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# The Socio-cultural Causes of Male Victimisation in Domestic Contexts in Lagos, Nigeria: A Qualitative Analysis

Johnson Oluwole Ayodele<sup>1</sup>

Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria

## Abstract

*This paper examines the factors that predispose men to female-perpetrated violence in Lagos, Nigeria. Using snowball sampling, it purposively selected one case study, one key informant and two in-depth interview participants from each of the three Senatorial Districts of Lagos. Data were content analysed. Findings indicated that male victims of domestic violence abound in Lagos; stigmatisation causes male victims' non-disclosure; and female aggressors sometimes used traditional mechanisms to control their male victims. The study concludes that lack of support worsens the conditions of male victims of domestic violence in Lagos. To prevent domestic violence, it suggests that the government should make institutional provisions for male victims.*

Keywords: Socio-cultural context, Domestic violence, Male Victims, Lagos, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a global social and public health issue. Its associated stigma, in traditional societies of Africa, complicates the enormity of the problem for male victims. In most parts of Africa, there is a subsisting traditional norm that recognizes men as family heads, stronger and subtly dominating partners in nearly all domestic contexts. From this background, men are assumed to be aggressors in IPV, implying women as customary victims. However, it is an open secret, in contemporary times that men are victims of IPV as well. Much is already known about women being victims of domestic violence in most parts of the world. On the other hand, significantly less is known about men being victims in the patriarchal African settings. In an attempt to contribute to the body of existing knowledge on the experiences of men as victims of IPV in Lagos, Nigeria, the current study hopes to advance scientific knowledge by answering the following questions: (i). What are the socio-cultural causes of men being victims of IPV in Lagos? (ii). What are the implications of men being victims of IPV for socioeconomic integration in the society? (iii). What provisions of protection are available to male victims of IPV? (iv). How can the incidence of men being victims of IPV be significantly reduced in Lagos?

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria. Email: johnson.ayodele@lasu.edu.ng

## Literature Review

Intimate partner violence is a critical global public health problem (Beydoun, 2012; Ellsberg, Henrica, Heise, Watts, & García-Moreno, 2008; Randle & Graham, 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). In spite of the conception of IPV by Breiding et al. (2015) as experiences of physical violence, sexual violence, stalking and/or psychological aggression by a current or former intimate partner, this does not exclude men even when the definition is conspicuously silent over gender. That stigma keeps male victims away from disclosure does not imply the non-existence of or foreclose the social problem. The frequency of IPV against men is highly disputed, with different studies showing different conclusions for different nations, and many countries having no data at all. Some researchers believe the actual number of male victims is likely to be greater than law enforcement statistics suggest due to the high number of men who do not report their abuse (Watson & Parsons, 2005). However, over 40% of victims of severe physical violence are men (Hoff, 2012), as evidence now exists to support the view that women assault non-violent male partners more frequently than men assault non-violent female partners (Dutton & White, 2013).

Granted that women experience intense physical injuries and psychological effects, men too are victims of all these (Hines & Douglas, 2010). Thus, saying that violence by women is not a serious social problem “is like arguing that cancer is not an important medical problem because many more die of heart disease” (Strauss, 2011, p. 284). In an analysis of 36 general-population studies on IPV and dating violence, Straus (2011) found that women were half again as likely to perpetrate serious physical violence. Twelve months prior to the release in December 2011 by the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS), an estimated 5,365,000 men and 4,741,000 women were victims of intimate partner physical violence (Black, et al., 2011), corroborating the findings of other studies that more men than women were victims of intimate partner physical violence. The prevalence and consequences of male violence directed towards women in intimate relationships has been well established (Lawson, 2003). However, the research on male victims of violent women in intimate relationships is far less developed in Lagos, Nigeria. This study hopes to bridge a gap in knowledge in this regard.

## Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the conflict theory propounded by Karl Marx to explain the problem. It claims that society is in a state of perpetual conflict due to competition for limited resources. It holds that order is maintained by domination and power, rather than consensus and conformity. Just as the dominant individual suppresses the powerless partner, contestation for power between the customary principal actors in intimate relationships intensifies at the home front. The struggle that follows usually attempts to restructure power so as to guarantee its balance between genders. In the course of doing this, violence becomes recognised “as a part of a system of domination but it is at the same time a measure of its imperfection” (Connell, 1995, p. 84). This explains why men who were victims of violence by their wives were made into objects of social derision (Davidson, 1977) and publicly humiliated to conform to societies’ roles that they are the dominant sex and women are subordinate (George, 2002, p. 118).

