriented to or shaped by that domain (gender), as distinct from conduct related to other patterns in social life' (Connell 2002). It is based on the view that men and women think and act the ways they do not because of their role identities or psychological traits, but because of concepts of femininity and masculinity they learn from their culture (Pleck, Sonenstein and Ku 1994; Courtenay 2000). Earlier (psychoanalytical) studies of gender made use of the concept of 'male sex role' to explain this process of learning of norms for conduct among men. But as Connell (1987) points out, the sex role theory was inadequate for understanding diversity in masculinity. As a result, recent works on masculinity focuses on how gender patterns are constructed and practiced (Connell 2002).

Social constructionism explores situationally formed gender identities, practices and representations of men. According to this approach, masculinity, understood as a set of subjective ideas and practices that enable men to achieve and project a hegemonic position, is not a static, essentialist and monolithic category, but a set of socially constructed relationships which are produced and reproduced through people's actions. It is constructed in different societal and historical spaces. Consequently to understand masculinity one has to understand how masculinity is variably constructed as a social phenomenon (Campbell and Bell 2000). Since masculinity is constructed differently across cultural and historical contexts, some scholars refer to it in the plural form - 'masculinities'.

Masculinity is also constructed in dynamic, dialectic relationships (Connell 1995). Like gender, masculinity is 'something one does, and does repeatedly, in interaction with others' (West and Zimmerman 1987). It does not 'exist prior to social behaviour, either as bodily states or fixed personalities. Rather masculinities come into existence as people act. They are accomplished in everyday conduct or organizational life, as patterns of practice' (Connell 2002). Since it is both achieved and demonstrated, masculinity is best understood as a noun (Kaschak 1992; Bohan 1993; Crawford 1995). It is not settled or given, but involves a complex and sustained effort at constructing identity and relationships. Masculinity is not a simple, homogenous pattern. The social construction of masculinity is fraught with contradictions, and reveals contradictory desires and logic. It also embeds multiple possibilities and complexities which are capable of generating tensions and changes in gender patterns.

The concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' refers to hierarchy and dominance in the social construction of masculinity. Some versions of masculinity occupy a dominant position in a given cultural setting. Connell (2002) points out that the hegemonic quality signifies a position of cultural leadership and authority and not total dominance, since other masculinities persist and may be more common. Hegemonic masculinity is highly visible, and dominant even in relation to the entire gender order, expressing 'the privilege men collectively have over women'. It is the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations' (Connell, 1995), and the version regarded as legitimate, 'natural', or unquestionable in a particular set of gender relations (Campbell and Bell 2000).

3. MASCULINITY IN NIGERIA

Gender did not feature as a prominent basis of social organization in pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Among the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa ethnic groups age, rather than sex, was the most significant category in the structure of society (Amadiume 1997; Oyewumi 1997; Last 2005). The coming of colonialism and foreign religions (Christianity and Islam) occasioned changes in the organization of traditional societies (Harris 2012). From the Muslim Fulani people, Hausa people borrowed the practice of female seclusion (Salamone 2007), while Igbo Christian converts learned notions of male superiority and female subordination where boys were trained to participate in public life while the girls were prepared for domestic servitude (Labode 1993).

Gender-based inequalities were accentuated by the introduction of wage labour under colonial administration. Men's work in the public was regarded as 'productive work' which attracted pay, while women's domestic work was considered 'reproductive work' and was not remunerated. The dichotomy between productive and reproductive work reinforced emerging gender roles and socio-cultural constructions of personhood where the male bread-winner becomes

a normative category and a dominant element of gender ideology (Harris 2012). Although this ideal is not always realizable in practice and some women may earn more income than men (Cornwall 2003), yet expectancies of gender roles obligates men to provide for the family and to regard themselves as failures when they cannot fulfill their role expectations.

