



SPOUSAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN INFORMATION SEEKING STUDY AT OJAH COMMUNITY, EDO STATE

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Abstract:

Women's empowerment remains a global development priority, yet it continues to face major challenges, particularly in the form of spousal violence and its often fatal consequences. Spousal violence, one of the least recognized forms of human rights abuse, undermines women's ability to access and utilize information necessary for personal growth and empowerment. This study investigated women's information-seeking behavior and empowerment in the context of spousal violence in Ojah community, Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. A quantitative research design was adopted, and data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered using simple random sampling. Out of 300 questionnaires distributed, 288 (96%) were properly completed and analyzed. The demographic analysis showed that 22.9% of respondents were housewives, 28.1% were civil servants, while others engaged in various artisan occupations. Educationally, 34% of the respondents had tertiary education and 20.1% had secondary education. About 42.4% were currently married, with 55.9% in monogamous and 44.1% in polygamous unions. Most respondents (76.4%) earned above the minimum wage. All participants reported experiencing at least one form of domestic violence—physical (18.4%), sexual (12.5%), verbal (18.8%), emotional/psychological (30.2%), and economic deprivation (20.1%). The study concludes that spousal violence, in its various manifestations, significantly hinders women's empowerment and their capacity to seek, access, and apply relevant information for self-development. It is recommended that empowerment initiatives should begin prior to marriage and that greater attention be paid to less visible forms of violence, particularly verbal and psychological abuse.

Keywords: Empowerment, Economic Deprivation, Physical Violence, Spousal Violence, Women, Ojah.

Introduction

Women are supposed to be safe in their home. Yet, when this safety is violated, women become vulnerable to their partners. Often, they are harassed physically and psychologically, and also weakened in their ability to make decisions, voice their opinions or protect themselves and their children because they fear the repercussions (Nwachukwu, 2011). Such repercussions include the fear of homelessness, or being unable to cater for themselves and their children financially. Spousal violence is any act within an intimate relationship that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm. Spousal abuse can occur from woman to man and from man to woman (Alo, Oduşina & Babatunde, 2012). In this paper we focus on spousal abuse toward the woman. Spousal violence is a form of violence perpetrated against women by their male partners.

The proportion of women who had ever experienced physical or sexual violence or both by an intimate partner ranged from 15% to 71%, with the majority between 29% and 62% (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002; WHO, 2007). In Nigeria, national-level data continue to show the pervasiveness of gender-based violence: for example, between August 2020 and November 2023, 28,428 cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were reported to the National Situation Room, but only 448 convictions (1.6 %) were recorded, pointing to a large gap between reporting and justice (The Guardian Nigeria, 2023). Moreover, a recent Womanity Index report found that roughly three out of every five Nigerians ($\approx 60\%$) have either experienced GBV themselves or know someone who has, and about 46 % of GBV survivors in Nigeria report intimate partner violence (IPV) or domestic violence (DV) (Womanity Index, 2023) [added]. Further empirical evidence from Nigeria shows that about 35% of ever-partnered women aged 15–49 have experienced domestic violence, with emotional abuse being the most prevalent (33.6%) (Alawode, 2024).

Women's empowerment is one of the key issues advocated worldwide. Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment whereby women can be gainfully employed and also where they can make decisions of their own for personal benefit and for society. When a woman is empowered, she increases and improves her social and

economic strength, which ensures her rights and also makes her confident in her environment. An empowered woman is given power and improved status that enables her to improve all aspects of her life. When a woman is empowered, she is bound to live a free life with a sense of self-worth, dignity and respect, having control of her life both within and outside of her home. Making decisions and choices for herself is not a problem. She will have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities, as well as equal social status in society. Her financial and economic choices will be determined by her. There is also equal opportunity for education and employment without gender bias. Such women, when employed, will also have opportunities to make their voices heard.

The main reason why women need empowerment is to reduce poverty in the home. Poverty is when they are deprived of basic necessities of life—like food, clothing and shelter—when the money earned by the male partner is not enough to meet these needs. A woman's additional earnings tend to help improve household income. Women are as talented as men: if allowed to showcase their talent, this benefits everyone within the home and even beyond. Women's empowerment enables them to participate in national development. This becomes possible when they stand on their own, become independent and earn a living that caters for their family—thereby improving the economy of any nation. However, as studies note, as women become increasingly economically empowered, the risk of spousal violence may increase because some men may use violence as an instrument to disrupt women's market-oriented activity (Hidrobo, Melissa & Fernald, 2013; Anderberg & Rainer, 2011). This illustrates the complex relationship between empowerment and vulnerability.