To the extent that ‘our anger towards men as victimisers blinds us to men who are victims’ (Farrell, 2001, p. 221), physical abuse should be seen as an aspect of domestic violence against a person, irrespective of gender. While men are seen as having an upper

hand in physical abuse, women have theirs in psychological abuse. Both aspects of domestic violence are damaging and therefore not justifiable because it is possible that “one can hurt a partner deeply, even drive the person to suicide, without ever lifting a finger” (Straus, 1997: 210). Psychological aggression is often more damaging and long-lasting than physical violence (Vissing, Straus, Gelles & Harrop, 1991). It is against the contributory input into the picture of daily domestic violence that George (2007) claims that the prejudice and discrimination against male victims allows abusive women to manipulate the agencies such as the police to further victimise their male partners. Thus, abusive women could wrongly claim self defence as they know society will believe them rather than their male partners (Battered Men: Hidden Lives, 2006).

### **Current Study**

The current study proposes that some men are victims of female-perpetrated violence in Lagos, Nigeria. Prior studies elsewhere have established some statistical linkages of female-to-male violence. None of these studies has provided empirical evidence linking the violence against men to intimate female aggressors in Lagos, Nigeria.

### **Data and Method**

To gain a rich understanding of the extent of domestic violence having female intimate partners as the assailants and male as the victims, in a traditional setting, requires a lot of empirical resourcefulness and data gathering creativity. The present study used these resources to identify and interrogate male victims and their close relations. From the participants, the study made significant inroads into the beliefs, emotions, gender relations, and social norms that drive female-perpetrated male victimisation in domestic contexts. In order to secure participants’ cooperation, the researcher engaged research assistants who reside in the male victims’ localities. The study explored the familiarity to access the direct victims and their very close relations. It gained and retained their confidence through its use of qualitative methods of in-depth interview, case studies and key informant interviews to collect data on the state of male victims of domestic violence in Lagos, Nigeria.

Different countries have different norms governing gender relations. In support of this assumption, WHO (2002) and Heise (1998) have observed that in cultures and sub-cultures in which men assign fixed, subservient gender roles to women, violence against women is assumed to be more prevalent. However, in some cases, the reversal of the normal domestic victimisation equation compels some men to become victims of their intimate partners. Thus, in these rare cases in Lagos, Nigeria, tradition-driven stigma causes men to deny their having been victimised by their intimate female partners. This denial makes the visibility of male victims, access to them and the disclosure of their experiences of intimate-partner-induced victimisation deeply problematic. Since the individuals in a target population typically share one characteristic and the specific interest of this study is directed at a target population, the crime victims (male victims of IPV in this instance) are not usually available (Gravetter & Forzano, 2003). Therefore, the significant breakthrough that led to the very small sample size of the present study was a product of six months of initial purposive sampling background on which the later snowball sampling approach was anchored. This indicates the intricate nature of the study,

the features of the population and sensitivity of its focus which recognise the absence of a sampling frame from which a formal sample size could easily be selected.

### **The Study Area**

The study was conducted in Lagos State which is one of the six states in the South West geopolitical zone of Nigeria in 2015. Lagos has a population of 9,113,605 people (NPC, 2006). These make Lagos a choice destination for individuals looking for greener pastures. Their convergence in Lagos causes interactions which may generate domestic violence in which men are likely to be victims. The sample for the study was drawn from different locations across the three Senatorial Districts of Lagos. The qualitative data included three case studies and three key informant interview (KIIs) (one from each of the three Senatorial Districts of Lagos respectively.) In addition, six in-depth Interviews (IDIs) (two participants from each of the three senatorial district of Lagos,) were purposively selected as participants. Interview guides kept the collection of data relevant to the study objectives and research questions. The in-depth and key informant interviews' guides were designed in a simple language with leading questions which address the main issues to collect qualitative data. For the male victims, the study used snowball sampling method to access the participants. Qualitative data were cleaned and emerging themes organised in accordance with the objectives of the study in the course of content analysis. Some striking expressions were quoted verbatim to strengthen the objectives of the current paper.

