

Community Norms and Cultural Attitudes and Beliefs Factors Influencing Violence Against Women of Reproductive Age in Nigeria

¹T.G Adegoke and ²Oladeji David

¹Department of Social Work, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

²Unit of Child Development and Family Studies, Department of Home and Hotel Management, Olabisi-Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

Abstract: This study examined the influence of men's right to control their wives' behaviour, discipline their wives by force, how dowry can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and how female, chastity and male honour serve to justify violence on violence among women of reproduction age in Nigeria. A total of 250 men and women from different professions drawn randomly in Ibadan constituted the sample for the study. The three instruments used were author-constructed questionnaires with 0.69, 0.72 and 0.66 reliability coefficients, respectively. The data obtained were analysed using multiple regression analysis. The results indicated that significant relationships existed between, men's right to control their wives' behaviour, discipline their wives by force, that bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and that, female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence but not with dowry demand. The results therefore, indicate the need for those in the helping professions, the government, community leaders and non-governmental organizations to mount strategies towards putting an end to violence against women.

Key words: Community norms, cultural attitudes, beliefs factors, influencing violence, reproductive age

INTRODUCTION

Violence against women is the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound social, psychological and health problems, sapping women's energy, compromising their physical health and eroding their self-esteem. Despite its high costs, almost every society in the world has social institutions that legitimize, obscure and deny abuse. The same acts that would be punished if directed at an employer, a neighbour, or an acquaintance often go unchallenged when man direct them at women, especially within the family.

For over two decades women's advocacy group around the world have been working to draw more attention to physical, psychological and sexual abuse of women and to stress the need for action. They have provided abused women with shelter, lobbied for legal reforms and challenged the widespread attitudes and beliefs that support violent behaviour against women (Heise, 1996).

Increasingly, these efforts are having results. Today, international institutions are speaking out against gender-based violence. Surveys and studies are collecting more information about the prevalence and nature of

abuse. More organizations, service providers and policy-makers are recognizing that violence against women has serious adverse consequences for women's health and for society.

In nearly 50 population-based surveys from around the world, 10% to over 50% of women report being hit or otherwise physically harmed by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives (CHANGE, 1999). Physical violence in intimate relationships almost always is accompanied by psychological abuse and, in one-third to over one-half of cases, by sexual abuse (Koss *et al.*, 1994; Leibreich *et al.*, 1995; CHANGE, 1999; Campbell and Soeken, 1999; Ellsberg *et al.*, 1999). For example, among 613 abused women in Japan, 57% had suffered all three types of abuse-physical, psychological and sexual. Only 8% had experienced physical abuse only (Yoshihama and Sorenson, 1994).

Most women who suffer any physical aggression generally experience multiple acts over time. In the Leon study, for example, 60% of women abused in the previous year were abused more than once and 20% experienced severe violence more than six times. Among women reporting any physical aggression, 70% reported severe abuse (Ellsberg *et al.*, 1999). The average number of

physical assaults in the previous year among currently abused women surveyed in London was 7 (Mooney, 1993) in the U.S. in 1997. In Nigeria and indeed, the sub-Saharan Africa, violence against women lacks statistics and records mainly because both the perpetrators and victims neither report the case to the law enforce agency for intervention, for the behaviour is considered a personal or family affairs.

Ending violence against women means changing the community norms and cultural attitudes and beliefs that give rise to men's abusive behaviour towards women and that permit it to persist. Changing community norms alone will not eliminate violence. Nevertheless, it is difficult to make progress until there is a consensus in society that violent behaviour is wrong.

A variety of norms and beliefs are particularly powerful in perpetrating violence against women. These include a belief that men are inherently superior to women that men have a right to "correct" female behaviour, that hitting is an appropriate way to discipline women, that a man's honour is linked to a woman's sexual behaviour and that family matters are private and it is inappropriate for others to intervene (Heise, 1998). Many cultures hold that man have the right to control their wives' behaviour and that women who challenge that right even by asking for household money or by expressing the needs of the children may be punished. In countries as different as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Mexico, Nigeria Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, studies find that violence is frequently viewed as physical chastisement-the husband's right to "correct" an erring wife (Bradley, 1985; Counts *et al.*, 1999; Jejeebhoy, 1998; Gonzalez, 1998; Armstrong, 1998). As one husband said in a focus-group discussion in Tamil-Nada, India, "if it is a great mistake then the husband is justified in beating his wife. Why not? A cow will not be obedient without beating" (Jejeebhoy, 1998).

