

Autonomy and Attitude towards Intimate Partner Violence as Mediators for Experiencing Physical Violence among Ever Married Women in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract—Recent data from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018 showed increased prevalence in the experience of physical violence (PV) among Nigeria women and over half of these women never sought for help. However, the role of autonomy and attitudes as mediators in experiencing physical violence among ever married women in Nigeria has not received sufficient attention. **Methods:** The study is cross sectional. The population of the study comprised all women of reproductive age (15-49 years) in Southwest Nigeria. 400 eligible women from three out of the six states in the region were purposively selected to represent this population. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression. Analysis was performed using Strata 14 software. **Results:** The prevalence of PV in Southwest Nigeria was (35.5%), with (45.7%) demonstrating positive attitude towards PV. Marriage type, autonomy and method of conflict resolution among partners significantly predicted experience of physical violence. Autonomy was associated with lower odds of experiencing PV. **Conclusion:** Autonomy significantly mediated the experience of PV even after adjusting for key maternal characteristics, while the influence of attitude towards PV was not significant. This has implication on policy and programmes targeting reduction or elimination of violence against women.

KEYWORD: Attitude, autonomy, IPV, Violence, Autonomy, Attitude, IPV, partner, married women, southwest

1. Introduction

Notwithstanding the fact that Nigeria passed the Violence against Persons Prohibition Act (2015) and also a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the increase prevalence in the perpetration of physical violence especially against women remains a serious social problem. [1]. This is further aggravated when such violence is perpetrated within relationships. Overtime, studies relating women's autonomy (though a difficult concept to measure) to vital aspect of their sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing have continue to receive research attention. Different proxy variables have been used to measure autonomy which include: educational attainment, occupation, income and decision making ability in seeking for care health care among others [2]. Recent studies [3], [4] have measured economy using woman's ability to influence decision, control economic resources and go out without necessarily informing her spouse. As such, similar variables were used in this study.

The influence of women's autonomy on the risk of experiencing violence in both low and middle income countries has been reported to have a mixed effect. For instance, attaining at least secondary education, having control over economic assets and land ownership among others have been found to offer some form of protection

to the woman [5], [6]. Similarly, a study involving mixed methods conducted in Nicaragua and Tanzania showed women empowerment such as possession of land and having decision making power in relationships were inversely associated with experience of violence [7]. Also, recent changes in household structure have been found to put women at risk of experiencing violence. The rise in female headed household, increased feminization of poverty which often position the woman in the poorest households couple with inadequate labour protections, wage loss among others which results in depletion of economic assets to the woman all makes the woman more vulnerable to experiencing gender based violence [8].

Although, contrasting outcomes have been reported, with regards to women's autonomy and risk of experiencing violence. Some studies [9], [10] in India and Nepal found autonomy (financial autonomy) among women was associated with lower chances of experiencing intimate partner violence. On the contrary, some other studies [11], [12] from Brazil and Bangladesh reported higher autonomy (household and financial autonomy) were associated with higher chances of experiencing intimate partner violence. Also, using data from Philippines, elevated risk of violence was found in settings where major household decision making was dominated by women. [13]. This was similar to findings from another study in South India reported higher level of autonomy among the women to be positively associated with higher

chances of experiencing violence [14]. Furthermore, the outcome of another revealed intimate partner violence impedes a woman's level of autonomy, while the prevalence of violence tends to change in line with the woman's level of autonomy, suggesting a positive relationship between autonomy and incidence of violence. [15]. In addition, the author argued that intimate partner violence is an increasing function of the strength of men's social norms on traditional gender roles. The study suggest education and income exact a positive effect on women's autonomy, their effect on strength of social norms of the husband on traditional gender roles was negative.

In Nigeria, available statistics indicates prevalence of domestic violence (especially physical violence) is highest among women from the southern region of the country, specifically south-south (46.4%), thereby calling for more research attention. Furthermore, it was reported that 32% of women between the age range 15 and 49 have been a victim of physical violence from age 15, while 14% of women have within the last one year preceding the 2018 (NDHS) experienced physical violence and only (32.0%) have sought for help [1]. The perpetration of violence against women domestically, has caused suffering and great pain to many women. And, this has made a number of these women to lose their lives. This act continues unabated because these women have probably accepted their fate as seen in their silence concerning the issue.