Following decline in oil revenue and the maleficence of structural adjustment programme of the 1980s and 90s, the Nigerian economy has undergone a decline 'marked by a steadily deepening economic crisis which has had adverse, far-reaching consequences for various sectors of the economy and the living standards of most Nigerians' (Olukoshi, 1993). The crisis has pushed a large section of the population out of the formal sector into the informal sector or unemployment. Many Nigerian men find it difficult to get a steady employment. Thus, the economic forces that created the bread-winner as a social category also dismantled the material basis of its legitimacy (Harris, 2012).

One of the outcomes of this dynamic is the 'uneasy coexistence of a masculine cultural ideal lacking the material underpinning that produced it, in a cultural setting in which the defining element of adult masculinity, the ability to exert effective control over wives and children, has so long depended on control over material resources' (Silberschmidt, 2001). This situation has generated a crisis of masculinity for Nigerian men who have found it increasingly difficult to assert their identities as men in the family. The resort to violence by men as a way of asserting control and validating masculine identity has become common, and the most common expression of male violence is against their intimate female partners.

4. METHODS AND DATA

4.1 THE STUDY SETTING

There is limited published ethnographic information on the people of Oron. The available information is derived from historical and ethnographic writings on the Ibibio, the larger ethnic group of which Oron is considered a sub-group (Udo 1982). These sources, along with oral history, form the basis of the following description. Geographically, Oron is located between latitudes 50° North and longitude 90° East. It is situated at the right bank of the lower estuary of the Cross River. It shares a common boundary with Mbo Local Government Area (LGA) to the South and South-East; Okobo LGA to the North and North-East; Esit Eket and Ibeno LGAs to the South-West and Cross River State in the North-East.

The area inhabited by the people of Oron is located in the flood plain of Southeastern Nigeria, and the land is intersected by numerous streams and tributaries flowing into the Cross River. The coastline stretches from *Uya Oro* to *Udun Uko*. The ancestry of the Oron people is disputed. Places such as Igbo-land

and Palestine have been named as their origin. According to a respected Ibibio historian, Oron people are an extraction of the Ibibio ethnic group (Udo, 1982). They migrated from the central Ibibio to their current settlement in the hinterland of the Ibibio country. Oron people speak *Oro*, a dialectical variation of the Ibibio language. They occupy five (5) Local Government Areas (LGAs) under the present geo-political system. These LGAs are *Oron*, *Mbo*, *Okobo*, *Udun Uko* and *Urueofong Oruko*.

Oron people practiced traditional religion in the past. Contact with western missionaries led to conversion to Christianity. Although Oron economy was originally based on fishing, the area quickly developed into major trading centers as imported European goods were traded for Palm Produce and other items. Oron is a patri-lineal society where descent is traced from the male line to an epic male ancestor. The community is organized on the basis of segmentary lineages, marked by the absence of hierarchical or centralized socio-political structures (Beattie 1964). This include minimal lineage (*idip ete*), which is the nuclear family made up of a man, his wife and children; minor lineage (*ufok*) and maximal lineage (*ekpuk*).

The basic social distinctions in Oron are based on age and sex, the latter being the most rigidly defined. The family is the basic unit of social organization. The father figure is primarily a disciplinarian and the culturally acknowledged head of the family (Charles 2005). Women and children live under the control of the man. The roles of men and women are defined by local gender norms. Women are answerable to their husbands. Intimate partner violence, notably wife battery, is prevalent and widely condoned in Oron. It is a mechanism for checking the transgression of gender roles by women. Data from the National Demographic and Health Survey (NPC/ICF 2004) show that Akwa Ibom State has the second highest prevalence rate of 59.5%. Data on the prevalence of IPV in Oron is unavailable, but observation shows that IPV is prevalent in the area.

Domestic violence against women is a normative practice in Oron. The enforcement of traditional gender roles, religious beliefs and the consumption of alcoholic beverages are major determinants of IPV in the area. Among Oron people, being a man means being 'tough', 'head-strong', 'courageous', 'aggressive', 'unapologetic' and 'un-emotional'. Traditional socialization practices train men be warriors, leaders, decision makers and bread winners. On the other hand, women are socialized to be house wives and domestic servants who carry out the wishes of men. These practices encourage violence in inter-personal relationships, especially among couples.