### **Presentation of Findings**

The researcher collected the data which the study presents below as responses from the participants to the four research questions raised in this present paper.

#### **1. Socio-cultural Causes of Men Being Victims of IPV in Lagos**

This section presents the findings on the socio-cultural causes which the participants claimed have predisposed them to female-induced violence in Lagos, Nigeria. Karl Marx anchored his core arguments of conflict theory on the presence of two classes in the society which struggle over power. He identified the bourgeoisie (the presumed powerful male) and the proletariat (female, who are understood to be the weaker sex) in patriarchal societies within which all domestic violence is either male physical abuse to maintain that power advantage or female defensive violence to protect self against arbitrary use of male power (Dutton, & Nicholls, 2005). A 45-year-old male participant, who also is a victim of female-perpetrated domestic violence, provided the narrative of how he became a victim and the experiences he suffers in the new status:

By experience, I have come to realize that the root of female-perpetrated IPV lies in power relations that are economy and power driven. Prior to losing my job, my family obeyed and respected me. My wife secured a job in a private primary school. There she became the head mistress and by implication that made her the financial head of my family. In the end, he who pays the piper dictates the tune. Anytime I complained that she came home late or failed to prepare family meal, she got angry and arrested me, claiming that I was sexually harassing her. The kind of torture that I have received from her police accomplices has caused me some traumatic pains. Nevertheless, I have learnt to internalize the agony of IPV

without complaints because without money, there is no status. (Male Victim, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

In disagreement with the assumption that some women do perpetrate domestic violence as a lifesaving response to being physically attacked by their male partners (Kelly, 2003), in box 1 of the case study below, the participant demonstrated the assortment of variables that could predispose a man to become an eternal victim of female-perpetrated violence within the domestic context.

**Box 1**

I am a forty-six-year old graduate, Christian, married and resident in Lagos Island Local Government Area. I hail from Ogun state. My wife is from Delta state. We met in the university and dated for six years before we got married. It was five years into our marriage before the real characteristics of my wife started to unfold. My wife drinks and smokes heavily. I did not discover these earlier enough. In spite of these fundamental weaknesses, I love her. Anytime I feel very anxiously concerned about her misconduct particularly in public, she abuses me and violently attacks me. If I do not complain about her excesses, she is naturally docile. Even if she is highly intoxicated, she remains withdrawn to herself except when one triggers her anger. Surprisingly however, she apologizes after each incidence of violence claiming that she loves me more after having injured me. From this evidence, I strongly believe that she suffers from a psychological problem of sadism.

Looking beyond the self-defence explanation, the current study found a range of other potentially significant causes for female perpetrated IPV. Just as Medeiros and Straus (2006) found among others that communication problems, jealousy, sexual abuse as a child, stress, and a general attitudinal approval of partner violence are secondary predictors of victimization of men by their female partners, a male-victim participant identified yet another socio-cultural factor when he talked about how the prior socialisation experiences of his wife have combined to make her favourably disposed to the reversal of the gender norm of domestic violence that conforms with conflict theory:

My wife is from a polygynous family. Her kind of family is that in which her mother was the aggressor and father the victim. To her, domestic violence is a usual occurrence in a normal home. She does not see anything untoward in assaulting her husband. Her mother always assaulted her father to her admiration as a young girl. Therefore, she always justified domestic violence as one of the few experiences that stimulate the maturity of a man. As a result, she sees on the face of everyman, the roadmap of the injuries of domestic violence, which she describes as mature experience. My wife does not require any concrete evidence of my having cheated on her before she violently attacks me. Her frail stature would not make anyone believe me that she physically abuses me. My fears are that if I hit her back, she might die. This fear has restrained me and has made her believe that she has a life license to victimize me. (Male Victim, Wednesday, September 16, 2015)

A female key informant interview participant considered the potency of the intervention of native medicine in male victimisation to the reversal of the basic assumptions of the conflict theory in the context of domestic violence and explained:

Often, male partners who were vibrant prior to their marriages did not readily accept the victim status without some reasons beyond their control. For example, male partners whose manly courage had been overcome by their wives through 'efo riro' formula (vegetable soup that has been empowered to deprive male victims of manly vitality) will easily yield to being battered without any visible objection until their remote control completely expires. My elder brother's case is a classic example. (Female KII, Wednesday, September 16, 2015)