On the other hand, attitude is individual's tolerance or acceptance of behaviour towards certain act including violence. Certain cultural and social norms can however, shape some individuals attitude towards domestic violence. As such, it is argued that the attitude of both the perpetrator and the victim of violence helps in shaping the perpetration of violence and constitute the key focus of campaigns seeking to prevent violence [16]. People with violence-supportive and violence-condoned attitudes for instance, are believe to respond with less empathy and support to victims are more likely to report the incident to the police, less likely to attribute blame to the victim and more likely to recommend lenient or no penalty for the offender [17].

In addition, the combination of economic vulnerability and financial dependence of the woman on the man, social and cultural practices that condone domestic violence and lack of prosecution or punishment of

perpetrators discourage victims from speaking out and seeking redress [18]. Most Africa women especially tend to be more vulnerable to violence because of the widespread poverty, political, social and religious marginalization often associated with them [19]. The response of women to violence is generally believed to be shaped by their attitude and the attitude of those around them [16]. Several studies have corroborated this argument. For instance, in a study conducted in Turkey, the author found attitude of the women was strongly influenced by the patriarchal system that places the males above the females. Other factors that determine the attitude and acceptance of domestic violence by the women include: living in the rural area, lack of formal education, from the poor household, marriage at younger age, among others. All these factors reduces the woman's autonomy, thereby making her totally dependent on her partner, leaving her with no choices. What this suggest is that women with low socio-economic status will generally not have the ability to resist violence from their partners, hence they resort to acceptance of violence especially from their partners [20].

Several other studies [21], [22] have found inverse relationship between domestic violence, women's socio-economic status and autonomy. Most of these studies found women who were highly educated, economically empowered and contributed to household decision making and purchases were less likely to be victims of domestic violence, underscoring the importance of autonomy and higher socio-economic factors as mediators in the experience of domestic violence among women. However, studies exploring the mediating effect of autonomy and attitude towards experience of violence have not received sufficient attention, especially in Nigeria. While the influence of higher socio-economic status and the likelihood of experiencing domestic violence have revealed contrasting findings, the influence of attitude as a mediator still remained areas requiring more research attention considering the important role of attitude in the experience and perpetration of violence regardless of socio-economic status of both the victim and the perpetrator. Against this backdrop, this study examine autonomy and attitude towards IPV as mediators for experiencing physical violence among women in southwest, Nigeria.

2 MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in three state capitals in South-Western, Nigeria: Abeokuta (Ogun state), Akure (Ondo state) and Ibadan (Oyo state). The three areas were selected based on the possibility of comparing the cultural, societal, religious diversities and their effects on the attitudes of women towards domestic violence. The areas were also reported to have one of the highest prevalence rate of domestic violence in the country according to report from the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NPopC and ICF International, 2019). The population for the study consist of all women of reproductive age (15-59 years) in South-western Nigeria drawn from the selected states. The sample size was 400 women of reproductive age in these three selected areas. This was to ensure full representation of the sample. In each of the selected states, one major local government area where women of reproductive age can be found in appreciable numbers was selected. The population for each local government was drawn from the 2006 National Population Census Reports and projected to 2016. Data collection was done using questionnaire. The questionnaire was drawn given consideration to the major research questions. The original questionnaire was prepared in English Language. It was however translated and back-translated to local languages to ensure the original meaning was retained, while effort was also made to translate it into the local language for those who are not learned that is illiterates and semi-illiterates. A pilot study to ascertain the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was conducted among 50 women outside the selected area. The Cronbach alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. The Cronbach alpha value obtained was 0.876. The final instrument was validated by an expert from the department of psychology. The participants were rated on a 4-point Likert Scale – Strongly Disagree (SD), Disagree (D), Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), a 4-point Likert Scale-ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD); Never, Once, Twice, Thrice or more; 5-point Likert Scale- Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always; and YES or NO responses respectively. Before the commencement of data collection, the study obtained Ethical approval from Institute of Public Health Ethical

Committee of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. Consent of individual respondent was obtained before participation in the study. Participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any point during the interview without any penalty, while the confidentiality of the participants who agreed to participate was strictly maintained. Prior to the field work, the researcher recruit and train four research assistants to help in the data collection. The researcher and the trained assistants visited each of the selected areas for the purpose of data collection. In the case of the survey, participants were approached individually. Questionnaires were only administered to eligible and willing respondents after being informed verbally and have adequately understood the contents of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was retrieved from the respondents the moments it was completed. Data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation were used, while Binary Logistic Regression s was the inferential statistics used. All analysis were performed using Stata 14 software.

3. RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics

The result of the background characteristics of respondents surveyed revealed those in the age group 25-29 accounted for the highest proportion (29.2%), followed by respondents in the age group 35-39 years (19.2) and 30-34 years (19.0%), while respondents in the age group 15-19 years accounted for the least proportion (1.2%). The married women accounted for more than three quarters (82.8%) of the total respondents, followed by women who are either never married or cohabiting (6.0%) and divorced (6.0%). Nearly three quarter (72.2%) of the respondents practiced Christianity, while more than half (55.2%) had higher education, with just (4.0%) having no education. Significant proportion of the women earned less than ₦50, 000 as monthly income and (80.2%) were from the monogamous family type.

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics (N=331)

| Variables | Freq | % |
|---|-------------|------------|
| Age Group | No | Yes |
| < 20 years | 7 | 2.11 |
| 20+ years | 324 | 97.89 |
| Religion | | |
| Christian | 246 | 74.32 |
| Islam | 70 | 21.15 |
| Traditional | 15 | 4.53 |
| Education Level | | |
| No education | 13 | 3.93 |
| Primary | 18 | 5.44 |
| Secondary | 132 | 39.88 |
| Tertiary | 168 | 50.76 |
| Employment | | |
| Employed | 286 | 86.40 |
| Unemployed | 45 | 13.60 |
| Partner's Education Level | | |
| No education | 11 | 3.32 |
| Primary | 27 | 8.16 |
| Secondary | 116 | 35.05 |
| Tertiary | 177 | 53.47 |
| Jointly decide household purchases | | |
| Yes | 234 | 70.69 |
| No | 97 | 29.31 |
| Attitude towards violence | | |
| Negative | 157 | 47.43 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Positive | 174 | 52.57 |
| Means of settling dispute | | |
| Amicably among partners | 194 | 58.61 |
| Involvement of third party | 137 | 41.39 |

Association between maternal characteristics and experience of physical violence

The bivariate analysis of data showed education level, partner's educational level, autonomy and how partners settled dispute were significantly associated with experience of physical violence. Higher proportion (38.5%) of women with no education reported experiencing physical violence when compared to (26.2%) of women with higher education. Similarly, the proportion of women reporting to have experienced violence was highest among women whose partner had primary education as the highest educational level attained (55.6%) when compared to those whose partner had tertiary education (27.1%). The incidence of physical violence was highest among women who do not jointly decide household purchases with their partner (43.3%) relative to those who jointly decide household purchase with their partner (29.5%). Also, more than half (52.3%) of the women who involved third party when trying to settle dispute with their partners reported experiencing physical violence when compared to (47.8%) who reported settling their dispute amicably.

Table 2: Experience of Physical Violence and Maternal Characteristics (N=331)

| Variables | Physical | Violence | | Chi Square |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| Religion | No | Yes | Total | |
| Christian | 136 (66.34) | 69 (33.66) | 205 (100.0) | $\chi^2 = 1.93$ p=0.38 |
| Islam | 55 (65.48) | 29 (34.52) | 84 (100.0) | |
| Traditional | 29 (69.05) | 13 (30.95) | 42 (100.0) | |
| Education Level | | | | |
| No education | 8 (61.54) | 5 (38.46) | 13 (100.0) | $\chi^2 = 8.35$ p=0.04 |
| Primary | 11 (61.11) | 7 (38.89) | 18 (100.0) | |
| Secondary | 77 (58.33) | 55 (41.67) | 132 (100.0) | |
| Tertiary | 124 (73.81) | 44 (26.19) | 168 (100.0) | |
| Employment | | | | |
| Business | 74 (62.71) | 44 (37.29) | 118 (100.0) | $\chi^2 = 4.83$ p=0.18 |
| Artisans | 28 (68.29) | 13 (31.71) | 41 (100.0) | |
| Public servants | 64 (63.37) | 37 (36.63) | 101 (100.0) | |
| Corporate | 54 (77.14) | 16 (22.86) | 70 (100.0) | |
| Partner's Education Level | | | | |
| No education | 7 (63.64) | 4 (36.36) | 11(100.0) | $\chi^2 = 10.19$ p=0.02 |
| Primary | 12 (44.44) | 15 (55.56) | 27 (100.0) | |
| Secondary | 72 (62.07) | 44 (37.93) | 116 (100.0) | |
| Tertiary | 129 (72.88) | 48 (27.12) | 177 (100.0) | |
| Jointly decide household purchases | | | | |
| Yes | 165 (70.51) | 69 (29.49) | 234 (100.0) | $\chi^2 = 5.86$ p=0.02 |
| No | 55 (56.70) | 42 (43.30) | 97 (100.0) | |
| Attitude towards violence | | | | |
| Negative | 106 (48.18) | 51 (45.95) | 157 (100.0) | $\chi^2 = 0.15$ p=0.70 |
| Positive | 114 (51.82) | 60 (54.05) | 174 (100.0) | |
| Settlement of dispute | | | | |
| Amicably among partners | 141 (64.09) | 53 (47.75) | 194 (58.61) | $\chi^2 = 8.12$ p=0.01 |
| Involvement of third party | 79 (35.91) | 58 (52.25) | 137 (41.39) | |