The consumption of alcoholic beverages is a practice of historical and cultural depth in Oron. The people are known for their home-made brews and traditional liquor production. Men are the most dominant drinkers. Heavy episodic drinking is the signature pattern of drinking. Men drink six to eight bottles of commercial beer in a single drinking episode (Nelson 2014). Drinking patterns are justified by socio-cultural and geographical realities (coastal habitat and the fishing economy). Drinking is a major determinant of IPV. For example, 65% of

participants in a study said 'they were more likely to be infuriated by their spouses' behaviour when they are drunk than when they are sober' (Nelson 2014, p. 62).

IPV in Oron is legitimated by religious beliefs. For instance, the belief in male headship is used by participants in this study to justify violence against their spouses. But the role of religion in IPV depends on interpretations of religious teachings. Thus, whereas the notion of male headship is interpreted as control, some interpretations emphasis leadership. Observations show that the latter view of male headship is espoused by most educated and socially progressive men. Therefore, education and social mobility may curtail normative cultural practices, including IPV. But some educated Oron men hold the traditional view of masculinity. This means that the relationship between education and IPV in Oron is not uni-directional.

4.2   DATA AND ANALYTIC PROCEDURES

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) data collected as part of a descriptive survey are used in this paper. The larger study involved in-depth individual interviews with 413 participants and FGDs with 46 male participants. Data from the individual interviews will be reported in a forthcoming article. The FGD participants were recruited purposively. Following the procedure outlined by MacDougall and Fudge (2001), characteristics of potential participants were described (including knowledge and experience) and those who possessed these characteristics were identified, contacted and asked to participate in the FGD. Recruitment and FGD sessions continued until little new information was being obtained (Baum, 1998). The discussions were tape-recorded, while notes were taken by a field assistant. FGDs allowed for an elaborate exploration of the study questions. Recorded discussions were transcribed by field assistants. The data was analyzed thematically following the data reduction, display and verification procedure (Miles and Huberman 1994). This involved thorough examination of the accounts of participants by fitting them within analysis matrixes. Attention was given to the themes and patterns emerging from the data. The broad themes where refined through the development of sub-themes and their properties. This process continued until the point of analytic saturation was reached.

Focus group discussion has the advantages of being 'data rich, flexible, stimulating to respondents, recall aiding and cumulative elaborative' (Fontana and Frey, 1994). Focus group discussions generate interactional data which enhances disclosure, access to participants own language and concepts, the production of more elaborate accounts and the co-construction of meaning (Wilkinson, 1998). The limitation is that the findings are subjective and cannot be generalized since they cannot be regarded as representative of the wider population (Robinson, 1999). But this does not take anything away from the study since it focused on particular attitudes and practices of the respective case study so that the findings

are context specific (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). Furthermore, subjective and inter-subjective accounts often say more about a phenomenon than does a dull and phoney objectivity because not all that counts can be counted, and not all that can be counted counts (Nyamnjoh, 2005).

5. RESULTS

5.1 PARTICIPANTS: PROFILE AND VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

Participants were between the ages of 31 and 45 years. Their mean age was 38 years. Majority of the participants (47%) had secondary education. There was no illiterate in the sample. Most participants were married (76%); only a few of them were divorced or separated (8%). Majority of the participants were employed in various occupations ranging from white collar jobs to commercial activities. Only a few participants (10%) were unemployed. All participants were Christians, mostly of the Methodist church denomination.

	#	%
Age		
25 – 35	28	60
35 – 45	18	39
Educational level		
Primary	11	23
Secondary	22	47
Tertiary	13	28
Marital status		
Single	7	15
Married	35	76
Divorced/separated	4	8
Occupation		
White collar	19	41
Self-employed	22	47
Unemployed	5	10

Table 1. *Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (n=46).* Source: Fieldwork, 2012.

A significant proportion of participants (32.7%) admitted that they have physically abused their spouses within the past month. A small percentage (17.9%) reported using verbal threats on their spouses. Others (12.8%) admitted refusing to give money for the upkeep of the household as a way of checking their spouse's insubordination. The reasons the participants gave for abusing their spouses ranged from neglect of domestic responsibility to suspicion of infidelity.

