

## **Public Perception of the Consequences of Domestic Violence on the Victims in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The consequences of domestic violence are profound, affecting not only the health and happiness of the victim but also the broader community. This descriptive survey study examined the perceived consequences of domestic violence against women in the Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. Anchored in Victim Blaming Theory, the study addresses the tendency to hold victims partly responsible for their misfortunes. Using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews, data were collected from 398 participants. The data gathered through these methods were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and content analysis. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents identified death as a consequence of domestic violence, while others cited unwanted pregnancy, physical injury, suicide attempts, depression, and job loss. The study concludes that domestic violence is a significant social problem that must be addressed promptly to prevent it from escalating. It recommends, among other actions, a more vigorous advocacy campaign against domestic violence through mass media, family, community, and religious organizations. Additionally, government and non-governmental organizations should enhance efforts to provide free education, community-based educational programs, vocational training, and life-skills development centers to empower the most vulnerable individuals in the communities.*

**Keywords:** *public, perception, women, domestic violence, consequence, victim.*

### **Introduction**

Domestic violence against women is a pervasive issue that has far-reaching consequences for both the individual victims and society as a

whole. The World Health Organization (2019) revealed that between 15% and 71% of women and children in its 10-country study, which includes nations like Japan, Ethiopia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Brazil, have experienced domestic violence. The widespread prevalence of domestic violence is not limited to a particular country or region; it is a global phenomenon. A survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) estimated that an average of 22% of European women have been victims of physical or sexual violence, and 33% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence across countries since the age of 15 (George, 2020).

According to MacGregor, Wathen and MacQuarrie (2019), in Nigeria, reports revealed high level of violence against women. The recent death of Nigeria's leading gospel music artistes, Osinachi Nwachukwu, who was allegedly battered to death by her husband, has elicited nationwide outcry. Christian leaders have risen in outright condemnation of the act, with many calling for her husband to face the law (Ibekwe et.al 2022).

According to the Challenged Parenthood Initiative (2020), the organization received several reports of domestic violence and other crimes ranging from rape, sexual molestation, coercion, female circumcision and forceful ejection from home within six months in Kogi State. It also explained that other gender based violence reported during the COVID-19 lockdown included verbal abuse, psychological abuse, harmful widowhood practices, spousal battery, harmful traditional practices and abandonment of spouse, children and other dependents without sustenance, and concluded that girls and women in Kogi State are no longer safe in the hands of abusers, who they reside with, and cannot come out over fear of intimidation and stigmatization.

Fawole, Okedare and Reed (2021), major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and

chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty (Sifat, 2020). Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Fawole, 2018). Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Campbell, 2020). The aim of this study, therefore, was to determine the perceived consequences of Domestic Violence on the victims in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Conceptual Clarification**

Etter and Birzer (2017), stated that domestic violence is an aggressive behaviour, where the perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object, including a weapon to inflict injury or discomfort upon another individual. The aggressive behaviour is conducted by an individual or group against another.

Oti, Paul and Duru (2017), defined domestic violence as a physical or sexual violence within the family, which includes sexual abuse of children and physical abuse of elderly parents. In the same vein, Aihie (2019), observed that in a United Nation's publication, domestic violence can be narrowly interpreted to mean incidents of physical attack, which may take the form of physical and sexual violations such as pushing, pinching, spitting, kicking, hitting, punching, choking, stabbing, throwing boiling water or acid and setting on fire. The result of such physical violence can range from bruising to killing. According to George, (2020), domestic violence also includes psychological or mental violence consisting of constant verbal insults, harassment, denouncement by spouses of one another, confinement, child abuse or neglect etc. such that it gives rise to wife battering which is a prominent feature of domestic violence. This gives credence to

Hamby, (2017), who saw domestic violence as a constellation of abusive and controlling behaviours, including psychological abuse, sexual coercion, financial abuse, isolation, threats, stalking, and physical violence to create a climate of fear and intimidation that maintain one partner in a position of domination and control, with the other partner in a position of subordination and compliance.

