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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ITS SOCIOECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES ON FAMILIES IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue globally, with profound socioeconomic consequences. This study explores the manifestations of domestic violence and its socioeconomic impact on families in Southeastern Nigeria. The research utilizes a multidisciplinary approach, drawing from sociology, economics, and gender studies. The study highlights the pervasive nature of domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria and its profound socioeconomic impacts on families. It also finds that domestic violence perpetuates poverty, limits educational opportunities for children, disrupts family stability, and exacerbates gender inequality. These findings emphasize the urgent need for multifaceted interventions addressing cultural norms, economic vulnerabilities, and weak institutional frameworks. Recommendations include strengthening legal frameworks, promoting gender-sensitive education, and implementing community-based interventions.

Keyword: Domestic, Cultural, Families, Society, Relationship, Legal, Violence, South-East, Nigeria

Introduction

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that affects families, communities, and nations, undermining social and economic stability. It refers to patterns of abusive behaviors by one partner to maintain power and control over another in an intimate or family relationship (World Health Organization, 2013). Globally, it is estimated that one in three women experiences physical or sexual violence, predominantly by an intimate partner (UN Women, 2020). However, domestic violence is not limited to women; men, children, and other family members are also victims. The complexity of domestic violence lies in its multifaceted nature, encompassing physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse.

These forms of abuse, while distinct, often overlap, compounding the harm to victims.

In Nigeria, domestic violence is both a public health and a sociocultural issue. Southeastern Nigeria, in particular, presents a unique context for examining the phenomenon due to its rich traditional customs, deeply rooted patriarchal systems, and economic disparities. The traditional Igbo culture, dominant in this region, often reinforces gender roles that subjugate women and condone violence under the guise of discipline or maintaining familial hierarchy (Okehie-Offoha & Sadiku, 1996). Furthermore, economic pressures, unemployment, and poverty exacerbate tensions within households, increasing the likelihood of violent conflicts (Okemgbo et al., 2002).

This issue is further compounded by systemic challenges such as inadequate legal frameworks, lack of enforcement of existing laws, and societal stigmatization of victims. While the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, marked a significant step toward addressing domestic violence in Nigeria, its implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas (Ajah et al., 2020). Many victims, fearing retaliation or social ostracization, choose to endure abuse in silence, perpetuating a cycle of violence.

The socioeconomic consequences of domestic violence are severe and multidimensional. Beyond the immediate physical and emotional trauma, domestic violence disrupts household economies, impairs children's education, and destabilizes communities. Women, as primary victims, often face barriers to economic empowerment, resulting in dependency that traps them in abusive relationships (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). Children in such households experience long-term psychological effects and are at risk of perpetuating violence in their future relationships (Oladepo et al., 2011).

In Southeastern Nigeria, this phenomenon is deeply rooted in cultural, economic, and structural factors. Domestic violence not only harms individuals but also affects family cohesion and societal development.

This study seeks to critically analyze the manifestations, causes, and socioeconomic consequences of domestic violence on families in Southeastern Nigeria. By situating the discussion within the broader frameworks of cultural, economic, and legal challenges, this research highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions that address the root causes of domestic violence while providing support for victims.

Statement of the Problem

Domestic violence remains a significant yet underreported issue in Southeastern Nigeria, affecting the well-being of families and hindering social and economic progress. Despite growing awareness of its prevalence,

the cultural, economic, and institutional factors perpetuating domestic violence remain deeply entrenched. Southeastern Nigeria, characterized by its patriarchal norms and economic inequalities, presents a context where domestic violence is normalized, limiting victims' ability to seek help or escape abusive relationships.

The socioeconomic consequences of domestic violence are profound, including diminished household incomes, interrupted education for children, and the destabilization of family units. These consequences further entrench poverty and gender inequality, creating a cycle of dependency and violence that is difficult to break. While legislation like the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, exists, its enforcement in this region is inconsistent, leaving many victims without adequate protection or recourse.

Research on domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria is sparse, with limited focus on its broader socioeconomic impacts on families. This gap in knowledge underscores the need for a comprehensive investigation into the causes and consequences of domestic violence in this region, as well as an exploration of effective interventions.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the identified problem and research focus, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Patriarchal cultural norms in Southeastern Nigeria significantly contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence.

H2: Economic instability, including unemployment and poverty, increases the likelihood of domestic violence in households in Southeastern Nigeria.

H3: Families experiencing domestic violence face greater socioeconomic challenges, including reduced household income and disrupted children's education, compared to non-violent families.

H4: Inadequate awareness of legal rights and weak enforcement of domestic violence laws perpetuate the cycle of abuse in Southeastern Nigeria.