Although majority of the participants said they have never abused their spouses, they shared the view that physical abuse was a common practice. But a few participants questioned IPV against women.

5.2   GENDER ROLES, MALE HEADSHIP AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF IPV

IPV in the research community is influenced by ideas of what it means to be a man, including the notion of male headship as contained in religious teachings. Majority of participants (89.7%) asserted that the man is the head of the family. They stated that the hierarchical structure of the traditional family unit has the man at the apex. This means that he is in a position of authority over the woman. Therefore, the proper role of the woman is submission to her husband. By 'submission' they meant respecting, obeying and deferring to the husband, not disputing or challenging his authority[1]. A participant stated:

> *The Bible says that the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife should submit to her husband. There is a saying that two captains cannot stir the same ship. When a man and a woman seek to rule in the family, there will be problem. The man will tell the wife, "I am the head of this house so stay in your role".*

Headship was said to imply 'uncontested authority', and the woman was supposed to live under the man's authority. Women were enjoined to respect their husbands since they shoulder the responsibility of providing for the family. The example was given that were the husband returns home late, the wife should show understanding rather than nag. A woman who nags instead of appreciating the husband's efforts will incur his displeasure. Some participants, however, opined that men should not adopt a life-style that irritates their spouses as such will encourage nagging. They urged men to always consider the feeling of their wives, and refrain from what will breed ill-feelings. A participant told us:

> *The man should not continue to a live a kind of life that will make his wife complain. Women don't just complain; there must be a reason for the complaint. So I say to the men, 'think about your wife's feeling when you want to act'.*

Most participants maintained that violence was due to usurpation of gender roles by women. It was pointed out that if a woman abides in her position of subjection to her husband the couple will live together in harmony and the husband will show her love. But a woman who does not submit to her husband will not enjoy

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[1]   Participants often quoted Ephesians 5 v 22 (that wives should submit to their husbands) out of context to support cultural practices. This method is questionable because a text taken out of context becomes a pretext for anything one wish to say.

harmonious relationship. The marks of insubordination in a woman includes being argumentative, flouting the man's instructions, doing things without his approval, not taking care of the children, neglecting domestic chores, disrespecting his relatives, serving meals late, denying him sex, and allegation of extramarital affair. We were told:

> *A woman should understand that she is under subjection to the man. That is what the word of God says. If you read the Bible, you will find that God is the head of the man, and the man is the head of the woman … A woman must submit to the man for there to be peace in the home.*

Agreeing that the man is the head in a marital union, some participants challenged the abuse of women in the name of headship. They opined that women are not inferior to men. Therefore, even though women are expected to be submissive, they should not be lorded over or oppressed by men. The authority of the man over his wife was said to be based on altruism and self-sacrificing love rather than physical force. A participant pointed out:

> *A woman is not a punching bag for the man. She is his companion to be loved and esteemed. It is true that the man is the head of the marriage union, but that does not mean that the woman is the door mat. Headship means selfless love, not using force. Any man who beats his wife will never receive her willing submission.*

Participants' accounts show that violence against women is a conventionalized male behaviour. A man was said to show his authority by making his wife submissive. A participant stated, *if a man has been married for many years and his neighbors have never heard him beat his wife, then something is wrong*. Others opined that any man who cannot make his wife submit to him has been domesticated by the woman. Such a man is called a 'woman wrapper'. We were told:

> *Men take pride in beating their wives because it is impossible for a woman not to provoke a man. A man is respected if he is able to control his wife. If you don't beat her, everybody will think she is controlling you. But if they hear her scream when you beat her, they will say that you are a real man.*

5.3 ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, MALE IDENTITY CRISIS AND IPV

The participants' accounts reveal a link between violence against women and the frustrations men experience on account of poverty and unemployment. The majority of people in research the community are poor by conventional standards. A recent survey estimates that about 71% of the people live below the poverty line (FERT, 2013). Poverty in the area is partly due to the unavailability of means of gainful employment. Opportunities for formal employment are limited. Most of the people earn a precarious living from various sectors of the informal economy.