A review of North American social science literature by Black (2020) identified several demographic, personal history, and personality factors consistently associated with a man's likelihood of physically assaulting an intimate partner. These factors include young age and a history of husbands who were either beaten as children or witnessed their mothers being beaten. According to Ibekwe et al. (2022), alcohol use among husbands is a significant factor linked to the likelihood of committing physical violence against a partner. In contrast, risk factors for female perpetrators of abuse include witnessing a mother hit a father, alcohol use, neuroticism, and a history of perpetrating partner abuse. Furthermore, Millward (2021) noted a connection between poverty and mental health challenges, such as stress, depression, and anxiety, all of which are risk factors for engaging in domestic violence.

#### **Consequences of Domestic Violence on the Victims**

Research conducted by Oyedokun, (2020) has shown that violence possess much more health hazards to women than cancer, malaria and road traffic accident combined. Sometimes women ignorantly endure persistent abuse and violence from their husbands till they get ill and die without dictating the fundamental cause of illness and death. Consequences or effects of domestic violence can be seen in the following ways:

**Consequences on Children:** There has been an increase in acknowledgement that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare (Roesch, et al.,2020). Some emotional and behavioural

problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family and authorities (Umana, Fawole & Adeoye, 2020).

**Physical Consequences:** Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Fawole, 2018). Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Campbell, 2020).

**Psychological Consequences:** According to Fedina, et.al. (2020), among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported. Gulati and Kelly, (2020), observed that depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism.

**Financial Consequences:** According to Fawole, (2018), once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy. Campbell, (2020), also opined that due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators (Barnett, 2021).

**Long-term Consequences:** Fawole, Okedare and Reed, (2021), observed that domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims, all of which are very relevant for a professional working with a victim. Major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty. Additionally, victim might lose confidence

in social and personal roles due to the constant undermining by their abuser (Sifat, 2020).

From the above literature reviewed, it is seen that the consequences of domestic violence do not only affect the victims, but the family as a whole; they affect children's education, family businesses, and economic growth of a nation as a whole.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored on the Victim Blaming Theory. In 1965, social psychologist Melvin Lerner coined the term 'just world' to reflect the belief that individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get" (Lerner, 1978 cited by Agarwal & Panda, 2019, pp. 359–388). Meanwhile, Psychologist William Ryan coined the phrase blaming the victim in his 1971 book of that title. Victim Blaming Theory describes the practice of holding victims partly responsible for their misfortune. It represents the faulting of individuals who have endured the suffering of crimes, hardships, or other misfortunes with either part or whole responsibility for the event (Saudino, 2020). Often, victim-blaming theories rely on the premise that individuals should recognize the dangers that exist in society and therefore should take the necessary precautions to maintain a certain level of safety. Those who do not take such precautions are perceived as blameworthy for their demise even if they have not acted carelessly. These perceptions in effect shift the culpability away from the perpetrator of the crime onto the victim. (Zawitz, 2019).

Victim-blaming theories have received considerable attention from social psychologists, yet little has been done to end the practice of shifting the culpability of unfortunate events from the offenders to the victims. Taking responsibility for one's safety may ensure a specific level of protection, yet it does not provide a guarantee that no bad events will take place. Until the populace gains an awareness of the

harm caused by the simple act of blaming victims, victims will continue to suffer needlessly.

Applying the theory to issues of family violence, violence against women, or sexual assault, one often hears victim-blaming statements such as, "Why didn't she leave?" or "She was asking for it." Within the context of family violence, victim blaming often includes condemnation of the victim for staying in an abusive relationship.

### **Methods**

The study made use of descriptive survey research design, which employed questionnaire and in-depth interview to collect data from the study population across the selected communities.

**Study Area:** Ofu Local Government is one of the twenty-one Local Government Areas in Kogi State, Nigeria. It was initially created by the Shehu Shagari's Administration on 2nd December 1980, and later scrapped by General Buhari's Administration in 1983. It was again re-created on the 11th May, 1989 when the military government of President Ibrahim Babangida created six additional local governments in Benue State. Ofu local government at creation had only three gazetted districts. In June 1991, however, eleven wards were created. The people are predominantly engaged in agriculture with a sizeable proportion engaged in government employment and business (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2012).

There are limited researches or data on consequences of domestic violence against women in the study area, addressing this gap would provide an opportunity to contribute to localized interventions.

As this research has been conducted for examining the consequences of domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The survey has been conducted among males and females of adult age, who were resident within the selected communities of the Local Government Area.