Another female key informant interview participant looked at the cause of men being victims of domestic violence from the point of view of lack of self control and noted:

My brother would not have been a victim of battery if he had been a contented person. The woman he was to marry was a well-mannered lady. My brother wanted free things, this was the reason he gave in to the bait of his female captor. Yoruba people call this 'atenuje.' If he had exercised significant self control, he would not have found himself in the big traditional mess in which he is now submerged. He does not only watch his wife's clothes, he cries like a baby anytime she beats him. (Female KII, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

It is not in all cases that partner abuse is a consequence of patriarchal manipulations in which women are stereotyped as the powerless victims and men portrayed as the powerful perpetrators (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). These vigorous public justifications have equipped feminist lobby with the stamina to influence criminal justice and public response to the needs of female victims of partner abuse (Fitzpatrick, 2005), to the exclusion of male victims. Thus, in most relationships the violence is consensual – both partners are equally responsible for what goes on behind the front door. A traditional ruler in Ojo Local Government Area, who also is a victim of one of his many wives' violence, argued:

In my home, one of my wives who is the fattest and I engage in mutual victimisation. Being too quarrelsome, anytime I wanted to put her under control, I use male technique to gain an upper hand otherwise, I am in trouble. Anytime we fought and I was the victim, she would pound me and I usually groaned silently. But any day she planned to victimise me, I calculate carefully before she pounced on me to use the advantage of size, I rushed her massive frame. As soon as she fell, I mounted on her and began to rain punches on her face as evidence of my having dealt with her. She would shout to attract rescuers. This was how I established myself as a man and husband in the estimation of her neighbourhood rescuers. (Male Victim, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

## **2. The Implications of Men Being Victims of IPV for Socio-Economic Integration**

This section presents the findings on the implications of men being victims of IPV in Lagos, Nigeria. To the extent that there exist variations in frequency, type, and severity of IPV, the impact of threats and/or acts of physical or sexual abuse, humiliation, insults, social isolation, coercive tactics, or economic and vocational development sabotage (Chronister, Wettersten, & Brown, 2004; Halpern, Young, Waller, Martin, & Kupper,

2004; Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon, & Shelley, 2002), will provoke significant and pervasive disparities (Caetano & Cunradi, 2003; Cerdá, DiGangi, Galea, & Koenen, 2012; Dillon, Hussain, Loxton, & Rahman, 2013; Ramos, Carlson, & McNutt, 2004). The reason for this is that IPV affects individuals from all age groups, communities, and cultural backgrounds (Black et al., 2011; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000), in different ways. Therefore, identifying the social effects of male victimisation by female aggressors in the domestic context, a male in-depth interview participant observed:

Once a man is pronounced a victim of domestic violence, everyone looks down on him as an automatic social outcast whose social contributions to the development of the communities have been inadvertently compromised. For him, social interaction becomes a difficult experience. In light of the deliberate avoidance of the victim's activities by others, he loses contacts in his hitherto rewarding socio-economic network which may still be useful to him or members of his family. In some cases, divorce may be an unpleasant, even if inevitable consequence. This often has dire implications for the children's upbringing who may grow to become aggressive and violent children. (Male IDI, Monday, September 14, 2015)

In box 2 of the Case Study below, the participant underscored the socio-cultural implications of stigmatisation for the continued gainful interaction of the male victims of female-perpetrated violence in domestic contexts in Lagos.

**Box 2**

I am a fifty-three-year old man, Muslim, and married. I hail from Lagos state. My wife is from Oyo state. We met at a Marriage ceremony in Gbagada, Lagos and dated for five years before we got married according to Islamic conventions. In the midst of a people that consider a man who suffers victimization in the hands of his wife a weakling, acknowledging being a victim is akin to committing traditional suicide. Therefore, that one is likely to be stigmatized and excluded is one solid consideration for victims' non-disclosure decision. As a consequence of intense manipulation, unruly control and extensive humiliation, my wife has used her intolerable violence to destroy my social network such that I cannot interact with outsiders because of the way she has made me to feel deeply ashamed, frightened, isolated and feel I have lost my self-worth. Everyone now avoids me as if I am leprous. It is this bad, being a male victim of a woman-perpetrated violence in my neighbourhood. If more male victims are constrained from reporting, more women will remain encouraged to be victimizers of their male partners in the communities of Lagos.

