

Underreporting Violence Against Women in Edo State: The Implications

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Abstract

Domestic violence has become a regular occurrence in many African societies but its reporting is argued to be very much below especially domestic violence against women in Nigeria. This is unacceptable. This study investigated incidences of violence against women happening in various communities in Edo State. It was carried out using content analysis and qualitative research design. The population comprises of journal articles, books, reports, website and other related materials published in Nigeria from which a convenience sample was selected (2013 to 2023). The study found that the underreporting of violence happening in Edo State is the same as the underreporting of violence happening in other parts of the country. It found that there has been a slightly visible impact of the provisions of the law and the National Gender policy in abating the violence against women in Edo State. The study concluded that the incidences of violence against women results presented in the paper were a vivid reflection of the situation in Edo State. It recommended that awareness about the ills of violence should be created and severe sanctions should be given to perpetrators to eliminate violence.

Key words: Violence Against Women, Intimate Partner Violence, Gender-based Violence, Domestic Violence and Underreporting

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years, literature and news have been inundated with several incidences of violence against women happening in various countries of the world. Domestic violence is the most pervasive but least recognized human abuse worldwide. It is the most abusive treatment directed mostly against women, thus violating the law of fundamental human rights (Nnabugwu, 2012). Domestic violence is an age long and deep-seated cultural practices exhibited in violent behaviours that inflict physical, mental, sexual harm, injury and distress or pain on women which subjugate them to second class status. Nworah (2011) asserts that it is a culture of silence which instead of prosecuting the perpetrators inflicts a condemnation stigma on the victim and as well reinforces it. According to United Nations General Assembly (1993) violence against women is defined as any act or violence that results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts or deprivation of liberty in public or private life.

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) (2015) intimate partner violence is an act of physical abuse or threat of violence in an intimate relationship. According to WHO intimate partner violence is the most common form of violence against women. Omuemu and Ogboghodo (2016) assert that domestic violence is one of the most worrisome of human rights violations denying women equality, security, dignity, self-worth and their right to enjoy fundamental freedom. According to Nworah (2011) domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behaviour in any relationship that is used by one partner to gain or maintain power and control over another intimate partner. This includes any behaviour that intimidates, manipulate,

humiliate, isolate, frighten, terrorize, threaten, blame, or injure someone. From Nwoha's assertion domestic violence can manifest in varied forms and in different magnitude for example spousal rape, battering slapping and disrespect. Generally, violence can be physical, sexual, verbal, emotional and psychological as well as by power of control happening in different forms and in different places such as homes, and in communities.

Several countries across Africa including Nigeria have been engulfed in various forms of violence (Bamiwuye & Odimegwu, 2014). Bamiwuye and Odimegwu (2014) reported that the prevalence of physical, sexual, and emotional forms of violence ranged from 30.5% in Nigeria to 43.4% in Zimbabwe; 45.3% in Kenya; 45.5% in Mozambique; 53.9% in Zambia and 57.6% in Cameroun. The amount of domestic violence currently being witnessed across Nigeria is very disturbing. The country seems to be consumed by domestic violence from the states in the north to the south and across the various geopolitical zones. Several studies had revealed that most of the incidences of domestic violence were never reported or disclosed for fear of stigmatization, preservation of family name or fear of losing the marriage to mention a few (Omuemu & Ogboghodo, 2016; Oche, et al, 2020; Okolie, et al, 2021; Osamuyi, 2022; Oseni, et al, 2022). The enthronement and acceptance of some of these practices found in multi-racial patriarchal societies cut across women's socio-cultural, economic and political status irrespective of their education, profession and class. The practices were to ensure complete subjugation of the women to men through dominance and control at home as well as other forms that perpetuate gender imbalance (Nworah, 2011).