The study recruited participants through a multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage involved a purposive selection of five (5) wards in Ofu Local Government Area namely: Ugwolawo Ward 1, Alloma Ward, Ochadamu Ward, Aloji ward, and Ejule/Alla Ward, while the second stage involved selection of two (2) communities from each of the selected five (5) wards. This was done using simple random sampling technique via balloting. The selected communities were: Ugwolawo, Atoda, Iboko, Okula, Ochadamu, Umomi, Aloji, Ogbabo, Ejule, and Alla. Questionnaires were administered to respondents who are relative to victims or victims themselves using systematic sampling techniques to select eligible adult males and females of 18 years and above, beginning from the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th, 11th... etc houses of each street or road in the five chosen communities where domestic violence has been reported or suspected.

The principle of informed consent ensured that respondents are informed about their rights to participate in the research, and are also free to withdraw from the research question whenever they feel liked. The participant informed consent was sought for before the study. All the participants were aware of the purpose of the study. Consequently, ethical clearance with certificate number CHSREC/2022/0003 was obtained from the College of Health Science Research Ethics Committee in Prince Audu Abubakar University before the study was conducted, thereby ensuring that information gotten were treated with utmost confidentiality and that the participants would not be harmed.

A total number of three hundred and ninety eight (398) copies of the questionnaire were administered of which all the copies were retrieved, yielding a response rate of 100%. It was possible to get all the copies of questionnaire back because the researcher adopted a face to face administration of questionnaire, which afforded an opportunity to explain any point of confusion or misunderstanding to the respondents.

Data generated through the questionnaire were sifted, coded and analyzed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, it is valued for its ease of use, versatility and comprehensive statistical capabilities, while data generated through in-depth interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis, because it offers a structured and systematic approach to interpreting diverse forms of content.

### **Results**

The results in table 1 show the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study area, in which 200(50.3%) of the total respondents were female, while 198(49.8%) were male. This indicated a near proportionate selection of respondents, which greatly reduced gender bias between the female and the male respondents in the study. The results also show that 65(16.3%) of the total respondents were within the age bracket of 18-27 years, 82(20.6%) within the age bracket of 28-37 years, majority 102 (25.6%) within the age bracket of 38-47 years, 78 (19.6%) within the age of 48-57 years, while 71(17.8%) of the total respondents were within the age bracket of 58 years and above. This indicated that majority of the respondents were within the age bracket of 38 - 47 years. Results on the educational background of respondents show that 53(13.3%) of the total respondents selected none, which means that they had no formal education, 72 (18.1%) selected primary, 151(37.9%) selected secondary, and 122(30.65%) selected tertiary.

In terms of marital status, the result shows that majority of the respondents were married women which is important because, married women are better placed to say their minds on what they perceive as domestic violence in their environment. Results also show that majority of the respondents are from monogamous homes, which could be a reason why it was easy to know when domestic violence has taken place as domestic violence in their environment. Results also show that

majority of the respondents are from monogamous homes, which could be a reason why it was easy to know when domestic violence has taken place.

#### **Socio Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

**Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

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Variables	Category	Frequency (N=398)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	198	49.8
	Female	200	50.3
Age in years	18-27	65	16.3
	28-37	82	20.6
	38-47	102	25.6
	48-57	78	19.6
	58 and above	71	17.8
Educational background	None	53	13.3
	Primary	72	18.1
	Secondary	151	37.9
	Tertiary	122	30.7

Marital status	Married	297	74.6
	Single	0	0
	Divorced	35	8.8
	Separated	25	6.3
	Widowed	41	10.3
Type of marriage	Monogamy	273	68.6
	Polygamy	125	31.4
Length of marriage	Less than 1 year	39	9.8
	1- 10 years	74	18.6
	11-20 years	120	30.2
	21-30 years	42	10.6
	31 -40 years	65	16.3
	41 and above	58	14.6
Number of Children	None	58	14.6
	1 -2	58	14.6
	3	126	31.7
	4	72	18.1
	5 and above	84	21.1

Religion	Christianity	163	40.9
	Islam	190	48
Occupation	Traditionalist	45	11.3
	Farming	66	16.6
	Petty trading	105	26.4
	Civil service	175	43.9
Average monthly income	Politician	52	13.1
	Below minimum wage of ₦30,000	125	31.4
	Minimum wage of ₦30,000	171	43
	Above minimum wage of ₦30,000	102	26