In a community sample of 1,615 dual parent households, children were 2.5 times more likely to be exposed to IPV by their mother than by their father (McDonald, Jouriles, Tart, & Minze, 2009). In a bid to establish how IPV impacts children in Lagos, Nigeria, a female key informant interview participant considered the diverse effects of a male being a victim of domestic violence on the children trapped in abusive parental relationship and noted:

When a male victim of domestic violence avoids social actions, he may as well unwittingly avoid his responsibilities to his children. If his domestic status negatively influences his economic actions, the nutritional value of the children's

food intake and the quality of their education may be adversely affected. Frustrated male victims could embrace alcoholism or take to drug addiction to overcome the pressure of their domestic limitations. Ultimately he may become murderous or suicidal because of intense exclusion and absence of ties that could dissuade extreme responses to life issues. This may deprive the home front of effective partnership for balanced overall upbringing of children. (Female KII, Wednesday, September 16, 2015)

In terms of implications, worthy of note is the failure to report that the male suicide rate is consistently higher than for women (Office of National Statistics, 2011). As if in response to the above, a male victim in-depth interview participant looked at the outward implications of being a male victim of domestic violence for the attainment of his life chances and observed:

The moment I realised that my wife has taken over power in the domestic context, the next thing I sought was an escape. This was never easy. Escape has its harmful implications for my progress and even other members of the family. With time, I took to alcoholism to overcome the agony of having become a social outcast. This caused most of my serious friends to avoid me because they can no longer trust me as a result of my newly acquired profile. Alcoholism soon made me lose my sense of value. I became unfeeling at home. Many times I thought of suicide. These further provoked my wife to assault me. Rather than solve the problem, my alcoholism and senseless thoughts worsened everything including the children's upbringing. (Male Victim, Tuesday, September 15, 2015)

Sometimes, one wonders how domestic violence becomes a trans-generational phenomenon in most communities of the world. When children witness the emotional trauma of one of their parents in the domestic context, in some cases, they are compelled to take sides, usually along gender sentiments. Supporting the idea that being part of the life audience of domestic violence plays significant role in children's perpetration of the vice, a male victim in-depth interview participant argued:

My wife sees her victory in any domestic violence as one successful struggle to rescue herself from marital slavery. She openly preaches this to our female children. My male children abhor the experiences. But my wife impressed it on our female children that the domestic violence they experience between her and myself were domestic laboratory practical training for our female children to liberate themselves from the captivity of patriarchy. This situation, I am afraid is capable of making our female children replica of their mother. It is also possible that our male children may surrender to fate and be willing victims of domestic violence, the way they have seen me admit defeat. Subjecting children to the vicarious liability of learning violence from their parents in domestic contexts are condemnable. It is not a fine heritage. (Male Victim, Monday, September 14, 2015)

### ***3. The Protection Available to Male Victims of IPV***

This section presents the findings on the protection facilities that are available to male victims of IPV in Lagos, Nigeria. A study of men seeking help from IPV victimization



(Hines & Douglas, 2010) found that intimate terrorism patterns were gender reversed for this group compared with a women's shelter group. Consistent with the above finding, almost all the participants in the present study lamented that there was no structured form of protection for male victims of domestic violence in Lagos. A female in-depth interview participant regretted that the only available support for a male victim of domestic violence exists in the emotional support provided by close associates in whom they have confided when she added:

The fact of non-disclosure itself forecloses support for male victims of domestic violence. Except the prayers he receives from collective blessings in his place of religious worship, the community does not have any structured provision for male victims to be supported in the neighbourhood. (Female IDI, Wednesday, September 16, 2015)

In box 3 below, a victim and case study participant reviewed the situations that made him a victim of female-perpetrated violence and the dearth of formal and informal protection for a male victim in the cultural environment of Lagos.

