



## Domestic Violence and its effects on Women Development in South Eastern Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** Domestic violence is another form of gender-based violence as well as cultural practices affecting women and women development in Nigerian society. It can be defined as any form of purposeful, destructive and coercive behavior, used against one's intimate spouse or partner. This research work exposes the concept of domestic violence and how it affects women development in the south eastern Nigeria, especially Imo and Anambra states. Women occupy a greater percentage of the human population; hence whatever affects them affects the society. Domestic violence comes in different forms, such as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal or economic. The problem is that domestic violence is becoming a normal way of life, as in most cases, women are advised to conceal this spousal abuse, as virtuous women and also to save their marriages. It further discovers that it has negative impacts on the life, development and wellbeing of the woman. In other words, this act has psychological effect/damage on women. It can also lead to deformity, psychological trauma and eventual death. It therefore concludes that domestic violence violates women's fundamental rights, as such remains unacceptable in the society.

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**KEYWORDS:**

Domestic Violence, women, women development, human dignity, southeast.

### INTRODUCTION

Violence, which is as old as humanity, can be seen as any use of force, verbal, written, physical or psychological against any person by an individual or group with the aim of directly or indirectly causing harm, oppression or injury.

Domestic violence is one of the issues as well as cultural practices affecting women and the society in Nigeria. It can be defined as any form of purposeful, destructive and coercive behavior, used against one's intimate spouse or partner. According to Anne L. Ganley, (1981:16) Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partner. In other words, this form of assault can be physical, sexual, psychological, as well as economic.

To I.B Naik (2016:1698), domestic violence refers to interpersonal violence, which takes place in domestic setting, family relationship and intimate relationship.

Domestic violence occurs in intimate partner relationships, where the perpetrator and victims are currently or have been previously dating, cohabiting, married or divorced. They may be heterosexual, gay or lesbian and may have children in common or not (Anne L Ganley, 2002:60). Wife/ spouse abuse, marital assault, woman battery, wife beating, conjugal violence, intimate violence, among others, fall under these forms of behaviours. This therefore entails that women are usually at the receiving end of these behaviors. Within the last two years, Nigeria has recorded many deaths of women as a result of domestic violence, from their spouses/partners.

This research is therefore interested in domestic violence and how it affects women development in the society. When the issue of women is raised, the issue of development is also raised. This is because one cannot discuss development without women. Based on that, the questions become what is domestic violence? Is the behaviour morally justified and acceptable? Does it abuse the fundamental right of the woman? How does it affect the societal development? Does it have positive effects on the society? These

questions and many of its kind are the consequences of the issues emanating from this research and the practice of domestic violence.

### **Statement of Problem**

Domestic violence (DV) is one of the deep-rooted cultural practices that violate the right, value and dignity of womanhood. It is a form of discrimination against women based on inequalities between the sexes, hence forms one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (which is the elimination of all harmful practices including gender-based violence by the year 2030).

Domestic violence is a pervasive issue that poses a significant threat to the physical, emotional, psychological well-being and development of women. In Anambra and Imo States, the prevalence of domestic violence has been exacerbated by socio-cultural norms, economic dependencies, and inadequate enforcement of legal protections.

Despite various advocacy and intervention programs, many women continue to suffer in silence, with limited access to resources that could empower them to seek help. The effects of domestic violence are far-reaching, leading to physical injuries, psychological trauma, diminished self-esteem, and disrupted family dynamics. This issue is therefore a hindrance to women's personal development and societal progress.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this research is to investigate and discover the culture of domestic violence and its effects on women development in Imo and Anambra states. In other words, this research seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on domestic violence and provide actionable insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, community leaders, and advocacy groups, to foster a safer and more equitable society for women in Imo and Anambra states.

It also ascertains the effect and implication of Domestic Violence (DV) in Imo and Anambra states and to determine if there are differences between those who believe that DV is normal and those who do not believe.