**Source: Field Survey (2024)**

#### **Consequences of Domestic Violence on the victims**

Table 2 shows the perceived consequences of domestic violence against women. It shows that 94(23.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that death can result from domestic violence against women; 187(46.9%) of the total respondents also agreed that death can result from domestic violence against women. Others, 56(14.1%) of the total respondents were neutral on the subject matter, while 61(15.3%) of the total respondents disagreed. These results indicate that majority of the respondents agreed that death can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. The result was corroborated during an in-

depth interview conducted with an aged man during the session. The man had this to say:

*Violence against women can put most women in a traumatic stage and no woman prays to end up in a home where the husband turns the wife to a punching bag; physical abuse like using of belt or any hard object on a woman can lead to bruises, fractures and even death, if it becomes an everyday beating.*

(Male, 65years old, Ochadamu community respondent May 19<sup>th</sup> 2024)

Results also show that 55(13.8%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that unwanted pregnancy or diseases are consequences of domestic violence against women; 27(68.3%) of the total respondents also agreed that this is true. 59(14.8%) of the total respondents were neutral, while 12(3.0%) of the total respondents disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents were not certain or sure, that unwanted pregnancy or diseases can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. This margin of difference is however comparable to the 55(13.8%), that strongly agreed that unwanted pregnancy or diseases are consequences of domestic violence against women

The results further show that, 298(74.9%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that physical injury is a consequence of domestic violence against women, and 100(25.1%) of the respondents agreed. The result thus show that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that physical injury can be inflicted on a woman who is in an abusive marriage.

Suicide attempts are also seen to be a consequence of domestic violence against women in the study area. The results show that 58(14.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to this position. While 132(33.3%) of the total respondents agreed that this is true, 102(25.7%) were neutral,

50(12.6%) strongly disagreed and 55(13.9%) of the total respondents disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents agreed to suicide attempts to be a major consequences of domestic violence against women.

The table also shows that 160(40.2%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to depression as a consequence of domestic violence and 129(32.4%) of the total respondents agreed to this. However, 32(8.0%) of the total respondents were neutral while 77(19.4) of the total respondents disagreed. The result thus showed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that depression is a major consequence of domestic violence against women.

Furthermore, 94(23.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that permanent disability can be a consequence of domestic violence against women, and 146(36.7%) of the total respondents also agreed; 67(16.8%) of the total respondents were neutral, while 91(22.9%) of the respondents disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents agreed to permanent disability as a major consequence of domestic violence against women.

Low self-esteem as a consequence of domestic violence was selected by 70(17.6%) of the total respondents who strongly agreed that it can cause domestic violence, while 327(82.2%) of the total respondents agreed; 1(0.2%) person out of the total respondents disagreed. This showed that majority of the respondents agreed that low self-esteem is a major consequence of domestic violence against women. This is corroborated with a response from a respondent during an in-depth interview session:

*If the abuse happens every day or all the time, neighbours will know and the woman will be ashamed to walk in public places. It also has emotional implication; the wife is not safe in her house, as she is always afraid of her husband (Female, 28years old, Ugwolawo community, May 21<sup>st</sup> 2024).*

Finally, 110(27.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence, and 112(28.1%) of the total respondents also agreed. However, 81(20.4%) of the total respondents were neutral, 41(10.3%) strongly disagreed and 54(13.6%) disagreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence. This showed that majority of the respondents agreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. This is in tandem with a response from an interviewee during an in-depth interview session who said:

*If the source of income is business and the woman does no business, then there will be no money for her to take care of her children* (Female, 44years old, Alla community, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024)

Another respondent opined that:

*Abusive partners work very hard to keep victims trapped in the relationship. They may try to isolate the victim from friends and family, thereby reducing the people and places where the survivor can go for support* (Female, 50years old, 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024)

**Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents on Determining the Perceived Consequences of Domestic Violence Against Women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State**

S/N	Items	Strongly	Agreed	Neutral	Strongly	Disagreed
		Agreed	4	3	Disagreed	1
5				2		
1	Death	94(23.6%)	187(46.9%)	56(14.1)		61(15.3%)
2	Unwanted pregnancy or diseases	55(13.8%)	272(68.3%)	59(14.8%)		12(3.0%)
3	Physical injury	298(74.9%)	100(25.1%)			
4	Suicide attempts	58(14.6%)	132(33.3%)	102(25.7%)	50(12.6%)	55(13.9%)
5	Depression	160(40.2%)	129(32.4%)	32(8.0%)		77(19.4%)
6	Permanent disability	94(23.6%)	146(36.7%)	67(16.8%)		91(22.9%)
7	Low self esteem	70(17.6%)	327(82.2%)			1(0.2%)
8	Loss of job	110(27.6%)	112(28.1%)	81(20.4%)	41(10.3%)	54(13.6%)