**Box 3**

I am a thirty-eight-year old man, Muslim, married and resident in Ojo Local Government Area. I hail from Oshun state. My wife is from Kwara State. We met at the National Stadium in Surulere, Lagos and dated for four years before we got married according to customary rules and regulations. If there is any protection for victims of domestic violence in the state, such is probably reserved for female victims. The fact that men do not report their experiences as victims of women-perpetrated violence in the domestic context paints the picture of the complete absence of the experience. Traditionally, female victims enjoy the solidarity of fellow women and that of their immediate families. Male victims nurse their pains without help. As a victim, the fear of societal rejection compels me to keep my status to myself. The peace I enjoy in my marriage is that of the graveyard. Since it is not imaginable that a woman could victimize a man, both informal and formal social provisions do not exist for my protection. This makes the internalization of whatever pains I experience in my domestic context the most sensible option for now.

However, in instances when the innocent victim of domestic violence happens to be a woman, she can at least find comfort and refuge but for men, at the moment, there is nothing. If he is involved with a violent woman he risks the laughter of his friends and a truly frosty reception from all the agencies (Pizzey, 2007). A male in-depth interview participant is convinced that traditional perception and consequent stigmatisation deprive male victims of domestic violence complete compassion in the community when he explained:

Contemporary development trend emphasises equity. Through the initiative, individuals who suffer different forms of social deficiencies in the modern world access some relief. That the challenges facing male victims of domestic violence is not receiving the due public attention it deserves is inexplicably contradictory of modern liberal gender relations initiatives which should advocate for equal social

provisions for victims of domestic violence, regardless of sex. (Male IDI, Monday, September 14, 2015)

In spite of the above, the suggestion of Lawrence (2003) that confirms the existence of support resources and networks for female victims of domestic violence shows that similar resources are not available for male victims. All over the world, there are shelters and safe homes to assist in protecting women from violent partners, but these are incomparable with the few services and resources available for men. In agreement with several studies which have drawn public attention to the self-reported shame and embarrassment of ‘abused men’, a 38-year-old male victim argued:

No matter how juicy the support the society promises, if the dominant stigmatisation that arises from the background of unjustified stereotype persists, no male victim raised from this traditional background will avail himself of the supposed triumphs of the social provisions. The public ridicule he faces is so debilitating to human personality. By implication, male victims of domestic violence will continue to be vulnerable and move on without public support. (Male Victim, Tuesday, September 15, 2015)

It is preposterous to assume that the consequence of stigmatization is not critical to male victims’ acceptance of their victim status to access societal support. On interviewing twelve self-identifying-men as abused, Migliaccio (2002) argued that this personified feeling of expected social rejection limited a man’s confidence to talk about the experience, everywhere and therefore constrain them from seeking help. If the above occurs in an environment that is more civilized than the location of the present study, then its severity could be imagined in African traditional settings. A 42-year-old-Igbo male victim confirmed that stigmatization is not a property of any particular ethnic group. He stated:

No matter the place under the sun a victim claims as his origin, he is treated the same humiliating way as other men who are unfortunate to be captured by their wives are normally treated. The seclusion is odious. It is better imagined than experienced. A male who is poor is still honoured as a member of the community but a male victim of domestic violence is treated as a social leper anywhere he goes with his stigmatised identity. (Male Victim, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

#### **4. Reducing the Incidence of Men Being Victims of IPV in Lagos**

This section presents the findings on the measures that could drastically reduce the incidence of men being victims of IPV in Lagos, Nigeria. Being a victim of female-perpetrated domestic violence, George (2007) argues that this “Great Taboo” (George, 2004) is the combination of two forbidden beliefs in society. The first holds that ‘a man can be beaten by a woman [which is an abomination particularly to men in traditional communities such as Lagos]. Second is the painful reality that a woman can be violent, which is in breach of stereotypical ideas of femaleness and is a status that neither men nor women wish to acknowledge’ (George, 2007:1). Thus, a male victim of domestic violence, who is an in-depth interview participant considered the ego of female-intimate-partners-victimised men in the domestic context and offered some suggestions:

I was aware that the moment I missed the traditional control of my wife, my justification for living has become completely eroded. However, to live and continue to be reckoned with, tradition provides a remedy for this irrelevance. I resorted to 'isora awon agba' (elders' traditional protection.) This came in the form of 'owo' (traditionally-induced respect) that could be complemented by 'awimayeun' (traditional automatic remote control.) With this intervention, my wife resumed her traditional role as my domestic complement. (Male Victim, Monday, September 14, 2015)