Spousal violence is becoming the most prevalent yet least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is known as power misused by one partner in a relationship to control another (Kaur & Garg, 2008). The control of one's spouse can be established through violence and other forms of abuse. Such forms include physical, sexual, psychological/emotional or verbal abuse. Himanshu & Panda (2007) estimated that one in every five women faces some form of violence during her lifetime; in some cases this

can lead to serious injury or death (Ashimolowo & Otufale, 2008). In Nigeria, spousal violence has become widespread. Women often face physical violence from their partners. Common forms of physical violence among spouses include slapping, kicking, pushing, hitting against the wall (and sometimes with an object), hair-pulling, threatening or weapon use.

This violence may lead to bruises, broken bones and fractures. It is also claimed that when a woman is empowered, she is less vulnerable to spousal violence. Spousal violence is an issue deeply embedded in societies worldwide. Nigeria is no exception. Though both men and women are victims of spousal violence, women victims are more because they are more vulnerable—to physical, sexual and sometimes emotional violence from their male counterparts. Some men have learnt to express anger and insecurity through violence mostly on women, and come to believe that violence is an acceptable means of inflicting fear and control on women. Historically, women (ab initio) were seen as property or “items” to men. In Nigeria, it has been argued that the law (section 55(1)(d)) in some states gave the man constitutional right to discipline his wife—although this view now conflicts with anti-domestic violence legislation (e.g., the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act 2015).

Various aspects of spousal violence **Physical violence:** This is a common form among spouses; it involves the deliberate use of physical force on one’s partner with the intention of causing harm, injury or sometimes death. Actions include slapping, kicking, hitting with an object or against a wall, aggressively pulling hair, pushing, choking. This is the most visible form of spousal violence, though it may start slowly or be less obvious to the victim or people around. For instance, Nigeria’s National Demographic and Health Survey (2013) reported that 51% of women in the study had experienced physical injury from their spouse. Obi and Ozumba (2007) also noted 83% of women experience physical violence. The European Union (2014) found 31% of women who had experienced physical violence by their spouse.

Emotional/Psychological violence: This type of violence does not leave physical marks but has a huge impact on a woman's confidence and self-esteem. She may feel her self-worth and independence are being taken away by her spouse. Emotional/psychological violence is quite destructive and damaging but is rarely noticed due to its hidden nature; if not properly handled it can lead to depression, fear and even suicide. It involves humiliating the woman in front of people, intimidating her all the time, telling her she is worthless. One study reported 39% of women experienced emotional/psychological violence (National Clearing Family Violence, 1996); NDHS (2013) reported 19% experienced emotional violence by their partner.

Sexual violence: This involves an act attempting to obtain a sexual act by force or coercion against a partner without their freely given consent. The World Health Organization (2005) defined sexual violence as "a sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comment or advances ... directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim". Ellsberg (1997) observed that nearly one in four women experienced sexual violence by a partner; NDHS (2013) reported 58% of women experienced sexual violence by spouse.

Verbal violence: This is the excessive use of language to undermine the dignity and security of one's spouse through insult or humiliation. Though perhaps less visible than other forms, it is equally serious because the victim often has no proof, e.g., being blamed for anything that happens, or threatened verbally.

Economic deprivation: This form of spousal violence occurs when your partner deprives you of working or earning a living for yourself. Economic deprivation is behavior that is coercive, deceptive or unreasonably controlling another without their consent and in a way that denies them economic autonomy (DFVPA, 2012). It also occurs when a person withholds or threatens to withhold financial support necessary to meet reasonable living

expenses. The spouse can also be prevented from seeking or keeping employment—economic violence is a subtle expression of power imbalance.

Objectives of the study

The aim of this study is:

- a. To examine the effect of spousal violence on the women empowerment
- b. To examine the implication of the various aspect of spousal violence on women

Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative research design to investigate the relationship between spousal violence and women's empowerment within the Ojah community of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, Edo State, Nigeria. The survey method was employed using a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. This approach was considered appropriate because it allows for the systematic collection of quantifiable data from a defined population, enabling statistical analysis and generalization of findings.

The study area is Ojah community in Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State. This community has a traditional ruler (Oba). Ojah migrated from "Orogbe" in present-day Benin City in the 17th century during the era of fierce inter-tribal wars between the Benin Kingdom and neighbouring communities. Ojah shares boundaries with Ososo and Makeke. It has an approximate population of 32,000 and is known as the third largest community in Akoko-Edo. Nationally it is known for pottery production: women in particular specialise in cooking pots, mugs, bowls and water pots. Their ethnic group is Okpameri.