**Source: Field Survey (2024)**

### **Discussion of findings**

The perceived consequences of domestic violence on the victims in the study area shows that, 187(46.9%) of the total respondents selected death, while 132(33.3%) selected suicide attempts as consequences of domestic violence, respectively. According to Ibekwe et al. (2022), in Nigeria, many women have died, brutalized or maimed for life, by their violent male counterparts. Very recently this year, a Nigerian

female musician by name Osinachi died as a result of injuries she sustained through domestic violence by her intimate partner. This means that domestic violence is a silent killer of women; sometimes the victim endures persistent abuse and violence from the husband till they get ill and die, without anyone dictating the fundamental cause of illness and death among the women.

The results show that, 272(68.3%) of the total respondents selected unwanted pregnancy or diseases as a consequence of domestic violence. This is in line with Fawole, Okedare, and Reed (2021), who observed that domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims; major consequences of domestic violence victimization according to them include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. Results of this study further show that, 298(74.9%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to physical injury as a consequence of domestic violence, and 146(36.7%) of the total respondents agreed to permanent disability as a consequence of domestic violence. According to Fawole (2018), bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization.

The results also show that 160(40.2%) agreed that depression is a consequence of domestic violence, while 327(82.2%) agreed to low self-esteem. This corroborates with Gulati and Kelly, (2020), who observed that depression is common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse, and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship (Gulati & Kelly, 2020).

Finally, the result showed that 112(28.1%) of the total respondents agreed to loss of job. This is in line with Ibekwe, Abiodun and Ayodele (2022), who observed that (126%) of the total respondents selected lack of concentration at work as an effects of abuse on the victim. This is in

line with Sifat (2020), who stated that victims of domestic violence often lack specialized skills, education, and training that are necessary to find gainful employment, and capital to support the children.

### **Conclusion**

Domestic violence is a social issue that must be addressed promptly to prevent it from escalating. Women's lives are at risk when they live with individuals who may threaten their safety over trivial matters.

Violence against women affects not only the victims but also their children. Women who endure constant violence are unable to contribute positively to society; they cannot effectively lead in their homes, businesses, or government. Victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse experience diminished concentration and effectiveness in their work and personal lives. Furthermore, they are often unable to support other women who have been widowed or are less privileged.

Education is crucial for girls. It fosters knowledge and awareness of domestic violence while reducing tolerance for its negative effects in the community. While girls are often taught to be submissive and obedient, boys should also be educated to respect and love women, particularly their wives. The culture of silence surrounding domestic violence can be diminished when victims are encouraged to speak out and when society holds offenders accountable.

Domestic violence is a significant social and psychological burden that victims cannot bear alone. Family and friends, along with religious organizations, can offer essential social and emotional support, enabling victims to speak out and seek justice without facing stigmatization. Most respondents in the study area did not view police intervention as the most effective strategy for addressing domestic violence against women. Therefore, in cases where some men refuse to respect women's dignity, appropriate strategies should be

implemented to address this issue and promote a just, fair, and equitable society.

### **Recommendations**

In order to tackle the problem of domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State Nigeria, collective effort is required to create awareness and ensure that the society has an in-depth knowledge about it, to prevent further crisis. The following recommendations are hereby made as a result of the findings from this study.

1. There should be continuous awareness creation about domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State through the mass media, especially radio and television.
2. Religious and community leaders in Ofu Local Government Area should continue to help in creating awareness of social vices among their subjects, and publicly condemn domestic violence in the area to reduce, if not eliminate domestic violence against women, generally.
3. Ofu local government, as a government at the grass root, should seriously embark on mass mobilization of the populace to campaign against domestic violence in order to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in the area.
4. Ofu Local Government should as a matter of urgency, set up guidance and counseling centers on family matters, where experts can educate and counsel partners in marriage to live peacefully, for improved family relationship.
5. Gender should not be a disadvantage; the law must reiterate this and bring perpetrators to book.

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