H5: Community-based interventions and economic empowerment initiatives reduce the prevalence and impact of domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Defining Domestic Violence

Domestic violence encompasses a range of abusive behaviors, including physical assault, sexual violence, psychological manipulation, and economic coercion. The World Health Organization (2013) highlights domestic violence as a global epidemic, often underreported due to fear, stigma, or cultural acceptance. In the Nigerian context, domestic violence is defined within socio-legal frameworks as any act of abuse within a domestic relationship, which may include

spousal, child, or elder abuse (Ajayi & Soyinka, 2015).

Contextualizing Domestic Violence in Nigeria

Domestic violence in Nigeria is rooted in a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Patriarchal norms, widespread in Southeastern Nigeria, reinforce male dominance, with many communities normalizing the use of violence as a disciplinary measure. For instance, Okemgbo et al. (2002) found that 65% of women in Igbo communities considered spousal violence acceptable in certain circumstances, such as failure to perform household duties. Similarly, traditional practices like bride price payments are sometimes interpreted as granting husbands ownership over their wives, further entrenching gender inequalities (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1994).

Economic stressors are another critical factor. High unemployment rates, especially among men, have been linked to increased domestic violence, as financial strain leads to frustration and aggression within households (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). Women in abusive relationships often face financial dependency, making it difficult for them to escape the cycle of violence. This economic vulnerability perpetuates a cycle of poverty and abuse, as victims are unable to engage in productive economic activities due to physical or emotional trauma (Ezeh et al., 2020).

Socioeconomic Impact of Domestic Violence

The socioeconomic consequences of domestic violence are multidimensional, affecting individuals, families, and broader communities.

Economic Impacts:

Domestic violence often results in significant financial costs for victims and their families. Victims may lose income due to physical injuries, emotional distress, or the need to leave employment for safety reasons (Kabeer, 2015). Research by Nnodim et al. (2021) found that domestic violence in Nigeria reduces household productivity, with affected families experiencing a 30% drop in income on average. Moreover, the costs of medical care, legal proceedings, and relocation further strain already limited resources.

Educational Disruption for Children:

Children in abusive households often experience disrupted education, either because of instability within the home or the need to assume adult responsibilities prematurely. Ezeh (2020) notes that children exposed to domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria are twice as likely to drop out of school compared to their peers. This educational setback limits their future opportunities and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Psychological and Social Consequences:

Exposure to domestic violence has long-term psychological effects on victims and their children. Studies show that children who witness violence are more likely to develop aggressive behaviors or mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). Women in abusive relationships often suffer from low self-esteem, depression, and feelings of helplessness, which further limit their ability to seek help or achieve independence (Oladepo et al., 2011).

Interventions and Legal Frameworks

The Nigerian government has made efforts to address domestic violence, most notably through the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015. However, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in rural areas. Weak enforcement mechanisms, combined with societal stigmatization of victims, limit the effectiveness of these legal protections (Ajah et al., 2020). Community-based approaches, such as gender-sensitization programs and economic empowerment initiatives, have shown promise in reducing domestic violence. For instance, microfinance programs targeting women in rural communities have been linked to reduced incidences of domestic violence, as financial independence enables women to leave abusive relationships (Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

Gaps in the Literature

While existing research highlights the prevalence and consequences of domestic violence in Nigeria, there is limited focus on its long-term socioeconomic impacts, particularly in Southeastern Nigeria. Additionally, most studies emphasize individual-level interventions, neglecting systemic issues such as cultural norms and weak institutional frameworks. This study aims to address these gaps by exploring the broader socioeconomic consequences of domestic violence on families and identifying scalable interventions tailored to the Southeastern Nigerian context.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence and its socioeconomic consequences on families in Southeastern Nigeria. The mixed-methods approach allows for the triangulation of data, ensuring reliability and validity.

Study Area

The research focuses on Southeastern Nigeria, comprising the states of Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. This region is predominantly inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group and is characterized by a mix of urban and rural communities with distinct cultural and economic dynamics.

Target Population

The target population includes:

1. Victims of domestic violence (both women and men) aged 18 and above.
2. Community leaders and social workers with knowledge of domestic violence in the region.
3. Experts in law and social policy, including legal practitioners and policymakers.

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed:

1. **Stage 1:** Purposive sampling was used to select three states (Abia, Anambra, and Enugu) based on reported cases of domestic violence and availability of intervention programs.
2. **Stage 2:** Stratified sampling divided participants into rural and urban categories.
3. **Stage 3:** Simple random sampling identified households and individuals within the strata.

Sample Size

The sample size was 500 participants, comprising:

- 300 victims of domestic violence (200 women, 100 men).
- 100 community leaders and social workers.
- 100 experts in law and policy.