In many developing countries, culturally, women share the notion that men have the right to discipline their wives by using force. In rural Egypt, for example, at least 80% of women say that beatings are justified under certain circumstances (El-Zanaty *et al.*, 1996; David and Chin, 1998; Bawah *et al.*, 1999). Not surprisingly, refusing sex is also one of the reasons women cite most often as triggering beatings (NSRRT and Jenkins, 1994; Zimmerman, 1995; Khan *et al.*, 1996; Wood and Jerokes, 1997).

Even where culture itself grants men substantial control over female behaviour, abusive men generally exceed the norm (Romero, 1994; Johnson, 1996; Rosales *et al.*, 1999). For example, data from the Nicaragua Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) show that, among women who were abused physically, 32% had

husbands who scored high on a scale of marital control compared with only 2% among women who were not abused physically. The scale included such behaviour as the husband's continually accusing his wife of being unfaithful and limiting her access to family and friends (Rosales *et al.*, 1999).

In recent years, for example, dowry has become an expected part of the marriage transaction in some countries, with future husbands demanding ever-increasing dowry both before and after marriage. Dowry demands can escalate into harassment, threats and abuse; in extreme cases the woman is killed or driven to suicide, freeing the husband to pursue another marriage and dowry (Schular *et al.*, 1996; Rao, 1997; Jha, 1999). Elsewhere, husbands are expected to pay "bridewealth" to compensate the bride's family for the loss of labour in her natal home. In parts of Africa and Asia this exchange has likewise become commercialized, with inflated bridewealth leaving many men with the impression that they have "purchased" a wife. In a recent survey in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, 82% of woman said it is culturally accepted that, if a man pays "Labola" (bridewealth) for his wife, it means that he owns her. Some 72% of women themselves agreed with this statement (Yemkes *et al.*, 1999).

Cultural attitudes towards female chastity and male honour also serve to justify violence against women and to exacerbate its consequences. In parts of Latin America and the Near East, a man's honour is often lined to the sexual purity of the women in his family. If a woman is "defiled" sexually-either through rape or by engaging voluntarily in sex outside marriage-she disgraces the family honour. For example, in some Arab societies the only way to "cleanse" the girl. A study of female homicide in Alexandria, Egypt found that 47% of all women killed were murdered by a relative after they had been raped (Graiton and Youssef, 1993). At a recent conference in Jordan, experts from six Arab countries estimated that at least several hundred Arab women die each year as a result of honour killing (Jehl, 1999).

Culture is neither static nor monolithic, however. Women's rights activists argue that communities must dismantle those aspects of culture that oppress women while preserving what is good. In the words of Ghanaian lawyer Rosemary Ofeibe Ofei-Aboagye, "A culture that teaches male mastery and domination over women must be altered" (Ofei-Aboagye, 1994). Although culture can aggravate women's vulnerability, it can also serve as a creative resource for intervention. Many traditional cultures have mechanism-such as public shaming or community healing-that can be mobilized as resources to confront abuse. Activists from Canada's Yukon Territory,

for example, have developed circle, sentencing, an updated version of the traditional sanctioning and healing practices of the Canadian aboriginal people. Within, the “circle” crime victims, offenders, justice and social service personnel, as well as community residents, listen to the victim’s story and deliberate about how best to “restore justice” to the victim and the community. Sentencing often includes reparation, community service, jail time, treatment requirements and community healing rituals (MIC, 1994; Basemore and Griffiths, 1999).

Most research work on violence against women focused on the nature, prevalence and causes. It is therefore, not to the knowledge of the researcher that studies linking violence on women and community norms and cultural attitudes and beliefs has ever been conducted in Nigeria. It is against this background that this study becomes relevant in filling such missing gaps in our knowledge in the issue of community norms and cultural attitudes and beliefs in the prevention of violence against women in Nigeria.

The purpose of this study, is to investigate the relationship of men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour, discipline their wives’ by force, how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence to violence against women of reproductive age.