Literature has shown how women in Nigerian Communities were passing through harrowing experiences of domestic violence in one form or the other (Oche, et al, 2020; Okolie, et al, 2021). Okolie et al had revealed a high prevalence of women who are publicly maltreated, verbally insulted and disgraced in public places. According to global index for human trafficking, Nigeria ranked 32 out of 167 countries with the highest number of slaves. About 11,000 women that arrived Italy via the Mediterranean Sea were from Edo State (Global Slavery Index, 2018). This situation is worsened by the frightening increase in the incidences and mortality rates from such discriminations, deprivations, and denials. The battle to stop violence against women and enhance their status and development in society needs to be fought on several fronts with a variety of weapons. Hence numerous international and national bodies, non-governmental and women organizations are joining forces together to combat the patriarchal anomalies dominant in our multi-ethnic societies. This battle can only be won through sustainability of awareness campaign strategies capable of calling all the concerned parties to order, prosecuting

the perpetrators of domestic violence and protecting the women and stemming the culture of silence to a culture of equity, justice and fair play. Researchers have observed that most of the incidence were not reported or documented (NPC & ICF International, 2014; World Bank, 2019; Cullen, 2020; Osamuyi, 2022). This leads to poor statistical estimates of victims affected and the underreporting of incidents. Considering the fact that there have been many unreported incidents of domestic violence happening in various parts of Nigeria, it has become necessary to investigate the violence against women in Edo State and highlight the implications of underreporting.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To determine if the underreporting of violence happening in other parts of the country is the same as the underreporting of violence happening in Edo State.
- To examine the impact of the provisions of the law and the National Gender policy in abating the violence against women in Edo State.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUALISATION

In Nigeria women and girl children are mostly victims of violence. About 28 per cent of women in Nigeria aged between 15-49 have experienced physical or sexual violence (NPC & ICF International 2014; World Bank 2019). Violence against women comprises of the domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Whether domestic violence or intimate partner violence, it can be physical, psychological or sexual. Recent studies have shown that violence against women is on the increase across the country. Scholars like Adams and Erhus (2020) had carried out their research in an urban community in Southern Nigeria during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was revealed that out of 616 respondents that took part in the study, more than one third of the women 221 (35.9) per cent had been victims of domestic violence during the pandemic. Scholars like Okolie et al (2021) had carried out their study in Maiduguri and found that sexual violence was prevalent. Oche et al (2020) did a similar research in Sokoto and found that violence against women was rampant across the state.

Similarly, prior studies have shown that the rate of violence against women is high in Edo State (Osamuyi, 2022; Oseni, et al, 2022; Omuemu & Ogboghodo, 2016). World bank (2019) rated violence against women as the most dehumanising incidence happening across various communities in the State. Such dehumanising incidences of intimate partner violence have formed a growing concern in the State as it is high among married women (Oseni, et al, 2022). It appears these incidences of

intimate partner violence are tolerated at the societal and community levels and are strongly linked to traditional beliefs. It is sad that some of these violent acts are embedded in the culture and regarded as a way of life. Some people believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife if she refuses to have sexual relationship with him or she is economically dependent on him or of lower economic status (World Bank 2019). The world bank pointed out that the harmful practices of child marriage and female genital mutilation were prevalent across the communities, and kidnapping and trafficking in women and children had become endemic in Edo State.

Moreover, it has become necessary to discuss the various conceptualisations of violence to actualise the overview of literature.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence Against Women is seen as the most dehumanising act happening in many countries across the world. The United Nations Declaration on Violence against Women described violence as an act which involves psychological, sexual, physical and economic violence. Violence against women is an attack on one's identity aimed at destroying the character and personality. Researchers like (Scott et al 2013) revealed that there has been violence against women across the globe. The violence against women can take place anywhere such as the homes, workplace, institutions and marketplace, schools and churches and it is a significant cause of female morbidity and mortality (Dipo-Salami, et al, 2022)