It finds out if religion and tradition have roles to play in the promotion or otherwise of DV and as well as find out other factors that may otherwise influence the existence of DV. Some set of people regard domestic violence as an integral part of family identity as well as a corrective measure. This will also contribute to knowledge.

It further identifies the prevalence and forms of domestic violence experienced by women in Imo and Anambra states. In these states, there have been so many cases of women who are abused daily, while some die in the hands of the abusers. Investigations have shown that the enablers are mostly women, primarily mothers (especially those who also experienced it) and aunts, as well as highly respected women in the communities. In other words, some mothers are contributory to this behaviour. For instance, a mother encourages her abused married daughter to endure domestic violence, and keep praying because she passed through it and nothing happened to her ... among others. This will therefore open the eyes of the abused, inform them, to know domestic violence violates the rights and personhood of women.

It also examines the socio-cultural and economic factors contributing to domestic violence in the region. It will further evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions, support systems, and legal frameworks in addressing domestic violence in Imo and Anambra states and recommend strategies and policies for mitigating domestic violence and supporting survivors effectively.

This research also brings into light various strategies to preventing domestic violence. In other words, it makes positive impact through awareness creation. With this research, the victims and survivors can be helped to build confidence, fight social exclusion, segregation, aid recovery and facilitate mental stability.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

I.B Naik, and Abdul Raffie Naik (2016) Domestic violence refers to interpersonal violence which takes place in domestic settings, family relationships and intimate relationships. It is also known as family violence or spousal abuse. Any one (men or women) can become a domestic violence offender or victim.

To them, domestic violence is an offence and a destructive behavior in an intimate relationship where one person tries to dominate and control other in a dating or marital relationship or in cohabitation, which causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in that relationship. It includes acts of physical aggression like slapping, hitting, kicking or beating, psychological abuse such as intimidation, constant belittling or humiliation, forces sexual intercourse or any other controlling behavior like isolating a person from family and friends, monitoring their movements and restricting access to information or assistance

They further highlight the difference forms of domestic violence such as physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal or economic. The root causes of domestic violence which includes certain risk factors such as individual, relationship, community, societal, legal and political factors. These factors are responsible for domestic violence and its consequences on the victim's psychological as well as physical health in day-to-day life ([www.opastpublishers.com](http://www.opastpublishers.com)).

However, according to the University of Western Cape, domestic violence is a pattern of coercive tactics that can include physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and emotional abuse, perpetrated by one person against an intimate partner, with the goal of establishing and maintaining power and control.

Abusive behaviors are not symptoms that someone is angry or out of control. An abuser makes a choice to exert power and control over his or her partner. Abusive behaviors include physical, emotional, sexual, social, and financial abuse. Domestic violence in all socio-economic groups, all religious groups, all races, all ethnic groups and within heterosexual, lesbian and gay relationships, to people of all ages and physical abilities is perpetrated against women in 95% of cases ([www.universityofjohannesburg.com](http://www.universityofjohannesburg.com))

Domestic violence is a pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks, as well as economic coercion, that adults or adolescents use against their intimate partners. She further points out the key elements of domestic violence as: conduct perpetrated by adults or adolescents against their intimate partners in current or former dating, married or cohabiting relationships of heterosexuals, gay men, and lesbians. A pattern of assaultive and coercive behaviors, including physical, sexual, and psychological attacks as well as economic coercion. A pattern of behaviors including a variety of tactics — some physically injurious and some not, some criminal and some not — carried out in multiple, sometimes daily episodes. A combination of physical attacks, terrorist acts, and controlling tactics used by perpetrators that result in fear as well as physical and psychological harm to victims and their children. A pattern of purposeful behavior, directed at achieving compliance from or control over the victim ([www.bazeuniversity.com](http://www.bazeuniversity.com)).

To her, domestic violence has many names: wife abuse, marital assault, woman battery, spouse abuse, wife beating, conjugal violence, intimate violence, battering, partner abuse and it can come in various forms such as being shot, stabbed, clubbed, burned, choked, beaten or thrown by their abusers.