Poverty undermines men's capacity to provide for their families. Participants explained that a man who does not have financial resources to meet family needs, either because he is unemployed or because his earnings are meager, will become aggressive. The slightest provocation from the wife will be met with violence. They observed that the situation is worsened if the wife is the sole bread winner or earns more money and contributes more to the upkeep of the family. In this case, the man regards minor disagreements as insubordination. He will think that the wife is disrespecting him because she is the one providing for the family. A participant remarked, *if your wife is the one doing everything at home, you will think she will not respect you.*

Others expressed a different opinion. They maintained that hardship does not justify physical violence against women. They also opined that not all poor or unemployed men abuse their wives. According to one of the participants, *some men have fragile ego. They think that inability to fulfill one's responsibilities to the family is an excuse for being aggressive.*

5.4 NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES OF IPV AND RELEVANT RESPONSES

Participants acknowledged that violence against women is associated with many negative consequences. They stated that IPV can undermine the living condition of the family and divert limited financial resources to healthcare services for the abused woman. They also commented eloquently on the health consequences of violence, including physical injuries, impairments and disabilities, and negative reproductive health outcomes. Violence can also lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression and suicide ideation. Constant threats of abuse was said to cause mental distress. Participants pointed out that verbal abuse can affect a woman's self-esteem and lead to the development of compulsive behaviour such as alcoholism and eating disorders. A participant reflected:

Violence in the home can cause all kinds of problems. It can lead to injuries and the person may have to be treated at the hospital. I have witnessed a

> *situation where a man hit his wife with his fist and she collapsed. She had to be taken to the hospital.*

In view of the negative consequences of IPV on women's health and the welfare of the family, participants made suggestions on how to tackle it. They maintained that the first step was for the woman to voluntarily submit to her husband. If women submit to their husbands, there will peace in the home. But if submission is lacking, problem will persist. A participant stated:

> *Any woman who wants to lord over her husband will always have problem because the man, as the head of the home, will not agree. To resolve this problem, a woman must submit to the husband. This will bring peace to the home.*

Most participants (87%) objected to the involvement of the police in addressing violence against women. The reason they gave was that the Nigerian police is inefficient in handling cases of domestic violence and often discriminate against women who report cases of violations. They also observed that IPV is a private issue which should be handled privately. Religious leaders were enjoined to condemn IPV and encourage couples in their congregations to live in peace. They were also urged to provide counselling and spiritual support to enable people make peace and rebuild their marriages.

The government was tasked with job creation to reduce unemployment and frustration. A participant stated; *if a man has something to do and is able to provide for his family, frustration and anger will reduce*. The courts, including alternative dispute resolution agencies, were seen as a stakeholder in the campaign against IPV. The participants stated that when culprits of IPV are punished by the courts, potential abusers will be deterred. A participant observed:

> *The law court has something to do here. I am saying so because most people are afraid of being convicted and sentenced to prison. So if the court is not involved, a lot of people will still be violent towards their partners. The fear of being sentenced to jail can help in reducing violence.*

The role of traditional rulers in stemming IPV was said to be very important. As custodians of the traditions of the people, it is believed that they can use their position to intervene and restore peace in destabilised homes. They were said to be in a position to assist because they are respected by community members and it is to them that most people turn when they have marital problems. A participant remarked:

> *These problems of domestic violence, the people who are in a good position to address them are the traditional fathers. Matters of family conflicts are usually taken to them. So they can help solve this problem. They should be involved in tackling the problem.*

The media was also considered a veritable partner in the campaign against IPV. Participants pointed out that the media should educate the public on human rights and the negative effects of IPV. They expressed the conviction that public enlightenment will go a long way to change men's attitudes and promote respect for the rights of women.