Data Collection Methods

1. **Survey:** A structured questionnaire was administered to 300 victims, capturing demographic data, experiences of domestic violence, and socioeconomic impacts.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 50 community leaders and social workers to provide qualitative insights.
3. **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):** Three FGDs were conducted with legal and social policy experts to explore systemic and cultural drivers of domestic violence.

Data Analysis

1. **Quantitative Data:** Data from surveys were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (chi-square tests, regression analysis) were used to examine relationships between variables.
2. **Qualitative Data:** Data from interviews and FGDs were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically using **NVivo 12** software.

Results

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender: Female	200	66.7
Gender: Male	100	33.3
Age: 18–29 years	150	50.0
Age: 30–49 years	120	40.0
Age: 50+ years	30	10.0
Educational Attainment: Primary	80	26.7
Educational Attainment: Secondary	160	53.3
Educational Attainment: Tertiary	60	20.0

Prevalence and Forms of Domestic Violence

The survey revealed high levels of domestic violence across Southeastern Nigeria. Table 2 details the prevalence of different forms of domestic violence, with physical violence being the most reported form.

Table 2: Reported Forms of Domestic Violence

Type of Domestic Violence	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Violence	180	60.0
Emotional/Psychological Abuse	120	40.0
Economic Abuse	70	23.3
Sexual Abuse	50	16.7

- Among respondents, women were more likely to report physical violence, while men were more likely to report psychological abuse.
- Economic abuse, such as withholding financial resources, was particularly common among unemployed women, exacerbating their dependency on abusive partners.

Relationship Between Domestic Violence and Socioeconomic Variables

Impact on Household Income

Table 3 presents a multiple regression analysis assessing the relationship between domestic violence and household income.

Table 3: Regression Analysis – Domestic Violence and Household Income

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	P-value
Physical Violence	-0.42	0.08	0.001**
Emotional/Psychological Abuse	-0.30	0.09	0.003**
Economic Abuse	-0.28	0.10	0.005**
Sexual Abuse	-0.12	0.12	0.070

Note: *P < 0.05 indicates statistical significance.*

Interpretation:

- Physical violence had the strongest negative association with household income. Victims often reported absenteeism from work and reduced productivity due to injuries and emotional distress.
- Economic abuse directly limited victims' ability to generate income, particularly among female respondents.

Impact on Children's Education

A chi-square analysis explored the relationship between domestic violence and children's school attendance.

Table 4: Chi-Square Analysis – Domestic Violence and Children's School Attendance

Variable	Chi-Square (χ^2)	P-value
Domestic Violence	16.45	0.002**

Interpretation:

- Domestic violence significantly affected children's school attendance. Interviews with victims revealed that financial constraints caused by abuse often led to withdrawal of children from school.

Qualitative Insights

Thematic analysis from interviews and focus group discussions provided deeper insights into the lived experiences of victims and the cultural context of domestic violence. Key themes include:

1. **Cultural Justifications:**
   - Many community leaders acknowledged the persistence of beliefs that justify spousal violence as a form of discipline. For example, one participant noted, "In our culture, a man is considered the head, and correcting his wife, even if by force, is seen as normal."
2. **Economic Dependence:**
   - Women in rural areas expressed feeling trapped in abusive relationships due to financial dependence. One victim stated, "I cannot leave because I have no means of feeding my children or myself."
3. **Psychological Trauma:**
   - Victims reported long-term psychological effects, including anxiety and depression. Community leaders highlighted the lack of accessible mental health services.
4. **Ineffective Legal Protections:**
   - Social workers emphasized the challenges of enforcing the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act. One participant remarked, "The law exists, but victims fear reporting due to stigma and retribution."

Table 5: Summary Statistics – Socioeconomic Impacts of Domestic Violence

Impact Area	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Observation (N)
Household Income Loss	3.8	0.6	300
School Dropout Rate of Children	2.5	0.8	300
Emotional Distress	4.3	0.5	300

Scoring Scale:

1: No impact, 5: Severe impact

Interpretation:

- Emotional distress scored highest, reflecting the significant psychological toll of domestic violence on victims.
- Household income loss and school dropout rates were also substantial, demonstrating the far-reaching socioeconomic consequences.

Discussion of Results

The findings align with existing literature, such as Ajayi and Soyinka (2015), which highlighted the economic and educational disruptions caused by domestic violence. The quantitative results demonstrate significant negative correlations between domestic violence and key socioeconomic indicators, while the qualitative findings underscore the cultural and structural factors perpetuating violence.

The results of this study reveal a deeply entrenched issue of domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria, with significant socioeconomic consequences. These findings align with existing research, providing a broader context for understanding the implications of domestic violence in similar settings.