Intimate Partner Violence

According to World Health Organisation (WHO) (2015) intimate partner violence is any act of coercion physical abuse or threat of violence in an intimate relationship. The World Health Organisation notes that intimate partner violence (IPV) is one of the most common form of violence against women. Violence by an intimate partner is demonstrated by physical, sexual emotional abusive acts as well as controlling behaviour. The physical violence by intimate partner involves slapping, kicking, pushing, beating as well as marital rape. The psychological abuse involves insults, belittling, and constant humiliation (WHO, 2015). Also, men maltreat women, marginalize women and subdue them to maintain their superiority over them.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence is violence mostly targeted against women and girl children. Gender-based violence is one of the most oppressive forms of gender inequality causing a fundamental barrier to the equal participation of women and men in social, economic and political activities. In Klugman et al (2014), the World Bank

Inter Agency described gender-based violence as an umbrella term for any harmful act that is perpetrated against somebody's will especially women. Gender-based violence affects both male and female, but women are most affected because the violence reinforces the existing gender inequality. Arango et al (2014) note that gender-based violence includes intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, female genital mutilation, sexual exploitation and abuse, child abuse, female infanticide and child marriage. The scholars reveal that such violence affect gender equality and national development. They observe that the harmful practice of child marriage and genital mutilation are still ongoing across the country and trafficking in women and children is endemic in Edo State. (Arango, et al 2014)

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Domestic violence against women is mostly prevalent in Nigeria with 81 per cent of women being victim of one form of abuse or the other (NPC & ICF International 2014; World Bank 2019). According to Aderinto et al (2006) domestic violence is recognised as a violation of human rights. The scholars noted that as early as 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly identified this form of violence as an abuse that threatened the security of women and their fundamental human rights, life and liberty as well as freedom and want. It is observed that domestic violence exists as a culture of silence and denial of serious consequence of abuse across the world. Since domestic violence is considered a private affair this contributed to its absence in public health policies and government programmes (Aderinto et al 2006). Domestic violence includes social, economic, religious and cultural considerations.

UNDERREPORTING OF VIOLENCE

The underreporting of incidents that involves violence against women is a common phenomenon across the globe. It is also faced in many countries with data-related issues like survey sampling where an important example of non-sampling errors that can introduce biases in the estimations. Underreporting is of great importance in public policy issues where government agents try to monitor incidents that are usually underreported for example inspection of restaurants, building compliance safety regulations and many others. Alvaro and Riascos (2022) argued that underreporting of patient safety incidents creates a reservoir of information that is plagued with epidemiological bias. These scholars noted that underreporting of socially sensitive events can undermine the credibility of official figures and can be used strategically by official agents or the general public.

IMPLICATIONS OF UNDERREPORTING OF VIOLENCE

Most studies on domestic violence which are meant to be taken as socio-cultural and economic are neglected thereby causing underreporting of the domestic violence. The Nigeria Demographic Health Survey carried out in 2013 revealed that about 45 per cent of women who had experienced violence never sought help or reported to anybody about the incident or violence. This corroborates the analysis of Cullen (2020) that analysed the magnitude of underreporting intimate partner sexual violence in Nigeria using 3 survey methods. The study found that in Nigeria intimate partner violence increased by 39 per cent and the cases were never reported. They noted that underreporting was associated with indicators often targeted in women's empowerment programmes, employment and education. The study suggested that standard survey underestimates the prevalence of intimate partner violence due to bias correlations and treatment effect estimate (Cullen, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out using a qualitative research design. The population under study comprises of journal articles, books, reports, website and other related materials on the violence against women published in Nigeria from 2006 to 2023. The convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample from (2013 to 2023) this population since it was impracticable to attempt the detailed study of all materials that emanated from all the journal articles, books, reports, website and other sources that were published on the violence against women and circulated in Nigeria. Circulation, accessibility, frequency and consistency of publication were the major criteria used in selecting these materials on the violence against women. Content analysis was used as the research instrument. It found to be the appropriate approach for this work. The descriptive data collected were analysed and presented following ethical considerations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first objective of this study was to determine if the underreporting of violence happening in Edo State is the same as the underreporting of violence happening in other parts of the country. Findings show that several studies had been carried out on the violence against women in across Edo state (Osamuyi, 2022; Oseni, et al 2022; Omuemu & Ogboghodo, 2016). Osamuyi (2022) was a study aimed at exploring marital violence against women in Useh Community in Ovia North East Local Government Area in Edo State. The study used descriptive survey design with a quantitative data collection method. The population was made up of women and Taro Yamane