The study population comprised adult women residing in Ojah community who were either married, previously married, or in cohabiting relationships. Using the simple random sampling technique, respondents were selected to ensure that every eligible participant had an equal chance of inclusion, thereby minimizing sampling bias.

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered across different households within the community. Out of these, 288 questionnaires, representing a 96% response rate, were

properly completed and found valid for analysis. The instrument captured data on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, experiences and types of spousal violence, information-seeking behavior, and indicators of empowerment. Data collected were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize patterns and trends among the variables of interest.

Presentation of Results

The study focused mostly on spousal violence as it affects the women folk.

Table 1 Social-economic characteristics of respondent

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age	20-30	59	20.5%
	31-40	85	29.5%
	41-50	78	27.1%
	51 & above	66	22.9%
Religion	Christian	191	66.3%
	Islam	93	42.3%
	ATR	4	1.4%
Occupation	Farming	35	12.2%
	Trading	42	14.6%
	Artisan	25	8.7%
	Civil servant	81	28.1%
	Teaching	39	13.5%
	House wife	66	22.9%
Level of Education	No School	44	15.3%
	Others	42	14.6%
	Primary	46	16%
	Secondary	58	20.1%
	Tertiary	98	34%
Marital Status	Married	122	42.4%
	Divorced	55	19.1%
	Separated	51	17.7%
	Widow	60	20.8%
Types of Marriage	Monogamy	161	55.9%
	Polygamy	127	44.1%
Monthly Income	Below 18,000	68	23.6%
	20,000 & above	80	27.8%
	150,000 & above	67	23.3%
	None	73	25.3%

Table 2: Analysis of spousal violence and women empowerment in Ojah in Akoko-Edo L.G.A

Variable	Responses	Distribution	
		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Do you experience spousal violence from your partner?	Yes No	288 0	100 0
Do you think men should work while the women take care of the Household or family?	Yes No	140 148	48.6% 51.4%
Do you think men should always make decisions while the women obey?	Yes No	160 128	55.6% 44.4%
Does your spouse encourage you to make money for yourself?	Yes No	120 168	41.7% 58.3%
Do you need your spouse's permission to spend money on yourself?	Yes No	155 133	53.8% 46.2%
What type of violence do you experience from your partner?	Physical Sexual Verbal Emotional/Psychological Economic deprivation	53 36 54 87 58	18.4% 12.5% 18.8% 30.2% 20.1%
What sort of physical violence do you experience from your partner?	Pull your hair Hitting your head on the wall Kicking/slapping you Pushing you Hit you with an object	38 49 115 44 42	13.2% 17% 39.9% 15.3% 14.6%
What sort of emotional violence do you experience from your spouse?	Deprive you of your needs Humiliate you in front of others Intimidate you on purpose like yelling at you Always insults and make you feel bad about yourself	89 71 60 68	30.9% 24.7% 20.8% 23.6%

Do you take permission from your spouse before you buy the following?	Clothing for yourself	85	29.5%
	Clothing for the children	116	40.3%
	Basic needs of the home	87	30.2%
Does your spouse encourage you to do any of the following?	To have a job	36	47.2%
	Have a business	85	29.5%
	Just an housewife	67	23.3%

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provide evidence that spousal violence remains a critical barrier to women's empowerment in Ojah community of Akoko-Edo Local Government Area, Edo State. Women's empowerment, depends on access to resources, informed decision-making, and the ability to act on information that enhances their social and economic well-being. However, the results reveal that multiple forms of spousal violence—emotional, economic, verbal, and physical—undermine these processes in measurable ways.

The data show that **48.6%** of respondents believed that men should be solely responsible for economic provision while women focus on domestic responsibilities, and **55.6%** felt that men should always make household decisions. These responses indicate deep-rooted gender norms that have normalized male authority and female subordination. Such socialization constrains women's participation in decision-making, which is a fundamental aspect of empowerment. Research has shown that women who internalize patriarchal norms are less likely to seek information that could challenge their subordinate positions (Danjuma, Onimode, & Onche 2015; Akinsola & Adetayo, 2020). The prevalence of these beliefs in Ojah suggests a cultural environment where women's access to empowering information—about rights, health, and opportunities—is restricted not only by structural factors but by learned dependency.

