

# Influence of Socio-Economic Status and Marital Satisfaction on Domestic Violence among Couples Living in Nigeria

Okhakhume A. S., Rotimi Oguntayo, Aroniyaso O. T.\*

Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

**Abstract** Adversely, increase rate of conduct disorder, low self-esteem, low education standard, drug dependence/alcoholism and sexual risk behaviour among children from violent couples thereby becoming hazardous to themselves and society at large attracted the attention of this study to investigate factors predicting domestic violence. This study investigated influence of socioeconomic variables and marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples in Nigeria. The study adopted cross sectional research design, purposive sampling technique was used to select 250 consisting of 112 males and 138 females who participated in the study and questionnaires was used for data collection. The results of the finding revealed that income significantly predicts domestic violence among couples in Nigeria. Further analysis revealed that there is significant influence of marital satisfaction on domestic violence. Therefore, it was Concluded that income and marital satisfaction are predictors of domestic violence among couples in Nigeria and it is recommend that government and non-governmental organisation should endeavour to implement or boost effective poverty alleviation programmes that will alleviate poverty in our society.

**Keywords** Socioeconomic variables, Marital satisfaction, Domestic violence, Couples

## 1. Introduction

Victims who are pregnant during domestic violence relationship experience greater risk of miscarriage, pre-term labour and death of foetus (Jones and Horan, 1979). It has been confirmed that victims of violence in the family are susceptible to some clinical syndromes like stress, fear, depression, anxiety, general phobia and post-traumatic disorder. Children from violent couple may develop conduct disorder, low self-esteem, low education standard, drug dependence/alcoholism and sexual risk thereby becoming hazardous to themselves and society at large. Due to economic deprivation and lack of social intimacy, victims experience poverty, lack of skills, homelessness and may end up being an unemployable citizens (American Civil Liberties Union Women's Right Project, 2007). Domestic violence has emerged as one of the global highest pressing problems. The United Nation estimated that more than one million cases of intimate partner abuse are reported each year and that between 20-50% of people worldwide experience physical violence at the hand of intimate partner or family members (Goldberg, 1999). U.S Office of Violence Against

Women (OVW) (2007), defines domestic violence as a "pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one's partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner". In Nigeria, several cases of spouses hurting partners verbally, sexually, physically and battering of one's spouse are common news on media. The true dimensions of domestic violence against one's spouse may never be known, under-reporting of such cases is significant due to isolation and the deep social stigma attached to it (Adidu, 2001). In many countries, Human Rights Watch found that some partners endured domestic violence because they were unable to escape, felt acute financial pressure to remain in their homes, or were under threat of greater harm if they did report (Amnesty International, 2005). Women in developed world, who experience domestic violence are encouraged to report to the authorities while recently in Lagos state (part of Nigeria), women are encouraged to report domestic violence to the authorities though it rarely reported by men unlike women in Nigeria rather they endure it, this is because of the social pressure against such reporting, with those that do facing social stigma regarding their perceived lack of machismo (sense of being manly) and other denigrations of their masculinity (Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team, 2015).

Johnson (1995) argues for three major types of intimate partner violence, which is supported by subsequent research

\* Corresponding author:

aroniyasooladipupo05@gmail.com (Aroniyaso O. T.)

Published online at <http://journal.sapub.org/ijap>

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and evaluation (Johnson, 2006), as well as independent researchers (Graham- Kevan and Archer 2003; and Rosen, Stith, Few, Daly and Tritt, 2005). Distinctions are made among the types of violence, motives of perpetrators and the social and cultural context based patterns across numerous incidents and motives of the perpetrator. Moreover, several researches have discussed some causes of domestic violence which to some extent depends on some factors such as, personal characteristics and characteristic of one's spouse, psycho-social characteristics like, self-esteem, self-efficacy, love and personality. But less has been said about economic characteristics like wealth, social class, education, occupation, tribe etc. Marital satisfaction can be defined as the "overall marital happiness of married couple". According to some researchers, some couples experience greater marital satisfaction than the other, thus, when a partner or partners are not satisfied in their marriages, it negatively affects one's health, such as, depression, cardiovascular diseases e.g. high blood pressure, stroke or even death.