mathematical model was used to draw the sample size of 335 participants. The study found that marital violence was caused by childlessness, low level of education, poverty, psychological factors and many others. It also revealed that many of these cases were not reported and a few Social work officials in Benin City from Egor Local Government Area in Edo State had rendered counselling services to resolve marital problems in the community. The study recommended that government and non-governmental organisations should collaborate to create agencies to fight the crime against women in rural and sub-urban areas so that these women would benefit the services of these organisations. It also recommended that men who physically assault women should desist from such act and change their behaviour.

A similar study, Oseni et al (2022) was carried out a study to determine the prevalence and pattern of intimate partner violence in Edo State. The study was carried out in six towns across three senatorial districts using a descriptive cross-sectional community-based study. A semi-structured questionnaire and interviews were used on a sample of 1227 respondents. The study found intimate partner violence of 37.7 per cent among the respondents, mostly affected were female married respondents (62.8 per cent, unemployed 53.1 per cent. It also found that the pattern of intimate partner violence was high among married women. It pointed out that incidences of intimate partner violence were a growing concern globally and particularly in Nigeria and concluded that although women were at a greater risk of the violence, men were also affected but these cases were less reported. The study suggested that there should be an improvement on the socio-economic status of Nigerian society especially women. It also, suggested that safe and non-violent relationships should be encouraged in communities among partners and sanctions should be given to perpetrators to eliminate violence.

Another study, Omuemu and Ogboghodo (2016) had examined the knowledge and perception of violence against women in Benin City. The study was carried out using descriptive cross-sectional design with a population made up of women attending ante-natal clinic at the Central Hospital Benin City. The data was collected using questionnaire and interview. The data collected was analysed using IBM SPSS version 21. The study found that out of a total number 400 women respondents, 293 (71.2%) of the respondents had knowledge of the meaning of domestic violence. A sizeable number of the respondents (70.8%) knew that beating or hitting was a form of violence against women. It reported that only 5% respondents had good knowledge of violence against women while less than half of this number of the women had good perception of violence against women. The study concluded that these women had poor knowledge and perception of domestic violence. The study suggested that being submissive, prayerful and obedient were ways of preventing violence against women. It also suggested

that the women should be enlightened about domestic violence through some awareness programmes.

Finally, the World Bank had carried out a study or an analysis of the implications of gender-based violence on women in Nigeria. The project was carried out in six states of the country including Edo State. This World Bank paper had pointed out that the Nigeria Demographic Health survey carried out by the National Population Commission and the ICF International in 2013 had indicated that 28 per cent of women in Nigeria aged between 15-49 had experienced physical or sexual violence. The paper noted that almost 45 per cent of women who had suffered from the violence had never asked for help or reported the case or incidence to anyone resulting in underreporting of the violence. The paper had also mentioned that the harmful practices of child marriage, and female genital mutilation were prevalent across the country but kidnapping and trafficking in women and children were endemic in communities across Edo State (World Bank 2019).

The findings corroborate that the underreporting of violence happening in Edo State is the same as the underreporting of violence happening in other parts of the country. Igbolekwu et al (2021) had pointed out that women in the rural communities do not have the power and authority to report these issues to the appropriate authorities. These women were afraid of losing their marriage. They hardly reported these incidences because of shame and stigmatization they would face if they ever mentioned the violence. Tomisin (2020) noted that victims of intimate partner violence had little or no trust in law enforcement institutions instead they have trust on their culture, families, friends and religious leaders. Okolie et al (2021) revealed that women were forbidden to report any domestic violence since they were regarded sex objects made for child bearing and nothing to contribute to national development. Consequently, most of the incidences of the domestic violence which were meant to be treated as socio-cultural ills were neglected thereby causing underreporting of the domestic violence. Available estimates on domestic violence were from the victims who presented themselves for treatment and testing in the hospitals.