A male key informant interview participant looked at the fundamental need for new ways of resolving the contradictions in domestic violence and recommended:

There is a need to embark on cultural paradigm shift in public perception of intimate partner violence. It is high time it became accepted that men and women are both aggressors and victims under different conditions in different places. Domestic violence is a social problem but male victimisation is more problematic in the traditional settings because its stereotype scares male victims from seeking and accessing support that could make them take absolute control of their lives. (Male KII, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

A male in-depth interview participant considered the need for the agency of criminal justice system involved in handling of the report of male victims of domestic violence to be neutral and suggested:

The police and other agencies of the criminal justice system that handle male victims at different levels should be re-orientated to trust male complainants so as to address their challenges. The situation in which male victims are judged as incredible information providers negates the principles of fair play in the administration of justice. This further causes male victims to embrace non-disclosure stance. (Male IDI, Tuesday, September 15, 2015)

In box 4 below, a case study participant considered the intimidating stigmatisation that accompanies men being victims of women-induced domestic violence. He recommended a solution.

**Box 4**

I am a forty-nine-year old man, Christian, and married. I hail from Lagos state. My wife is from Oyo state. We met at a Marriage ceremony in Gbagada, Lagos and dated for eight years before we got married according to Islamic conventions. Many times, I felt the urge to report my traumatic experiences in the hands of my wife but when I consider the multiplier effects of reporting to our partial police on my self-esteem, I changed my mind. Police perception of men who are victims of domestic violence as customary perpetrators of domestic violence does not encourage male victims to come out to seek help. As a result, many are dying of silence-induced frustration. Therefore, one of the very effective ways of reducing female-perpetrated male victimization in the domestic context is for public policy to forbid the stigmatization of victims who come out to report their experiences to the police or any agency.

A male in-depth interview participant examined the ages and education of individuals involved in marriages from the point of view that both variables confer the necessary maturity required to sustain a marriage. He advised:

Since the inability of marriage partners to apply internal mechanism of self control to manage anger is one of the most common causes of domestic violence in Lagos, future couples should attain the age of maturity and have the education that can enable them cope with the realities of marital challenges before they attempt to go into marriage. (Male IDI, Thursday, September 17, 2015)

A female key informant interview participant examined how men's cautiousness in food consumption could prevent them from becoming victims of domestic violence and added:

Men, who are married, should beware whenever they get involved with members of the opposite sex, especially individuals whose marriages had crashed prior to their meeting. They should exercise considerable self control whenever they are offered foods or drinks by these usually generous 'senior girls'. They use extraordinary native means to hypnotize their prospective victims. Once they do that and one responds positively through unguarded consumption behaviour, one becomes a victim of what Yoruba people call 'atenuje'. He divorces his wife and moves to the house of his new-woman captor who will assault and remote control him until he is rescued by a higher spiritual authority. (Female KII, Tuesday, September 15, 2015)

## Discussion

The acknowledgment by participants that the aggressors of male victims of domestic violence were women underscores the finding of Parity (2010); Fiebert (1997, 2004, 2009); and Dutton (2007) that at least as of 2010, there are over 250 and counting worldwide academic studies that consistently show women, by their own admission, can be as aggressive as their male counterparts. However, it disproves the finding of Johnson and Leone (2005) that men were the only perpetrators of what they called "intimate terrorism" who deployed IPV for useful purposes. Holding patriarchal values as the sole motivation for IPV trivialises the problem. Other areas of human weaknesses need to be interrogated to situate further causes of other forms of aggression (Bates, Graham-Kevan, & Archer, 2014).

While Holtzworth-Munroe's (2005) argues that abused women sometimes use weapons in times of conflict to equalize the power imbalance of their male intimate partner. This defence is equivalent to the 'non-violent' use by women in traditional settings of native 'weapons' such as *efo riro* to deprive their intimate partners of their supposed masculinity. In a manner reminiscent of the scientific truism that action and reaction are equal and opposite, some highly perceptive male victims often quickly neutralise the domestic insurgency of their female partners by embarking on the use of '*isora awon agba*' (protection by the elders.) which often comes in the form of '*owo*' accompanied by '*awimayun*'. The cultural perception that men are not traditionally positioned to be domestic victims of women forecloses the provision of protective measures for men who are unfortunately trapped in abusive relationships.