To be satisfied in marriage is to reach one's goals in marital life or attain affective condition of a spouse who gained his/her desires in marriage. Marital satisfaction is an individual's subjective impression of specific components within his/her marital relationship. It includes roles, interpersonal relationships and reciprocities, prosperities, motivations, inter marital contention factors, privacy preferences, perception of the partner's humour and attribution. Marital satisfaction is the product of interaction between husband and wife and the amount of agreement between one's expectations of the marriage and the rewards that marriage provides. A good marriage is the most rewarding experience life can offer. It makes a person feel adequate, desired, approved and complete to a degree which is not possible in any other form of human relationships (Coleman and Miller 1975). There is a relationship between marriage and marital satisfaction, both are inextricably tied to each other. The thread of sexuality is also woven densely into the fabric of marital satisfaction. It is a very sensitive barometer for assessing marital relationship. Sex in no way is the entity of marriage, any disturbance in this aspect can be a threat to marriage. Marital satisfaction plays a major role to promote good patterns of personality. It is generally assumed that the longer the duration of marriage, the greater the frequency of marital satisfaction and the lower the level of violence to one's partner. The satisfaction and dissatisfaction that lead to marital happiness and unhappiness also depends upon the sexual behaviour of the husband and wife. Becoming a parent involves many changes in behaviour, that is, there are new roles and responsibilities, social approval behaviour, rationality and quality in life.

Marital satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of individual's experiences in their marriages. By subjective evaluation, we mean that marital satisfaction can only be rated by each person in response to the question "How satisfied are you?" The level of your satisfaction cannot be determined by anyone else. Thus, marital satisfaction is not a property of a relationship but it is a subjective experience and

opinion. Uniquely, marital satisfaction is a relatively stable attitude and attribute which reflects the individuals' overall evaluation of the relationship. Marital satisfaction depends upon the individual's needs, expectations, and desires for the relationship. Individuals are usually satisfied when their needs are being met, the individual's expectations and desires are being satisfied and hurting each other is minimal or not present to some extent. Marriage has been documented in every known culture and more than 90% of the world's population will marry at least once (Epstein & Guttman, 1984). Oyeniran and Abanihe (2005) found that a large percentage of Nigeria women agreed that a man is justified to beat his wife and that violence against women by male partners is widely condoned by many Nigerians because it is deeply embedded in the culture. In south east Nigeria, 70% of respondents reported abuses by their family with 92% being females victims (Obi and Ozumba, 2007). In a research carried out in Yaba part of Lagos State, majority were Yoruba tribe while 29.4% of the participants reported to have experienced above average domestic violence and 42.70% experienced significantly more psychological distress than the general population of the participants (Ajirofutu, Gabriel and Akinkunmi, 2010). Report revealed that half of Nigerian women had experienced domestic violence (Afro, 2007). Consequently, the education, civility and enlightenment is needed considering socioeconomic factors to be considered to aid satisfaction derived in marriage which will determines whether they will be violent or non-violent couples.

Various theoretical perspectives have tried to explain domestic violence and marital satisfactions thus: the cognitive theory explains that there are some variables associated with marital discord which suggests that through distortive information processing, discordant couples may differ from non-discordant couples in the extent to which their behavior toward their partner reflects different intentions and interpretations as well as different emergent goals during interaction and conflicts (Fincham and Beach, 1999). Whereas non-discordant couples are able to transform conflict of interest or disagreement into opportunities for advancing long-term goals therefore, foster accommodation, a communal orientation, and forgiveness (Rusbult, Verette, Whitney and Slovik, 1991), discordant couples find themselves pulled toward short-term and avoidance goals, leading to heightened negative affect reciprocity, increased negative intent, and increased willingness to engage in negative behaviours should the occasion arise.

Some psychologists have also specifically probe into the factors influencing domestic violence among couples, one of which is the data collected from a sample of 300 married women of Shiraz, Mirahmadzadeh *et al.* (2003) where they investigated in regard to power dominance in families. They studied the effects of socio-economic variables of family power structure. Survey method was used to measure the effects of the variables. In their study, dominance was been measured under two concepts of work distribution pattern and resolution pattern. Based on the results, husband and

wife's education is one of the significant variables in relation to power dominance in families. The women who have higher educational levels have a more crucial role in cooperation and resolution. There existed a negative significant relationship between man's education and his exerting power in families. In other words, the more educated the men are, the less power dominance there will be and women have more chances for cooperating in relations. Mirahmadizadeh *et al.* (2003) argued that marital satisfaction was greater amongst those who were older and had higher level of education at the time of marriage. Cases of domestic violence against intimate partner have been on the increase in Nigeria. There have been reports of cases of husbands killing and maiming their wives in the media. Vanguard newspaper reported a case of a couple on the 25<sup>th</sup> August, 2015 presented in customary court, Ikorodu in Lagos that a man was arraigned for abusing his wife physically because she refused to have sex with him, as a result, he threatened to bath her with hot water if she refuses again. The statistics presented by This Day (2011) newspaper are daunting. 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%). Most endure, believing they have nowhere to go and in any case, believing, for good reason, that the law will not protect them. Staggering 97.2% of them are not prepared to report to the Nigeria Police. Only four states of the Federation (Lagos is one of them) have passed laws against the insidious crime, whilst several Bills against it suffer in Nigeria male dominated National Assembly of the states that have passed it, the law is yet to be fully tested.

