

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG POLICEMEN: RANK AND SPOUSE EMPLOYMENT STATUS AS CLUES

***Uchenna C. Onuoha¹, Peter O. Olapegba², & Opeyemi I. Segun-Martins¹**

¹Adekunle Ajasin University, Nigeria

²University of Ibadan, Nigeria

***Correspondence:** Uchenna C. Onuoha, Department of Pure & Applied Psychology, Adekunle Ajasin University, PMB 001 Akungba-Akoko, 34-234 Ondo State, Nigeria. E-mail: nauche2010@yahoo.com
Phone:+2348034544547.

ABSTRACT

Interest in domestic violence may have been sustained by concerns about its negative effects on the well-being of victims. Despite concerted global effort at reducing domestic violence, gaps still exist in scholarly literature regarding the contributions of personal characteristics to domestic violence. The present study extended domestic violence literature by examining the influence of spouse employment status and rank on domestic violence among personnel of Nigerian Police Force. Participants consisted of 212 purposively selected personnel of the Nigerian Police Force. They included 88 commissioned officers and 144 non-commissioned personnel. Their age ranged from 28 to 57 years. One hundred and forty-three had wives who were employed, while the remainder (69) had non-working wives. After a critical review of domestic violence literature, two hypotheses were tested using t-test of independent samples. Results indicated significant influence of spouse employment status on domestic violence, such that policemen with working spouse were less likely to engage in domestic violence than those with unemployed spouse. However, rank had no influence on domestic violence. Vocational skill acquisition for non-working wives of policemen to enhance their economic contribution to the family is recommended.

Key words: Domestic violence, Spouse employment status, Rank, Nigeria Police Force

INTRODUCTION

In many countries across the globe, violence against women has been increasing (Archer, 2000; Black, Basile, Breiding, Smith, Walters, Merrick, Chen & Stevens, 2011; Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts, 2006; Odimegwu, 2001). Abraham (1999) described violence against women as acts that include 'sex without consent, sexual assault, rape, sexual control of reproductive rights, and all forms of sexual manipulation carried out by the perpetrator with the intention or perceived intention to cause emotional, sexual, and physical degradation to the victim'. Violence against women, whether by an intimate partner, or close family member, is of immense concern to governments, advocacy groups and other stakeholders because of its health, psychological, emotional and social consequences on victims (WHO, 2002).

In most cases, violence against women not only has a negative effect on their well-being, but it may also reduce their optimal contributions to the family, community, and society at large, especially if such women are married.

Violence towards female spouse can take one or more of three forms: physical abuse (kicking, hitting, pushing); sexual violence (forced sexual activity, sexual sadism); emotional/psychological abuse (intimidation, isolation from family and friends) (National Council on Child Abuse and Family Violence). Although violence against women may originate from different sources, abuse perpetrated by an intimate partner such as a husband tends to be commonplace in most patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. The reason may not be unconnected with traditional cultural practices in male-dominated societies that subjugate females to males, and in marital relationship, husbands often relate with their wives as a junior partner, or treat them as their private property.

In general, incidence of gender-based violence tends to be higher in societies in which the customs, beliefs, traditions and other practices not only discriminate against women but also promote gender inequality (Felson & Outlaw, 2007; Kinsfogel, 2010; Ilika, Okonkwo & Odimegwu, 2002; Odujinrin, 1993; Okemgbo, 2002). In a study that examined social norms as factors of domestic violence, Davis, Parks, & Cohen (2006) concluded that social norms that oppress and objectify women, show great value for the use of power over others, tolerate violence and victim-blaming and support traditional views of masculinity as basically dominant and controlling, significantly contribute to sexual violence against women.

Besides the role of discriminatory cultural norms in promoting domestic violence, membership of law enforcement organizations such as police might also increase male to female domestic violence. In Nigeria, policemen tend to rely on the use of force as a 'weapon' for arresting, interrogating an offender, and ensuring compliance whenever there is a perceived threat to their authority. In most cases, the use of force had often led to successful arrests and interrogation of offenders, thus increasing their performance. As a result, policemen may have developed a positive attitude towards the use of force and this may have generalized to non-work settings such as the home (Westman, 2005), thus increasing their tendency to engage in spouse abuse. Whereas studies have investigated how personality attributes influence domestic violence, there are still gaps in literature regarding the role of spouse employment status and rank on domestic violence in Nigeria, especially among policemen. But it is argued these two factors may increase the likelihood of male to female domestic violence among policemen and thus warrants further investigation.

Research has suggested a strong association between female partner's employment status and male-to-female intimate partner violence (Caetano, Vaeth, & Ramisetty-Mikler, 2008; Rao, 1997; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). These studies found that the likelihood of a female becoming a victim of intimate partner violence is higher among economically disadvantaged females. The finding suggests that females with little or no contributions to the family's purse may be more vulnerable to domestic abuse. In a related study that explored the relationship between income and male-to-female domestic violence, lower income predicted violence against female spouse (O'Donnell, Smith, & Madison, 2002; Pan, Neidig, & O'leary, 1994). An explanation for this link is that couples who are struggling to make ends meet may experience greater stress which increases the tendency of relationship friction between them.