Domestic violence is a problem of epidemic proportions with far-reaching consequences for individual victims, their children and their communities. Domestic violence results in death, serious injury, and chronic medical and mental health issues for victims, their children, the perpetrators, and others ([www.opastpublishers.com](http://www.opastpublishers.com))

According to Baze University, violence against women is a global problem of great magnitude. No woman in the world is secure against violence. Throughout the world, women's bodies are vulnerable to a range of violent assaults that include domestic violence, rape within marriage, rape by acquaintances or dates, rape by strangers, rape in wars and communal conflicts, honor killing, trafficking and forced prostitution, child sexual abuse, female infanticide, female genital mutilation, and sex-selective abortion. Other practices that are not as obviously violent also contribute to the atmosphere of threat in which all women live the entirety of their lives: sexual harassment, stalking, threats of violence, deprivation of bodily liberty, the under nutrition of girls.

While it is true that some women are more vulnerable to violence than others — differences of nation, region, culture, class, and circumstance do make a difference — the fact is that no woman, who is rational is ever utterly free of the fear of such violence, whether she has ever experienced violence herself or not. This fear, itself a form of psychological violence, takes its toll on women's lives.

Violence and the threat of violence, affect women's ability to have a meaningful relationship... they also affect woman's ability to enjoy leisure, laughter, and play. ...there is nothing sadder than to see the removal of laughter from the eyes of a girl or woman, through repeated sexual or physical abuse, or through persistent fear.

Akhilesh Kumar Pandey, (2024: 102) in his paper, "Gender-Based Violence and its Impact on Society" explains that gender-based violence (GBV) is a form of discrimination and inequality that targets individuals based on their gender identity or expression. It disproportionately affects women and girls but can also affect men and non-conforming individuals.

However, gender-based violence (GBV) is a global issue, with approximately 1 in 3 women experiencing physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner at some point in their lives.

According to A.K Pandey, GBV violates human rights, and perpetuates harmful power dynamics, reinforcing societal norms that marginalize certain genders. Addressing GBV requires strategies that address social, cultural, and economic factors, promote gender equality, challenge stereotypes, strengthen legal protections, provide support services, and engage communities in prevention efforts.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a widespread issue affecting individuals of all ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and identities worldwide. Its impact is profound and multifaceted, including physical, and psychological health, economic impact, interpersonal relationships, educational attainment, public health crisis, gender inequality, social cohesion, and legal, and human rights implications. Victims of GBV often suffer physical injuries, leading to anxiety, depression, PTSD, and even suicide.

Economically, GBV can hinder victims' ability to work and earn a living, perpetuating cycles of poverty, and economic dependency. Interpersonal relationships can be strained, leading to fractured family dynamics, isolation, and social alienation.

Educational attainment can be disrupted, hindering academic achievement, and perpetuating cycles of poverty. GBV contributes to a public health crisis, increasing the burden on healthcare systems, law enforcement, and social services.

Reducing gender-based violence in society is fundamental. Since Gender-Based Violence (GBV) infringes upon core human rights, including the right to life, security, and dignity, it is imperative that this issue be addressed for the sake of both individual and societal well-being. For survivors of GBV, there are serious emotional, psychological, and physical repercussions that might include trauma, bodily harm, mental health issues, and even suicide. GBV is a cause as well as an effect of gender inequality and addressing it can aid in the deconstruction of detrimental gender norms and the advancement of gender equality in a variety of contexts. In other words, addressing GBV requires challenging deeply ingrained social norms and promoting gender equality in all spheres of life. Social cohesion is undermined by GBV, as fear of violence restricts individuals' freedom of movement, and participation in public life. It therefore violates the fundamental human rights, including the right to life, liberty, and security of person, and is a barrier to justice. Strengthening legal frameworks and ensuring accountability for perpetrators are crucial steps in addressing GBV.