Multivariate Analysis

Table 3 presents the result of the binary logistic regression examining the predictors of physical violence among currently married women. Six models were presented. Model one and two present the unadjusted odds ratio examining the effect of attitude towards domestic violence and autonomy on the experience of domestic violence. The third model presents the odds ratio of the joint effect of attitude and autonomy on experience of physical violence. Model four presents the effect of socio-demographic characteristics of the women and their partners on the experience of domestic violence. Model five examined the influence of all the explanatory variables, adjusting for attitude towards physical violence, while model six adjusted for autonomy. Model five and six moderated for attitude to physical violence and autonomy. To qualify as a mediating variable, such variable must be significantly related to both the outcome and explanatory variable. However, bivariate association showed autonomy was significantly associated with the outcome variable (experience of physical violence) and some selected explanatory variables such as education level, partner's level of education and how dispute is settled among partners, while the association between attitude to physical violence and the outcome variable was not statistically significant.

The unadjusted result showed attitude towards physical violence did not significantly influence the experience of physical violence ($OR=1.09$, $p>0.05$). Autonomy (joint decision making) however, significantly influenced

experience of physical violence. Women who jointly decide household spending with their partner were less likely to experience physical violence relative to those who do not jointly decide household spending with their partner ($OR=0.55$, $p<0.05$). The joint influence of attitude towards violence and autonomy revealed the influence of autonomy on the experience of physical violence remained statistically significant ($OR=0.55$, $p<0.05$). The influence of socio-demographic characteristics showed only marriage type ($OR=2.77$, $p<0.05$) and how dispute is settled among partners ($OR=2.24$, $p<0.05$) were significantly associated with experience of physical violence. Women in the polygyny union and those who settle their marital conflict by involving a third party were twice more likely to experience physical violence relative to those in the monogamous union and those who settle their marital conflict amicably respectively. Furthermore, the result revealed the moderating effect of attitude towards physical violence on the experience of physical violence was not statistically significant ($OR=1.23$, $p>0.05$). However, the moderating effect of autonomy on the experience of physical violence was statistically significant ($OR=0.56$, $p<0.05$). Adjusting for other explanatory variables, the odds of experiencing physical violence was 44.0% lower among women who jointly decides household spending with their partner.

Table 3: Binary Logistic regression model showing the predictors of physical violence and the moderating effect of autonomy.