Similarly, Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer (2002) reported positive relationship between annual household income and intimate partner violence among Americans of different nationalities. The authors found that the incidence of domestic violence was higher among lower income family, especially among couples with non-working wives. However, in a somewhat contradictory finding, Rodriguez, Lasch, Chandra, & Lee (2001) reported that non-employed individuals were not more likely than employed persons to engage in domestic violence, suggesting that factors other than employment status might contribute to domestic violence between intimate partners. The authors however noted an increased likelihood of conjugal violence among employed individuals who supplemented their income with welfare.

Further evidence highlighting an association between socio-economic status and domestic violence showed a significant negative relationship between income level of male partner and violence (Hoffman, Demo, & Edwards, 1994). Interestingly, there are studies that suggest that women with greater autonomy and control over economic resources tend to be more protected against violence (Jewkes, Levin, & Penn-Kekana, 2002). The finding is an indication that having economic power or control over economic resources may reduce the risk of women becoming victim of abuse. Corroborating this finding, Ghazizadeh (2005) reported that physical abuse was significantly more frequent among unemployed female spouses compared to those engaged in some form of economic activity.

Rank and hierarchy may have some effect on police domestic violence. Studies (Lott, 1995; Southworth, 1990) found that rank predicted domestic abuse, such that lower ranked policemen exhibited a higher tendency of engaging in domestic violence. The authors noted that this outcome might be related to the need for power and control among lower ranked policemen. They reasoned that in a rigidly controlled structure with a clear chain of command such as the police force, the lower ranks are the ones who execute orders but have little control over what they are required to do. They stated further that if an individual had limited power and control at work and experienced a need to exercise such power and control, they may then exercise that need in another context.

Previous studies (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Caetano, Cunradi, Clark, & Schafer, 2000; Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2000; Ratner, 1993) reported that lower ranking military personnel were at greater risk for perpetrating spouse abuse. These findings were attributed to factors related to the remuneration of lower ranked personnel. Lower ranked servicemen may face greater socioeconomic stressors than higher ranking soldiers because of their relatively lower remunerations such as salaries and other financial benefits. The authors thus concluded that stress experienced by lower ranking servicemen as a result of financial constraints may explain the positive association between lower rank and domestic violence. The conclusion validated findings across countries which showed a strong association between socioeconomic status and family violence (Jewkes, 2002).

Policemen may experience negative moods such as depression as a result of inability to satisfy certain needs and this may increase their likelihood of engaging in domestic violence. Halpern, Spriggs, Martin, and Kupper (2009) investigated this relationship and found a positive association between depression and intimate partner

victimization. The finding suggested that depression significantly increased the likelihood of domestic violence. Also, Foshee, Reyes, Ennett, Suchindran, Mathias, Karriker-Jaffe, Bauman, & Benefield (2011) reported that positive attitude towards violence by one's peer group significantly increased intimate partner violence. The study suggested a higher tendency of relationship violence if one's peer group has a favorable attitude towards it.

Hypotheses

1. Policemen with unemployed spouse will be significantly higher on domestic violence than those with employed spouse.
2. Lower ranked policemen will be significantly higher on domestic violence than higher ranked policemen.

METHOD

Design and participants

The study was a cross-sectional survey. The setting was randomly selected Divisional Police offices located within Ibadan metropolis. Two hundred and twelve (212) married policemen were purposively selected to participate in the study. Of this total, 88 (41.51%) were commissioned officers, while the remaining 144 (58.49%) were non-commissioned officers. Their ages ranged from 28 to 57 years. One hundred and eighty-four respondents indicated that they were in a monogamous relationship (married to one wife), while the remaining twenty-eight were in a polygamous relationship (had at least two wives). One hundred and forty-three had working wives, while the rest had wives who were not engaged in any form of economic activity. In terms of educational qualification, 28.3% had senior school certificate, 30.7% possessed Ordinary National Diploma, with the remaining 41.0% being educated up to Bachelors degree and post graduate level.

Measures

Domestic violence was measured with Intimate Partner Abuse scale (Hudson, 1992). The scale had 9 items that measured physical and non-physical abuse that occurred between partners in intimate relationship. The scale is scored according to 5-point Likert response format with options that ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The scale was revalidated in this study and yielded Cronbach's alpha of .76. In interpreting scores in the scale, scores above the mean value indicated higher tendency to abuse a partner, while scores below the mean value indicated lower tendency to abuse a partner.