By addressing GBV, we can prevent intergenerational cycles of violence, break intergenerational cycles of violence, and promote economic empowerment. GBV can hinder individuals' ability to work and earn a living, perpetuating cycles of poverty and dependency.

By providing support services for survivors, societies can promote economic empowerment and financial independence. GBV restricts people's freedom of mobility and involvement in public life, undermining social cohesiveness and trust among communities. To address GBV, legal frameworks must be strengthened, offenders must be held accountable, and survivors must have access to justice. In addition to adding to the public health issue, addressing GBV also puts a strain on social services, law enforcement, and healthcare systems. Societies may save healthcare costs, enhance public safety, and more efficiently use resources by tackling GBV.

In general, gender-based violence (GBV) has extensive and widespread effects on society, including people's physical and mental health, as well as their social cohesiveness, economic standing, and interpersonal connections. Comprehensive approaches that address underlying social, cultural, institutional, and economic issues, advance gender equality, and offer resources and support to survivors are necessary to address GBV. Societies may seek to create communities that are safer, more egalitarian, and inclusive for everyone by addressing GBV.

In conclusion, GBV's social implications highlight the need for comprehensive strategies to address the root causes of violence, promote gender equality, and provide support and resources for survivors. By working together, societies can create safer, more inclusive communities free from violence and discrimination.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Area**

The study area is on domestic violence and the research is carried out in the south eastern states of Nigeria, particularly Imo and Anambra states.

### **Procedure**

The research design will be descriptive, expository and investigative. It involves a systematic review of literature. This will also include the use of questionnaire, face-to-face interviews (with women), reports, conference papers, journal articles, textbooks and internet sources.

## **DATA ANALYSIS/ DISCUSSION**

Because of the sensitivity of the topic, an initial and cautious feasibility study is carried out in Anambra and Imo states.

Three groups were arranged for interview and questioning. One with married women, another with unmarried and the other one with widowed, divorced and single mothers, in order to obtain more in-depth insights into the issue of domestic violence and to elaborate questions for the interview guide. The interviews were conducted in an isolated place to minimize interference and to maintain privacy. The participants/ respondents and victims were also asked open-ended questions about their own experiences and their general perceptions, attitudes and practices of domestic violence. These questions came in form of questionnaires. Two thousand (2000) questionnaires were given to the respondents in different areas of Imo and Anambra states. The questionnaires were designed in a simple way to include strongly agreed (SA), agreed (A), strongly disagreed (SD), disagreed (D) and neutral (N) answers, where participants could add individual comments. 1000 people responded to the questionnaires anonymously.

## Socio demographic characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Percentage
Age 18-24	50%
25-34	60%
35-44	60%
45-54	00%
55+	00%
Gender	
Male	00
Female	100%
State of Origin	
Imo	50%
Anambra	70%
Employment Status	
Employed	35%
Unemployed	60%
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	75%
Cohabitation	50%
Married	60%
Separated	5%
Divorced	5%
Widowed	10%
<b>Level of education</b>	
Primary school (FSLC)	60%
Secondary School (WAEC/NECO)	60%
HND/OND	
B.Sc	50%
Postgraduate	37%
	30%

From the demographic report, the study consisted of victims, non-victims and survivors of domestic violence ranging in ages from 18 to 44 years old.

Generally, most respondents/participants were of low social economic status while the few were of higher economic status. Also, most respondents/participants who suffered domestic violence were primary and secondary school holders while 50%, 37% and 30% were HND, Bachelors degree and Post Graduate Degree holders respectively.

From the above, domestic violence is not a new phenomenon and women irrespective of their level of education are victims of domestic violence, hence Aniket Sancheti (2024:808) explains:

Violence against women is not a new phenomenon. Women have to bear the burns of domestic, public, physical as well as emotional and mental violence against them, which affects her status in the society at the larger extent.