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated IPV against women and the social construction of masculinity in Nigeria. Confirming previous findings (Counts, Brown and Campbell 1999; Jejeeboy 1998), the study shows that male violence is a culturally acceptable male response to perceived women's insubordination. It also confirms the finding that men abuse their spouses in order to assert their gendered position of authority in the household (Fawole, Aderonmu and Fawole 2005; Hatcher et. al., 2013). Furthermore, women's conduct which is said to provoke men to violence constitutes transgressions of traditional gender roles (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottemoeller 1999). Men use violence to resist transgressive female conducts because they imply an attempt by women to spurn male dominance and control. Male violence constitutes a cultural practice by means of which men assert and maintain control over women, thereby reinforcing their identity as men (Ofei-aboagye 1994).

Male violence against their intimate partner is aggravated by poverty and unemployment, which undermines men's roles as bread winners for the family. Poverty and unemployment causes men to panic over failure to fulfill their traditional roles, and threatens their ability to exercise control over their spouses and children, thereby precipitating a crisis of masculinity. This resonates with Heise, Ellsberg and Gottomoeller (1999) who argue that poverty tends to generate stress, frustration and a sense of inadequacy among men for failing to live up to their traditional roles as bread winners. Similarly, Strebel, Crawford and Shefer (2006) contend that failure to provide for the family tends to encourage men's violence towards their partners as their feelings of powerlessness may be used to justify and/or excuse it. Boonzaier (2005) suggests that when men cannot sustain a gendered position of power over their female partners, they may experience a crisis of masculine identity that induces violent behaviour. Supporting these findings, this study shows that the threat posed to male dominance by poverty and unemployment has the potential to escalate violence against women.

The study also links IPV against women to religious tenets. The notion of men's authority and women's subordination are supported by religious teachings. The transgression of these 'divinely-ordained' gender roles by women is what triggers domestic violence. Religious teachings are interpreted in a manner that preserves the gender hierarchy. This echoes Uthman, Lawoko and Moradi (2009), who related IPV against women to misinterpretation of religious teachings. This study shows that misinterpretation results from emphasizing those elements in the

religious texts which privilege men's position of authority, and de-emphasizing countervailing elements. The meaning of scriptural texts is considered self-evident, or taken for granted. On the contrary, 'the meaning of a given text is never definitively captured but is always sought and constructed as it is lived out' (Lash 1988). Traditional interpretations of religious teachings support the status quo, making it is difficult for women to challenge male violence or (re)negotiate unfavourable gender roles. Thus, contrary to Illika's (2005) argument that scriptural teachings support women's subordination, this study suggests that scriptural passages are interpreted in a way that provides support for gender inequality.

Further, the study reveals that men are aware of the socio-cultural factors shaping violence against women. They also recognize the negative effects of violence on women's health and family welfare. Although they perceived themselves to be human agents capable of autonomous actions, they also recognized that their actions conform to conventionalized male behaviour. Some of them even challenge traditional ideas of how men ought to behave. This goes against extant view of men as 'perpetrators' and 'assailants', which ignores men's agency and leads to their exclusion from intervention on domestic violence. The findings of this study highlight the need to involve men in interventions on domestic violence.

Findings suggest the need for an expanded and multi-sectoral approach to the problem of domestic violence. Government should pursue poverty reduction and job creation in order to reduce structural enablers of domestic violence. The mass media and the religious and traditional institutions have a duty to educate the public on the effects of violence as well as the rights and dignity of persons, especially women. At the community level, traditional rulers and religious leaders could also serve as mediators assisting couples in resolving differences and rebuilding their families. The legal system has a role to play in developing relevant legislations on domestic violence, including domestication of existing treaties such as the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Public perception of the police deserves attention. Anecdotal evidence suggests that police response to cases of domestic violence discourage complainants from reporting cases. This attitude deepens the silence surrounding domestic violence, and encourages violence by creating the impression that there is no price to pay for abuse. Measures to reform the police and increase its efficiency in handling cases of domestic violence are urgently needed to enable the police play its role in addressing IPV.

Furthermore, the study highlights questions and directions for future research on intimate partner violence. There is need for further studies on the link between religious beliefs, traditional gender roles, and intimate partner violence against women. There is also need for further research on the socio-economic enablers of intimate partner violence, including attitudes and practices relating to household finances and how these contribute to intimate partner violence.

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