In order to achieve the purpose of this study, the following research questions were answered:

- To what extent would men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour, discipline their wives by force, how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence when combined predict violence among women of reproductive age?
- What is the relative contribution of the factors to the prediction?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: This study adopted a descriptive survey research design in which questionnaires were employed in collecting data from the respondents on the variables studies.

Sample: A total of 250 participants both men and women were randomly drawn from officers of the Nigerian Police Force, Eleyele, Ibadan Force Headquarters, (31 male and 19 female officers); 50

professional Bankers, (21 men and 29 female) from 5 reputable banks in Ibadan; 50 professional teachers, (36 and 14 both from senior and junior secondary schools) in Ibadan; 50 officers of the Nigerian Army (4 male and 9 female officers) Odogbo Cantonment, Ibadan and 50 Nigerian Nurses (39 female and male) from University Teaching Hospital (UCH), Ibadan. The range of participants’ age was between 32 and 50 years with a mean age of 37.4 years and standard deviation of 9.69. All the participants are married with a minimum of 2 and maximum of 4 children.

Instrumentation: The 3 instruments used in this study were Self-Responding Questionnaire on Marital Violence (SQMV), Community Norms Inventory (CNV) and Attitudinal Scale on Culture and Beliefs (ASCB). He three instruments were author-constructed.

The Self-Responding Questionnaire on Marital Violence (SQMV) measures the likely causes and consequences of marital violence. It has 25 items rated on a 4 point likert-type scale. The respondents are to indicate their degree of agreement with each item by ticking, Strongly Agreed (SA) = 4; Agreed (A) = 3; Disagreed (2) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1. It has 0.69 and 0.72 as the internal consistency and revalidation reliability, respectively.

Community Norms Inventory (CNI) measures men’s right to control their wives behaviour, right to discipline their wives by force and see hw female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence. It has 15 items with True and False response format. It has 0.72 as the internal consistency and a test-retest reliability of 0.77.

Attitudinal scale on Culture and Beliefs (ASCB) measures how dowry demand escalates threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to wife purchasing and how culture aggravate women’s vulnerability. It has 15 items response format anchored on partly true to very untrue. The test-retest reliability of the scale was found to be 0.66 and 0.71, respectively.

All the three instruments were considered valid through the favourable comments of experts in psychometrics on the suitability of the items.

Procedure: The participants for the study were administered to three questionnaires with the assistance of 2 guidance counsellors. The collected questionnaires were scored and the data obtained from them were analysed to answer the research questions. On the whole, 250 copies of the questionnaires were distributed and returned fully filled, giving a return rate of 100%.

Data analysis: The data collected were analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis to establish the relationship between men’s right to control their wives behaviour, discipline their wives by force, how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to wife purchasing and how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence and violence among women of reproductive age.

RESULTS

Research question 1: Using a combination of the independent variables to predict violence among women of productive age.

Table 1 a and b show that a combination of the 5 independent variables, men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour, discipline their wives by force, how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing wife and how female chastity and male honour serves to justify violence in predicting violence among woman of reproductive age gave a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.4821 and multiple R-square (R²) of 0.2324 accounting for 23.2% of the variance of violence among women of reproductive age. Table 1b also shows that the analysis produced the fishers value F-ratio of 10.212 at 0.05 alpha level. The table further shows that F-ratio is significant which implies that the R² value is not due to chance.

Table 2 shows for each independent variable, the standardize Regression Weight (B), the Standard Error Estimate (SEB), the Beta, the T-ratio and the level at which the T-ratio is significant. As indicated in the table, the T-ratio associated with four variables (Men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour, discipline their wives by force, have bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence) were significant at 0.05 alpha level. The contribution of how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence to the prediction of violence among women of reproductive age was not significant.

Table 3 shows the intercorrelation coefficients between the independent variables and violence among women of reproductive age. Most of the correlations were significant at 0.05 alpha level. For instance, men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour, has $r = 0.23, p < 0.05$, men’s right to discipline their wives by force has $r = 0.161, p < 0.05$; how dowry can escalate threat and violence has $r = 0.126, p > 0.05$ and how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife has $r = 0.243, p < 0.05$.