It is also evident that it is not only married women that suffer domestic violence. Most respondents explained that they started being abused as daughters (teenagers) in their respective families. One of the anonymous respondents narrated her experience:

Right from my teenage age, my elder brothers abused me (via flogging, beating, stripping naked) that when I got married and my husband continued, I taught it was normal. I never saw anything wrong with domestic violence.

In other words, single/unmarried women mostly suffer domestic violence. This is followed by married women (both educated, uneducated, employed and unemployed) and then, cohabitants. According to This Day daily newspaper of 2011:

About 50% of women have been battered by their husbands. Shockingly, more educated women (65%) are in this terrible situation as compared with their low income counterparts (55%)...

Additionally, most of the married women who suffered domestic violence were employed but could not leave as a result of culture/tradition, religion/biblical teaching about divorce, sexual satisfaction from their abusive partners and their children. For instance, the woman set ablaze by her husband at Abagana in Anambra State Nigeria, refused to walk away because of her children.

Category of Women/Respondents	Reason	Location	Forms of Domestic Violence
Pregnant woman/wife	Delayed in opening the gate for her husband	Ezi-Ogwugwu, Otolu-Nnewi in Nnewi of Anambra	Strangled to Death by her husband.
Wife	Caught her Husband cheating.	Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra	Beaten by her husband
A mother of five (One time Senior Prefect)	A loaf of bread	Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra	Beaten to death by her husband.
A mother/wife (A business woman)	Accused of infidelity.	Abagana, Anambra State	Set ablaze by her husband
Pregnant woman	Her Husband stole from her	Nibo, Anambra State	Beaten/Harrasement from husband
A mother of five (optometrist)	Quarrel	Obowo Local Government Area of Imo State	Strangled by her husband.
A newly married woman (A graduate)	Disagreement	AWO-IDEMILI, in Orsu LGA of Imo State	Beaten to death by her husband.
Unmarried woman (Undergraduate)	Insecurity	Owerri, Imo State	Hitting by her boyfriend.
Married Woman	Gave birth to female children	Naze, Imo State	Beaten, harrasement, verbal abuse.
A married woman	Checked her husband's phone	Orlu, Imo State	Beaten by her husband.
A married woman	Insecurity	Nekede, Imo State	Beaten, Harrasment from husband.
A mother of four (separated)	Insecurity	Ngor Okpala, Imo State	Set ablaze by her husband.
A single mother	Money	Fege, Onitsha, Anambra	Flogging and forced sex by her boyfriend.

From the indications, insecurity, anger, finance, infidelity, greed, and the sex of the children amongst others are the causes of domestic violence. In addition, lack specialized skills, education, frustration, jealousy, poor self-esteem and exposure can cause domestic abuse.

Domestic violence can be physical; psychological, emotional, sexual, verbal, social and economic. Physical abuse is the most familiar form of domestic violence, which begins with less violent assault. It involves the use of force, by the abuser against the victim/abused. This includes the use of weapons, pushing, slapping, stabbing, acid bathe, driving dangerously, destruction of property, locking the victim out of the house, and sleep deprivation etc. Mirian Ujah adds (2021:46)

This form of violence, in most cases is perpetrated by a father, husband, boyfriend, stepfather, brother, uncle, son, other male relation in the home or other members of the family... This may include: slapping, grabbing, pinching, biting, beating, shouting, choking, stabbing, strangling. Others are, acid burning, kicking out, locking out, restraining, murder and other acts designed to injure, hurt, endanger, or cause physical pain to an intimate person.

Psychological abuse is basically an inclusive term for intimidating, threatening, or fear-causing behaviour. According to L. E. A. Walker, (1984:50): psychological abuse is a very complex form of abuse, most of time physical abuse leads to psychological



abuse like phobia, guilt feeling, insecurity, poor impulse control, nightmares, impaired sleep, humiliation, shame, isolation of victim, forced weakness.

Psychological abuse also instills fear, like; intimidation, threatening physical harm to self, blackmail, harassment, mind-games, stalking.