Prevalence and Forms of Domestic Violence

The study found that physical violence (60%) was the most prevalent form of abuse, followed by psychological abuse (40%), economic abuse (23.3%), and sexual abuse (16.7%). These patterns are consistent with findings by Okemgbo et al. (2002), who reported high rates of physical and psychological violence in Igbo communities, attributing this to cultural norms that condone such behaviors. Similarly, a study by Ajayi and Soyinka (2015) in Lagos corroborated the prevalence of psychological abuse, noting its insidious and long-lasting effects on victims.

Economic abuse was another significant finding, reflecting patterns noted by Adebayo and Kolawole (2013). Economic control, such as withholding financial resources, not only disempowers victims but also perpetuates dependency, making it difficult for them to escape abusive relationships.

Socioeconomic Consequences

Impact on Household Income

The negative relationship between domestic violence and household income aligns with Nnodim et al. (2021), who found that domestic violence significantly reduced productivity and income in Nigerian households. Injuries and psychological distress often lead to absenteeism and reduced work efficiency, exacerbating poverty cycles. Furthermore, women in abusive relationships frequently lack the financial autonomy needed to contribute effectively to household income (Panda & Agarwal, 2005).

The study's findings that economic abuse contributes directly to household poverty are supported by Kabeer (2015), who argued that economic disempowerment is both a consequence and a driver of gender-based violence. Victims, particularly women, often lose access to economic opportunities, which perpetuates cycles of dependency and violence.

Impact on Children's Education

Domestic violence's adverse effects on children's education were evident in the chi-square analysis, which revealed a significant relationship between abuse and school attendance. This finding is consistent with Ezeh (2020), who noted that children in abusive households often experience disrupted schooling due to financial instability and emotional distress. Research by Oladepo et al. (2011) further supports this, showing that children exposed to violence are more likely to drop out of school and perform poorly academically.

The intergenerational impact of domestic violence, whereby children's educational setbacks limit future economic opportunities, highlights the cyclical nature of poverty and violence. This phenomenon is mirrored in Garcia-Moreno et al. (2015), who emphasized the long-term developmental risks for children in violent households.

Cultural and Structural Factors

Qualitative insights from this study underscore the role of cultural norms in perpetuating domestic violence. Patriarchal beliefs, which normalize male dominance and violence as a form of discipline, were frequently cited by participants. This finding aligns with Isiugo-Abanihe (1994), who identified patriarchal traditions as a significant barrier to gender equity in Igbo society.

Moreover, the study highlighted weak enforcement of the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, as a critical issue. Similar challenges were noted by Ajah et al. (2020), who found that corruption and lack of awareness among victims hinder the effective implementation of legal protections. These systemic issues prevent victims from seeking help and perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

Psychological Impact

The study also revealed high levels of emotional distress among victims, consistent with findings by Oladepo et al. (2011), who reported that victims of domestic violence often suffer from anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The lack of accessible mental health services in Southeastern Nigeria further exacerbates these issues, leaving victims without adequate support.

Comparative Analysis

The findings of this study resonate with global research on domestic violence, such as Garcia-Moreno et al. (2015), which identified domestic violence as a critical public health and socioeconomic issue worldwide. Similar trends have been observed in South Asia (Panda & Agarwal, 2005) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Kabeer, 2015), where cultural norms and economic dependencies play significant roles in perpetuating abuse.

However, the unique cultural and structural context of Southeastern Nigeria adds layers of complexity to the issue. Traditional

practices, such as bride price, and communal stigmatization of victims present distinct challenges that require culturally sensitive interventions.

Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that domestic violence in Southeastern Nigeria is both a public health issue and a socioeconomic crisis. Its impact on household income, children's education, and victims' psychological well-being underscores the urgent need for comprehensive and context-specific interventions. Aligning with existing literature, these findings highlight the importance of addressing cultural norms, strengthening legal frameworks, and providing economic and psychological support to victims.

By drawing on similar studies, this discussion situates the findings within a broader scholarly framework while emphasizing the need for localized solutions tailored to the unique challenges of Southeastern Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthen Legal Enforcement:** Implement stricter enforcement of domestic violence laws, particularly in rural areas.
2. **Economic Empowerment Programs:** Provide microfinance opportunities for victims to achieve financial independence.
3. **Community Sensitization:** Organize workshops and campaigns to challenge harmful cultural norms.
4. **Integrated Support Services:** Establish centers that combine legal aid, psychological counseling, and economic support for victims.

By addressing the root causes and consequences of domestic violence, these strategies can mitigate its socioeconomic impact on families in Southeastern Nigeria.

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