More so, studies have been conducted to examine the causes of domestic violence among couples in Nigeria. Worthy to mention are Aina (2004) investigated the phenomenon of domestic violence among the Yorubas. Tenuche's (2004) study focused on Tiv, Idoma and Igede peoples of Kogi and Benue States. The minority ethnic groups in Edo and Delta States were explored by Aderinto (2004), while Alumanah (2004) undertook a study of the Igbos. Using semi-structured questions, in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guides, they reported that the incidence of domestic violence is 'perpetuated' in different forms such as beating, hitting with objects, pushing, stabbing, throwing something at partners, denial of housekeeping allowance to mention a few. Idialu (2003) also investigated the causes of crises among couples in Edo State. In the said study, emphasis was placed on family finances. A major conclusion reached in the work has to do with the fact that financial problems put enormous strain on family relationship. Anyakoha and Eluwa (1991) addressed the factors which affect family relationship. In their study, they concluded that variables such as changes in growth and development, individual differences, home conditions, family size, human needs, parental attitudes and child-training methods were quite significant in the

explanation of such phenomenon. But less studies have been conducted to examine socio-economic and psychological variables that could make couples susceptible to domestic violence in Nigeria. Therefore, this study investigate the influence of socio-economic and marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples living in Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to examine influence of socio-economic and marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples living in Nigeria. While the specific objectives include:

- i. To examine the influence of income on domestic violence among couples in Nigeria.
- ii. To investigate the influence of marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples living in Nigeria.
- iii. Proffering credible and actionable recommendations to identified problems.

### **Hypotheses**

1. Couples with high income will report significant low level domestic violence among couples in Nigeria compare to those with low income.
2. Couples with high marital satisfaction will report significant low level domestic violence among couples in Nigeria compare to those with low marital satisfaction.

## **2. Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopted cross sectional research design. The independent variables are income and marital satisfaction, while the dependent variable is domestic violence.

### **Research Setting**

This study was conducted in Nigeria and it only involved only married, cohabited and separated/divorced couples who are literate were approached for the administration of the questionnaire.

### **Study Participants**

The participants for this study were randomly selected purposively during questionnaires administration. A total sample size of about 200 couples (which involved 112 males and 138 females) participated in the study. The demographic characteristic show that 167 were Christians while 83 are Muslims. educational characteristic revealed that 48 have SSCE, 57 have OND/NCE, 93 have B.Sc, 44 were Masters degree holders and 8 have PhD degrees. Lastly, 184 married from their own tribe while 66 married from other tribes which contribute to the generalization of this study.

### **Procedure for Data Collection**

Permission was first sought from head of the family visited which is man according to west African culture before the administration of the questionnaires. The researcher then administered the questionnaire, retrieved and

two hundred and fifty were accurately satisfied. Prior to the given questionnaire to fill, the researcher instructed them on how they were expected to respond to the statement in the questionnaire and also informed them that their confidentiality was guaranteed and therefore they should not write their names on the questionnaire. The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling technique which involves the selection of participants in such a way that it would follow the purpose of the study strictly by considering only the married, cohabited and separated/divorced couples.

### Instruments

Questionnaires were used to collect relevant information from the participants of the study. The questionnaire was divided into five segments with each of the segments tapping information based on the identified variables of interest. It comprised of five sections; A, B, and C. The structure of the questionnaire is outlined below.

#### Section A: Demographic characteristics

In this section of the questionnaire, demographic information of the participants were captured ranging from age to their income per month. This section consisted of variables such as age, sex, religion and highest academic qualification, marital status, and income per month.

#### Section B: Marital Adjustment Test (MAT)

Locke, H. J. and Wallace, K. M. (1959) developed this Self Report Short version scale to measure marital satisfaction among couples. It was 15-items scale with 7 likert responses format ranging from extremely unhappy (1) to perfectly happy (7) constructed to measure marital satisfaction. It was initially used to differentiate well-adjusted couples from distressed (unsatisfied) couples. The scale demonstrated strong convergent validity with other measures of satisfaction and excellent construct validity with anchor scales from the nomological net surrounding satisfaction, suggesting that they assess the same theoretical construct as do prior scales. The resultant 15-items scale yielded alpha coefficient of .99.

#### Section C: Hurt-Insult-Threaten-Scream Scale (HITS):

This is a short Screening tool for measuring Domestic Violence in the Family practice Setting. This instrument was designed by Kevin M. Sherin, James M. Sinacore, Xiao-Qiang Li, Robert E. Zitter, and AmerShakil in 1998. The questionnaire measures how often couples physically Hurt, Insulted, Threatened with harm, and Screamed at their spouse. The HITS scale showed good internal consistency and concurrent validity with the CTS verbal and physical aggression items. The HITS scale also showed good construct validity in its ability to differentiate family practice patients from abuse victims. The scale is a 5 points likert scale format. The options ranges from 1-Never, 2-Rarely, 3-Sometimes, 4-Fairely Often, 5- Frequently. It is directly scored and score of 10 and above indicate a victim of domestic violence. The scale yielded internal coefficient of .80.