Economic deprivation emerged as another major indicator of disempowerment. Nearly **53.8%** of respondents stated that they could not spend money on themselves without their spouse's approval, while **20.1%** experienced direct economic deprivation. Economic control of this nature reduces women's financial autonomy and limits their access to

information resources, such as media, mobile phones, or educational materials. Studies have established that financial independence increases women's likelihood of seeking and applying information for self-development (Adeleke & Nwalo, 2017; Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2018). In the Ojah context, financial dependency serves as both a tool and a symptom of control, impeding women's capacity to engage in informed choices or to access information that could alter their socio-economic position.

The study further revealed that emotional and psychological violence (**30.2%**) was the most prevalent form of abuse, followed by verbal (**18.8%**), physical (**18.4%**), economic (**20.1%**), and sexual (**12.5%**) violence. Emotional and verbal violence—often through humiliation, intimidation, and insults—are particularly destructive because they diminish self-worth and erode confidence. Psychological insecurity in turn reduces the motivation to seek help or acquire information (Alhassan & Akpan, 2022). This aligns with findings by Akpojivi (2019), who observed that women in abusive relationships often demonstrate low information-seeking behavior due to fear, stigma, or internalized inferiority. Consequently, spousal violence functions not only as a physical constraint but as an informational one—isolating women from knowledge networks, peer support, and self-affirming communication channels.

The interrelationship between violence, information access, and empowerment is evident in the data. Where women are silenced, economically dependent, and emotionally suppressed, they are less likely to engage with available information systems—whether libraries, social media platforms, or community-based initiatives—that could enhance their empowerment. The LIS perspective interprets empowerment not merely as socio-economic advancement but as **information empowerment**—the ability to identify, access, and use information for self-determination (Kuhlthau, 1993; Hepworth & Walton, 2009). The findings from Ojah therefore demonstrate that violence diminishes women's informational agency, thereby obstructing the very process through which empowerment is achieved.

Overall, the study underscores that combating spousal violence requires more than social or legal intervention; it demands the creation of **information-enabling environments**.

Such environments would facilitate access to accurate, context-sensitive information on rights, economic opportunities, and psychosocial support. In rural settings like Ojah, where cultural norms constrain women's voices, libraries and community information centres can serve as neutral and trusted spaces for information sharing, empowerment training, and advocacy. This study therefore contributes to the growing recognition that information access and literacy are central to addressing gender-based violence and fostering sustainable empowerment.

Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between spousal violence and women's empowerment in Ojah community, Akoko-Edo Local Government Area of Edo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that spousal violence in its various forms—emotional, economic, physical, verbal, and sexual—continues to be a major barrier to women's empowerment. Emotional and psychological abuse was found to be the most prevalent, often manifesting in humiliation, intimidation, and verbal threats, which collectively diminish women's self-worth and confidence.

The study also found that socio-cultural beliefs reinforce male dominance, with nearly half of the respondents agreeing that men should be the primary decision-makers and breadwinners. These norms not only sustain economic dependency but also reduce women's capacity to seek, access, and utilize information that could foster their empowerment. The high rate of economic deprivation and control over women's financial decisions further limits their access to empowering information sources such as education, digital media, or library resources. Without access to relevant and trustworthy information, women remain trapped in cycles of dependency and silence. Thus, tackling spousal violence requires a multidimensional approach that combines social reform with improved access to information, education, and communication networks that support women's empowerment and autonomy.

Recommendations

- **Promote Information Literacy and Access:** Libraries, community information centres, and women's development agencies should collaborate to organize information literacy programs targeted at women in rural areas. These programs should focus on teaching women how to access and evaluate information related to their rights, health, and economic opportunities.
- **Establish Community-Based Information Hubs:** Public and community libraries in Edo State should serve as **safe spaces** for women to access printed and digital information on gender equality, domestic violence prevention, and empowerment initiatives. Such centres should also offer referral services to legal and health support systems.
- **Integrate Gender and Information Empowerment Policies:** Government and non-governmental organizations should integrate information access as a core component of gender and empowerment policies. Women's empowerment initiatives should go beyond financial inclusion to include access to ICTs, literacy training, and knowledge of available support services.
- **Increase Awareness through Strategic Communication:** Information professionals and local media should develop culturally sensitive awareness campaigns that address harmful gender norms and highlight the impact of spousal violence on women's well-being and community development.
- **Strengthen Research and Data Collection:** LIS researchers should continue to investigate the link between information behaviour and social issues such as gender-based violence. Future studies could adopt mixed-method approaches to explore how digital and interpersonal information channels influence empowerment outcomes.
- **Collaborate with Traditional and Religious Institutions:** In communities like Ojah, where cultural norms strongly influence gender roles, partnerships with traditional rulers and faith leaders are essential for disseminating empowering information and reshaping public attitudes toward spousal violence.

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