Emotional abuse happens when abusers who want to make their partners feel scared, crazy, worthless, or responsible for the abuse. In other words, it involves the reduction and destruction of the abused self-worth and is brought about by continuous insult, humiliation, or criticism. For example, emotional abuse comes in form of, name-calling, insults, put-downs, silent treatment, manipulating victim's feelings and emotions to induce guilt etc.

Sexual abuse is one of the least discussed, but most common forms of domestic violence that involves the violation of an individual's body and bodily integrity. According to D Russel (1982:76): it includes various form of sexual harms like forceful sexual intercourse, mutilation of genitalia, painful sex (sadism), forced oral sex, anal mutilation, digital penetration and forced nakedness. Examples are marital rape, acquaintance rape, forced sex after beating, attacks on the sexual parts of the body, forced prostitution, fondling, sodomy and sex with others. Sexual jokes that make the victim uncomfortable, treating women as sex objects, withholding sex as punishment, flaunting affairs, rape or forced sex after beatings are examples of sexual abuse.

Verbal abuse entails continual putting down and humiliation of the abused, privately or publicly, that focus on intelligence, sexuality, body image and capacity as a spouse/partner. It can also come in form of screaming, shouting, mocking, name-calling etc.

Financial/economic abuse. Here, the abusers attempt to establish financial control over victims/abused. Making financial decisions, having no access to money, keeping financial secrets, monitoring the victim's spending, refusing victim work amongst others are examples of financial/economic abuse.

Social abuse is used to isolate the victim from others in the community, including family members. The fewer people the victim/abused is connected with, the more control the abuser has over them. Social abuse comes in form of: stopping/discouraging the victim from seeing family and friends, monitoring the victim's activities, movements, messages or phone calls, etc.

However, domestic violence has no benefits, hence harms both girls and women in various negative ways. In other words, domestic violence has the following negative effects:

Domestic violence gives birth to so many physical problems, such as injury or fracture on neck, nose, pelvis, chest, abdomen and other body parts, scratches and bleeding. Sometimes, cardiac problem like hypertension and somatic chest pain. One of the respondents narrated her experience of physical assault:

As a victim of domestic violence... my husband started with slapping me, whenever there was an argument or issues in the family. Initially, I did not see anything wrong with slapping. It eventually degenerated to beating and inflicting of all sorts of injury and scratches all over my body.

Also, domestic violence leads to psychological trauma and common emotional traumas such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, substance abuse and posttraumatic stress disorder. In other words, the psychological effects include: high amounts of stress, fear and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Another respondent narrated the experiences of her sister before she passed:

My sister, whom I lived with endured abuse from her husband for a long time. This made her to be emotionally traumatized, to the extent that whenever her husband returns from work, she became nervous and was gradually became unstable, till she died...

Women who are financially stable are psychologically abused than women who less stable financially.

Domestic violence could result in death, serious injury, and chronic medical and mental health issues for women. Hence, it affects both the victim, women and the wider society.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the above analysis, it is evident that domestic violence violates the fundamental rights and dignity of women and should not be condoned.

There should be domestic violence counseling programs that address discrimination against women and promote gender equality and try to stop domestic violence from happening in the first place.

Women should be courageous enough to speak out, as it will inspire others to do so.

Health care professionals like gynecologists, obstetrician, counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist and social worker should be active and available to identify the problems as early as possible.

Women empowerment should be emphasized. Women should be respected and should get equal rights. Gender sensitization programs should be enhanced and legal literacy should be provided to women.

There should be public enlightenment through the mass media on the negative effects of domestic violence against women, especially wife battery.

Religious leaders too should vigorously teach against intimate partner violence/marital violence in their places of worship.

The schools should help in teaching and encouraging the youths to desist from brutish treatment of wives/partners around them.

Punishment should be given to grievously offending husbands, publicly, so that it can serve as deterrence to others.

### **Conflict of Interests**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

### **Acknowledgements**

We wish to acknowledge Tetfund for sponsoring this Institutional Based Research (IBR).

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