Table 1a,b: Regression analysis on sample data using a combination of independent variables to predict violence among women of reproductive age

| | |
|---------------------|--------|
| Multiple R = | 0.4821 |
| Multiple R-square = | 0.2324 |
| Adjusted R-square = | 0.1021 |
| Standard errors = | 8.2143 |

| Analysis of variance | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----|---------------|-------------|---------|------|
| Sources of variation | Df | Sum of square | Mean square | F-ratio | P |
| Regression | 10 | 1073.77 | 107.377 | * | |
| Residual | 240 | 2029.442 | 10.514 | 10.212 | .05 |
| Total | 250 | 3166.219 | | | 5ddd |

*Significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 2: Testing the significance on relative contribution to the prediction of regression weight of independent variables

| Variable description | STD. REG | | | | |
|---|----------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| | WT. (B) | SEB | Beta | T-value | P-value |
| Men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour | 2.330 | 0.469 | 0.075 | 4.959 | .05 |
| Men’s right to discipline their wives by force | 1.319 | 0.434 | 0.236 | 3.038 | .05 |
| How dowry demand can escalate threat and violence | -0.647 | 0.673 | -0.078 | -0.961 | NS |
| How bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife | 1.276 | 0.471 | 0.0271 | 2.712 | .05 |
| How female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence | -1.449 | 0.376 | -0.0066 | -3.851 | .05 |
| Constant | 48.472 | 3.851 | 12.587 | .000 | |

Table 3: Inter-correlation between the variables

| Variable description | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---|
| Men’s right to control their wives’ behaviour | - | | | | |
| Men’s right to discipline their wives by force | ** .732 | - | | | |
| How dowry can escalate threat and violence | ** .242 | * .180 | - | | |
| How bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife | ** .321 | ** .599 | ** .272 | - | |
| How female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence | ** .223 | -.161 | .126 | ** .243 | - |

**Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

DISCUSSION

The major goal of this study was to find out the influence of men’s right to control their wives behaviour, discipline their wives by force, how dowry demand can escalate threat and violence, how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife and how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence on violence among women of reproductive age.

In Table 1 a and b the total influence of these factors on violence among women of reproductive age accounted for only 23.2% of the overall causes. This

means that 76.8% of the factors responsible lies outside the findings of this study. Also, the observed F-ratio on Table 1 which is significant at 0.05 alpha level indicates that the effectiveness of the combined effects of the component variables in predicting violence among women could not be attributed to chance. The results also show that men's right to control their wives' behaviour is the most potent contributor to the prediction followed by how female chastity and male honour serve to justify violence, men's right to discipline their wives by force and how bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife in that order.

Men's right to control their wives' behaviour was shown to significantly relate to violence among women. This result agrees with Heise (1998). This result is also in agreement with Bradley (1985), Counts *et al.* (1999), Zimmerman (1995), Schuler *et al.* (1996), Jejeebhoy (1998), Osakwe and Hilber (1998), Michau (1998), Gonzalez (1998) and Armstrong (1998).

The result obtained in this study also showed that men's right to discipline their wives by force was a significant contributor to the prediction of violence among women. This result agrees with that El-Zandty *et al.* (1996). Furthermore, the result from this study showed that bridewealth is synonymous to purchasing a wife. This result is consistent with the works of Jewkes *et al.* (1999) but at variance with the works of Romero (1994) and Johnson (1996).

Female chastity and male honour that justified violence was considered significant in this study. This finding supports the work of Graitcer and Youssef (1993) and Jehl (1999). Dowry demand which often escalate threat and violence was not found to significantly predict violence among women in this study. This result of this finding is at variance from the works of Schuler *et al.* (1996), Rao (1997) and Jha (1999).

CONCLUSION

Ending violence against women requires strategies coordinated among many sectors of society and at community and national levels. Agenda for change must include:

- Empowering women and girls;
- Raising the costs of abusers;
- Providing for the needs of victims;
- Coordinating institutional and individual responses;
- Involving youth;
- Increase women's access to and control over economic resources;
- Increase access to education for women and girls;
- Strengthen women in leadership and decision-making;

- Eliminate laws that discriminate against women and children;
- Increase women's access to health and social information and women's control over their own bodies;
- Improve women's self-esteem and sense of personal power.

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