| Variables | MODEL 1 | MODEL 2 | MODEL 3 | MODEL 4 | MODEL 5 | MODEL 6 |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| | UOR | UOR | AOR | AOR | AOR | |
| Attitude | | | | | | |
| Negative | RC | RC | RC | | RC | |
| Positive | 1.09 (0.68-1.73) | | 1.12 (0.70-1.77) | | 1.23 (0.73-2.08) | |
| Joint decision | | | | | | |
| No | | RC | RC | | | RC |
| Yes | | 0.55** (0.33-0.89) | 0.55** (0.33-0.89) | | | 0.56** (0.33-0.96) |
| Age group | | | | | | |
| < 30 years | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| 30+ years | | | | 0.46 (0.09-2.29) | 0.47 (0.09-2.40) | 0.53 (0.10-2.64) |
| Religion | | | | | | |
| Christian | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Islam | | | | 0.84 (0.45-1.56) | 0.84 (0.43-1.56) | 0.79 (0.42-1.49) |
| Traditional | | | | 2.06 (0.66-6.41) | 2.12 (0.66-6.56) | 2.08 (0.66-6.56) |
| Education level | | | | | | |
| None | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Primary | | | | 1.65 (0.34-8.10) | 1.66 (0.34-8.16) | 1.34 (0.27-6.74) |
| Secondary | | | | 1.50 (0.42-5.41) | 1.43 (0.39-5.17) | 1.38 (0.38-5.05) |
| Higher | | | | 0.70 (0.19-2.62) | 0.65 (0.17-2.46) | 0.59 (0.15-2.26) |
| Employment status | | | | | | |
| Employed | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Unemployed | | | | 1.03 (0.50-2.13) | 1.03 (0.50-2.13) | 0.97 (0.47-2.01) |
| Marriage type | | | | | | |
| Monogamous | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Polygyny | | | | 2.77** (1.46-5.25) | 2.84** (1.49-5.42) | 2.68** (1.39-5.14) |
| Partner's level of education | | | | | | |
| None | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Primary | | | | 2.40 (0.53-10.9) | 2.36 (0.52-10.7) | 2.00 (0.43-9.23) |
| Secondary | | | | 0.93 (0.24-3.63) | 0.92 (0.24-3.58) | 0.87 (0.22-3.41) |
| Higher | | | | 0.82 (0.21-3.14) | 0.81 (0.21-3.07) | 0.74 (0.19-2.86) |
| How dispute is settled | | | | | | |
| Mutual | | | | RC | RC | RC |
| Third party | | | | 2.24** (1.36-3.67) | 2.17** (1.31-3.57) | 2.16** (1.31-3.57) |

**Statistically significant at 0.05%

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the mediating effect of autonomy and attitude towards IPV on the experience of physical violence among ever married women. Findings from this study revealed one third of the women had experienced physical violence. This prevalence rate was similar to what was reported by NDHS (2018), which reported a prevalence of (30.0%) among women residing in Southwest Nigeria. Previous studies have reported at least one quarter of women experiencing physical violence from their partner. For instance, a longitudinal study in New Zealand reported physical violence prevalence rate of 50% among the women, compared to 40% reported by men [23]. Another study among newly wedded couples in some European American countries reported a prevalence of 30% and 34% among the men and women respectively [24]. However, in this our study, less than half of the women demonstrated positive attitude towards physical violence. Marriage type, attitude towards physical violence and autonomy (joint decision making on household purchases) significantly predicted experience of physical violence. Previous studies on autonomy and experience of physical violence have reported conflicting findings which might be attributed to differences in sampling technique, research design and study context among others. A study in Nepal found autonomy (financial autonomy) among women was associated with lower chances of experiencing intimate partner violence [10]. Similarly, another study using data from Philippines revealed elevated risk of violence in settings where major household decision making was dominated by women [13], while another study in South India reported higher level of autonomy among the women was positively associated with higher chances of experiencing violence [14]. On the contrary, some studies [11], [12] from Brazil and Bangladesh found higher autonomy (household and financial autonomy) were associated with higher chances of experiencing intimate partner violence. This presupposes that autonomy alone, in isolation with some other contextual factors such as attitude, personality trait among others, may not necessarily explained the experience of physical violence. Also, method used in conflict resolution was significantly associated with

experience of physical violence. The involvement of third party in conflict resolution was significantly associated with higher odds of experiencing physical violence among the women. This suggest the influence of third party in conflict resolution especially among partners might not necessarily yield a positive outcome and could also imply couples preferred resolving conflict within the marriage context. The study revealed autonomy significantly mediated the experience of physical violence even after adjusting for key maternal characteristics, while the effect of attitude towards physical violence was not significant.

5. CONCLUSION

Evidence from this study revealed that autonomy significantly mediated the experience of physical violence even after adjusting for key maternal characteristics, the mediating effect of attitude towards physical violence was however, not significant. This has implication on policy and programmes targeting reduction or elimination of violence against women. The fact that attitude did not mediate the experience of physical violence might be due to traditional and cultural values that embraces and condone certain practices as it relates to violence, putting the women in most cases, at disadvantage.

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