Cullen (2020) had analysed the magnitude and predictors of underreporting intimate partner sexual violence in Nigeria and Rwanda using 3 survey methods. The study found that intimate partner violence had increased greatly in Nigeria by 39 per cent. It noted that underreporting was associated with indicators often targeted in women's empowerment programmes, employment and education. The study suggested that standard survey had underestimated the prevalence of intimate partner violence due to bias correlations and treatment effect estimates (Cullen, 2020). Adam and Erhus (2020), carried out a study on violence against 616 women during the Covid-19 pandemic in an urban community in Southern Nigeria. The study found that more than a third of the women 221 (35.9 %) had

been victims of domestic violence during the period of Covid-19 pandemic. It had revealed that the violence against took the form of psychological (54.3%), physical (30.8%), sexual (17.2%) and economic (16.3%). It also revealed that the husband (76.5%) and boyfriends (57.4%) were the main perpetrators of the violence against women but few reports were recorded.

The second objective of the study was to examine the impact of the provisions of the law on the National Gender policy in abating the violence. The findings revealed that there are relevant provisions of the law of the country to aid in reduction the violence such as section 15 (2) and 42 (1) of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. Section 15 (2) of the constitution prohibits sex-based discrimination while the Section 42 (1) of the same constitution provides that any citizen of Nigeria of a particular sex shall not by reason only that he is such a person be subjected to discrimination either expressly by or in the practical application of any law in Nigeria. There are also recent a number of recent Acts like the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (2015) and the Edo State Violence against persons' prohibition law (2019). An amendment to the Edo state Violence against persons' prohibition law was done in 2021 to introduce several legal and institutional mechanisms to fight against the violence against persons. This new law has the goal of prohibiting all forms of violence against persons in private and public life and providing maximum protection and remedies for victims as well as punish offenders of gender-based violence.

However, these legal provisions have failed to offer universal coverage to the women and girls because institutions in the communities across the state have failed to enforce them. The enforcement of Edo state Violence against persons' prohibition law is currently hindered by the religious beliefs or cultural practices, ignorance, misinformation, informal settlement/non-prosecution of cases, low level of convictions, lack of monitoring mechanisms, poor access due to central coordination in urban area, discrimination, and stereotyping (Dipo-Salami et al, 2022). This finding corroborates studies that revealed how gender-based violence particularly intimate partner violence is still tolerated at the societal and community levels by following the religious and traditional norms (Tomisin, 2020; Igbolekwu, et al 2021; Okolie, et al 2021). Tomisin (2020) found that victims of intimate partner violence had little or no trust in law enforcement institutions instead they have trust on their culture, families, friends and religious leaders. Scholars like Igbolekwu et al (2021) found out that the women in the rural communities did not have the power and authority to report these issues to the appropriate authorities. Many of these women never reported the violence because they were afraid of losing their marriage. They believed that a husband was justified in beating the wife if she refused to have sexual relationship with him, if she was solely dependent on the man financially and

if she left the house without permission as well as if she neglected the children.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the fact that there have been many unreported incidents of domestic violence happening within various communities across the 36 states of Nigeria, it had become necessary to investigate the violence against women in Edo State and highlight the implications of underreporting. The paper brings to fore that the underreporting of violence happening in Edo State is the same as the underreporting of violence happening in other parts of the country. There has been hardly any visible impact of the provisions of the law and the National Gender policy in abating the violence against women in Edo State. It can be concluded that the results presented in the paper are a vivid reflection of the current situation of violence against women in Edo State. Against this background, the following recommendations are made:

- advocacy groups could render some services using appropriate medium of communication
- women should be enlightened about domestic violence through awareness programmes
- women should be educated about the violence through the media.
- awareness about violence should be created during meetings.
- men should attend workshops where they would be taught how to prevent domestic violence.
- non-violent relationships should be encouraged among partners within communities
- government should enact laws that would protect women from the perpetrators
- severe sanctions should be given to perpetrators to eliminate violence

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