The present study found no institutional structures on ground to support male victims. Even in environments in which social provisions are assumed to be in abundance, Douglas

and Hines (2011:7) reported that a large proportion of male victims who sought help from Domestic Violence agencies were told, “We only help women.” This automatically qualifies him for public ridicule if his new social status gets to the public domain. The current study found stigmatisation of male victims to be widespread. The above finding is consistent with Lyon et al, (2011:165), who reported male victims experienced “shame and difficulty finding services when they appear to have been designed for women.” In all of these, it is clear that conflict theory has the explanatory power to give a meaning to the conflictual struggles for power between men and women which often triggers violence in the domestic contexts. If the woman gains ascendancy, the man who inevitably becomes suppressed is a potential victim of IPV by his intimate partner.

To the extent that a greater proportion of the African continent is paternalistic, tradition is likely to continue to frown at any man who falls short of being the legitimate head of his family in compliance with customary expectations. Because of this critical cultural prescription and the socialisation that enforces its compliance with role orientation in furtherance of this norm; male victims of domestic violence are understandably invisible. This explains a lack of direct-victim participants in the present study. They hide to avoid being consigned to traditional insignificance arising from stigmatisation that has been reinforced by deep-rooted stereotype. To situate the question of domestic violence more globally involves an adoption of the human rights framework which transcends the norms and values of any particular culture or tradition (United Nations, 1993; Council of Europe, 2002; Amnesty International, 2004). This initiative may fail to underscore the grip of culture on the everyday conduct of traditional peoples. It may also overlook the significant obstacles which male victims of IPV face in increasing their safety and recovering from trauma because of disbelieving or stereotyped responses from their families, communities and official agencies (Viano, 1996). Thus, it is feared that the absence of services dedicated to assisting male victims may exacerbate a sense of invisibility and isolation (Humphreys & Thiara, 2003).

### **Directions for Future Research**

The findings of the present study suggest a few future directions for research on males as victims of IPV. While it successfully extends the frontiers of scientific knowledge on the specific conditions that predispose male victims to domestic violence in essentially traditional communities of Lagos, future research focus should concentrate on how male victims should overcome the stigmatisation that prevents them from acknowledging the fact of their victimization in the domestic context as a means of addressing the problem. Since the present study has established that domestic violence is an ill wind which blows no gender any good, there is a need for future direction of research to engage positive means of relieving the contemporary homes of domestic violence and making institutional provisions for domestic actors and actresses who may become victims in abusive relationships.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The current study has significant strengths and limitations. Since the study directly involves the status of human beings, it cautiously handled participants with the assurance that the interests of participants will not be exposed to any form of disdain because the effort is essentially for empirical purposes. Furthermore, this exploratory study opens up

the hitherto unexpected realm which tradition almost forecloses. It confirms that male victims of IPV exist in the study site. It also provides preliminary evidence that IPV defies ethnic boundaries. Conversely, the present study has the following limitations. The fewness of the participants makes generalization beyond the study site very problematic. Scholars may want to deploy multi-method approach to uncover possible areas of IPV that the present study fails to capture.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Because of the culture of stigma that still wraps the male victims of intimate partner violence in shame, members of this at risk population are still largely isolated as special victims in African communities. To eliminate domestic violence in contemporary communities, the study found that there is a need to change existing stereotypical norms that stigmatize male victims of intimate relationships and radicalize existing institutions in a way that makes them readily able to contain most of the stress which the family actors encounter. Male victims of domestic violence experience a great difficulty integrating into the mainstream of their traditional communities. As a result of the absence of institutional safeguards, necessary support eludes the male victims because they are incapable of meeting the cultural leadership expectations appropriate of the *baale ile* (family heads.) A paradigm shift is desirable to address the lopsided stereotype that consigns men who are weak enough to be successfully battered by their wives to a subhuman status. The solution of the problem should start with the acceptance of its existence. Once this is acknowledged, both men and women will see themselves as both aggressors and victims of a remediable problem in different domestic contexts. The participants strongly suggested the reformation of the police and other agencies of the criminal justice system to handle domestic violence with caution. Participants also recommended that the state's educational curriculum should include anti-battery values and teachers should teach children to appreciate battery as anti-social and criminal behaviour in Lagos communities.

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