Procedure

The researcher established contact with some police officers who expressed interest in the study and helped to facilitate the process that led to the granting of permission to conduct the study at the designated divisional police office selected for the

study. Thereafter, the researcher with research assistants met with policemen at their weekly briefing session at the various police divisions selected for the study and discussed the purpose of the study with them. Objections were responded to and clarifications made where necessary. Research instrument was subsequently administered on those who expressed willingness to participate in the study and gave oral consent as requested by the researcher.

Participants were assured that the result of the research would not be used for personnel decision whatsoever by the police hierarchy. The research instrument was collected from participants who were able to complete theirs the same day. Those who could not complete theirs were requested to drop them at an agreed designated collation point after they might have responded to the questions. Data collection lasted three weeks as some participants asked for more time to enable them respond to all the items in the instrument.

RESULTS

The results of the t-test of independent measure on the influence of spouse employment status on domestic violence are presented in Table 1.

Table 1:

Summary of t-test on Spouse Employment and Domestic Violence

Spouse Employment Status	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Employed spouse	143	9.71	7.50			
Unemployed spouse	69	13.0	10.30	210	-2.63	<.01

Table 1 indicates that spouse employment status significantly influenced domestic violence such that policemen with employed spouse displayed lower tendency to engage in domestic violence compared to those with unemployed spouse [$t(210) = -2.63, p < .01$]. The hypothesis 1 was, therefore, accepted.

To test the influence of job rank on domestic violence, a t-independent test was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

Summary of t-test on Rank and Domestic Violence

Rank	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
High rank	120	3.67	3.99			
Low rank	92	3.92	3.22	210	-.51	>.05

Table 2 shows that rank had no significant influence on domestic violence. Higher ranking policemen (Mean = 3.67; SD = 3.99) and lower ranked policemen (Mean = 3.92; SD = 3.22) were comparable on domestic violence [$t(210) = -.51, p > .05$]. The hypothesis 2 was not accepted.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated spouse employment status, and rank as predictors of domestic violence among policemen. On the basis of literature reviewed, it was hypothesized that spouse employment status will have significant influence on domestic violence. The result indicated significant influence of spouse's employment status on domestic violence. The finding showed that domestic violence was higher among non-working or unemployed wives compared to employed spouses. The finding is a further confirmation of previous studies which reported that non-working female spouses were at higher risk of domestic violence (Caetano *et al.*, 2008; Rao, 1997; Panda & Agarwal, 2005). The finding supported commonly held belief that economically disadvantaged women tend to be at higher risk for violence by an intimate partner (Cunradi, Caetano, & Schafer, 2002).

An explanation for this finding in the present study might have a cultural undertone especially in traditionally patriarchal societies like Nigeria. In these societies, husbands are projected as sole provider for the family; with this ascription significantly influencing male and female expectations of their economic contributions in conjugal relationships. However, contemporary economic reality might have forced a review of women's role as far as the family's economic well-being is concerned, as more women have now assumed active economic roles in the family. Consequently, most men in patriarchal societies may have developed a negative attitude towards economically unproductive spouses. Therefore, the finding in this study indicates that domestic violence among policemen can be associated with socioeconomic factors and may be understood from an economic perspective.

Rank had no significant influence on domestic violence. The finding showed that higher ranked policemen and their lower ranked counterparts were similar on domestic violence. The finding is at variance with studies from western societies which reported that lower ranked servicemen had a higher likelihood of battering their spouse (Bachman & Saltzman, 1995; Caetano *et al.*, 2000; Cunradi *et al.*, 2000; Ratner, 1993). The contradictory finding regarding the association between rank and domestic violence in this study seems more an indication that policemen irrespective of their rank, might have subscribed to male sub-cultural norms that justify violence towards women as is common in traditional African societies. The finding further suggests the existence of a negative police culture towards women which might cut-across the organizational hierarchy. This negative police culture undoubtedly may have originated from the larger cultural practices in male-dominated societies that oppress and objectify women, value the use of power over others, tolerate violence against women, and often engages in victim-blaming (Davis *et al.*, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The study explored how spouse employment status influenced domestic violence. The study found that being unemployed significantly influenced domestic violence. In addition, the study found that rank had no influence on domestic violence. The finding in this study emphasizes the need for emotional management training for policemen. It also stresses the need for better support services for policemen in order to help them better manage job-related stress.

The major limitation of the study has to do with the setting. The sample for the study was drawn from only police divisions in Ibadan metropolis. Another limitation has to do with the small sample size of the study. Generalization of the findings might have been enhanced if the sample size had been larger and police divisions in other south western states of Nigeria were sampled.

The present study found that spouse employment status was a significant factor that predicted domestic violence. It indicated that being gainfully employed reduced the risk of domestic violence. Economic empowerment of spouses of policemen might reduce domestic violence among members of the police force. It is therefore recommended that the police hierarchy through such organs as POWA (police officers wives association) and other related associations should embark on programs to create awareness among wives of policemen on the need to become economically active as a way of reducing their risks of being victimized.

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