## 3. Results

Hypothesis one which stated that Couples with high income will report significant low level domestic violence among couples in Nigeria compare to those with low income and Hypothesis two which stated that couples with high marital satisfaction will report significant low level domestic violence among couples in Nigeria compare to those with low marital satisfaction was tested using t-test for independent sample and the result is presented on table 1 below;

**Table 1.** Table showing influence of monthly income and marital satisfaction on domestic violence

	income	N	Mean	SD	df	T	P
<b>Domestic violence</b>	Low	149	15.22	6.45	248	5.43	<.05
	High	111	12.14	4.24			
<b>Domestic violence</b>	<b>Marital Satisfaction</b>				248	4.73	<.05
	Low	147	14.93	5.45			
	High	103	10.63	3.72			

Table 1 shows that monthly income has significant influence on domestic violence at  $t(248) = 5.43$ ;  $P < .05$ . The result also indicate that participants with low monthly income experienced higher levels of domestic violence while participants with high monthly income experienced lower levels of domestic violence and the result also indicated that the difference was statically significant.

More so, the table shows that marital satisfaction has significant influence on domestic violence at  $t(248) = 4.73$ ;  $P < .05$ . The result also indicate that participants with low marital satisfaction experienced higher level of domestic violence while participants with high marital satisfaction experienced lower level of domestic violence and the result also indicated that the difference was statically significant.

## 4. Discussion & Conclusions

The present study examine the influence of socio-economic and marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples living in Nigeria and the result revealed that monthly income has significant influence on domestic violence at  $P < .05$ . The result also indicated that participants with low monthly income experienced higher levels of domestic violence while participants with high monthly income experienced lower levels of domestic violence and that the difference was statically significant. This was partially supported by the results of research conducted by Idialu (2003), who investigated the causes of crises among couples in Edo State. In her said study, emphasis was placed on family finances. A major conclusion reached in the work has to do with the fact that financial

problems put enormous strain on family relationship. She argued that contemporary marriages experience more strain because of financial matters than any other factors. This conclusion also agreed with that of Lauer (1992) who found that major reasons why couples engage in verbal abuse was as a result of insufficient income. It was observed during the study that the relationship that exist between the husband and wife of rich home is differ from those of middle or low socio-economic class.

More so, the result also revealed that marital satisfaction has significant influence on domestic violence at  $P < .05$ . Further analysis indicated that participants with low marital satisfaction experienced higher level of domestic violence while participants with high marital satisfaction experienced lower level of domestic violence and the difference was statically significant. This finding was partially supported by Hotaling and Sugarman (1990), that Marital satisfaction significantly influenced domestic violence among in couples. Afolabi (2011) also confirmed that, there is a great relationship between marital satisfaction and violence. Researchers such as Lewis and Fremouw (2001) have said that violence and marital satisfaction are bi-directional, that is, that there may be low satisfaction in the past that leads to violence or vice-versa. A number of researchers like Bookwala *et al.* (1994) have found that in violent couple relationships, lower level of relationship satisfaction exist compared to non-violent couple relationships. Also, the findings is related to Sagrestano *et al.* (1999) who argues that marital satisfaction has a negative relation to domestic violence. From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that economic status and marital satisfaction of intimate partner predicted domestic violence among couples. This implies that couples who experience satisfaction in their marriage have tendencies for low risks of domestic violence and that, homes with poverty may elicit domestic violence towards each other.

## 5. Recommendations & Limitations

The findings of this study revealed that economic status predicted domestic violence among couples in Nigeria as homes with poverty tend to elicit domestic violence towards each other than the rich homes, even when asked that what was the major reason that makes them to engaged in domestic violence or quarrelling with themselves, the response was insufficient fund to catered for the home. Therefore, it is recommend that government and non-governmental organisation should endeavour to implement or boost effective poverty alleviation programmes that will alleviate poverty in our society. Health workers and every individual should form the habit of referring victims of domestic violence to clinical health psychologists for interventions rather than the old measures of communal and court intervention. Welfare homes, ministry of social development and other rehabilitation homes in Nigeria should make an objective "change" upon

themselves by employing clinical psychologists to champion the family therapy and other clinical interventions to effectively cure and prevent violence of various types in respective homes.

This research is limited to income, marital satisfaction and domestic violence among couples in Nigeria, other factors such as personality and environmental factors also may be consider for further research.

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