

The Socio-demographic Dynamics of Intimate Partner Violence in Benue State

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Abstract

This study examined the dynamics and correlates of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Benue State of Nigeria. It explores the socio-cultural variables that predispose to IPV as well as people's response to the menace. The research adopted descriptive method of data analysis with the questionnaire and focused-group discussions forming the primary source of data while the secondary source includes library sources. Research subjects were males and females within the study area from the age of 18 years and older who have ever been in an intimate relationship. Two thousand and sixty (2060) copies of a structured questionnaire were administered within the sample frame. Bivariate analysis was performed to identify factors that determine IPV with P-values of less than .05 accepted as significant. Results revealed that 30.24% of respondents had experienced at least one form of IPV. Of this, 27.81% experienced economic violence, 22.91% experienced controlling behaviours while 20.78% and 13.50% experienced emotional and physical violence respectively. The findings further revealed IPV as common place among the three major ethnic groups in the state. Reasons for enduring IPV included care for the children (68.4%), pressure from friends and family (66.5%) and fear of stigmatization (59.7%). Coping strategies were diversion of attention to children, taking solace in family and friends as well as involvement with church activities. The study therefore confirms the high prevalence of IPV in Benue State despite its designation globally as a human rights violation and makes a case for the acceleration of local actions in coordination with national policies to prevent IPV.

Keywords: Violence, Intimate Partner, controlling behaviour, stigmatization, patriarchy.

Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) occurs when one partner in an intimate relationship abuses the other. (Brown, Reed, & Messing, 2018). The abuse can be physical, sexual, economic, and

emotional or a combination of two or more. While women and children are most commonly reported victims of IPV (World Health Organization, WHO 2012), potential victims cut across all age categories and includes the married and unmarried people. The abuse can be against a woman, or by a woman against a man. Common forms of IPV in Nigeria are rape, acid attacks, molestation, wife beating, and corporal punishment (Adejimi, Fawole, Sekoni, Kyriacou, 2014) leading to physical injuries. It can also come in form of emotional abuse, economic deprivation and controlling behaviors which can lead to psychological disorders, dysfunctional families and broken relationships. In extreme cases, it can even lead to death.

The most extensive data available on domestic violence are contained in the National Demographic and Health Survey (NPC, 2013). That study showed that domestic violence cuts across all socio-economic, religious and cultural backgrounds. It further showed that 28% (almost a third) of all women in Nigeria, have experienced physical violence. This is in spite of efforts by government and civil society organizations in combating the scourge. The numbers are significant considering that Nigeria has a population of over **160 million** (Bolarinwa, *et al*, 2023), where about half the population are women.

In a bid to combat the scourge of domestic violence, the Federal Government of Nigeria passed the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act VAPP, 2015 (Omidoyin, 2018). The country also adopted the Child Rights Act in 2003 to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Danjuma, & Joela, 2020). This act has been domesticated in Benue State. Furthermore, the Nation ratified several enabling Protocols and conventions such as Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Despite the concerted National and International efforts, IPV appears to pervade in the country. Afolabi and Okoro (2017) in an Non-governmental Organization's shadow report indicated that, up to a third of women in Nigeria report that they have been subjected to some form of violence, including battering and verbal abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, marital rape, sexual exploitation, or harassment within the home. One in every five women in Nigeria has experienced physical abuse and most times the abuses are carried out in the presence of children. The WHO (2012) reported that up to 50% of sexual assaults are committed against girls under the age of 16 and globally, 603 million women live in countries where domestic violence is not yet considered a crime.

Due to the seeming failure of previous efforts at combating the menace of IPV, this study set out to adopt a community based approach to analyze the situation. Studies such as *Heise (2011) and Abramsky et al, (2012)* have shown that, community-based strategies hold the potential for transforming the social norms and structures that are the root causes of IPV. Mobilizing communities to identify and prevent IPV involves engaging them in supporting, developing, and implementing preventive strategies that target change in individuals, as well as in the community and society. According to Dim (2020), Ethnicity and place of residence play a pivotal role in the social realities of Nigerian women, especially with their experience of IPV. The study therefore analyses the spatial dynamics of IPV in Benue State in order to unveil the dominant parameters at play.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on Social Exchange Theory which posits that, people in a social relationship seek the highest reward while putting in the least amount of effort (Kreager, *et al.*, 2013). When used in relation to IPV, violence on a weaker party is deployed when the reward of gaining control is worth the efforts (Resko, 2010). Although there may be laws against abuse, this does not always deter abusers. In most cases, many women, when reporting abuse, are re-victimized and accused of putting themselves in that situation (Miller & McCaw, 2019). This attempt to justify IPV harms the victim further by blaming her for the violent actions of another human being and also encourages more violence from the perpetrators because society essentially condones the act. Without concrete actions and true legislative actions to penalize those who perpetuate IPV, the abuse is further rewarded because the victim is more likely to comply with the wishes of the partner as a way to avoid more violence (Resko, 2010).

A holistic understanding of IPV should therefore be a priority towards addressing the challenges that come with it (Anule and Ujoh, 2018). This justifies the need for a community based approach to identify and combat the menace of IPV. The study therefore sets out to characterize IPV that is manifest within the socio-cultural context of Benue State. The focus is mainly on intimate partners defined as people who have ever married or co-habited even if they are separated at the moment. Understanding this situation would help in proffering solutions towards it. Distinctions have been made regarding the types of violence that pervades across the state the reasons while victims condone it as well as the coping measures. Those distinctions were made based on patterns across numerous incidents and the outcomes placed within the socio-cultural context of the study area.

The study is justified within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations which are intended to be action-oriented, aspirational and universally applicable to all countries, while considering different local realities. Of specific relevance to this research is the SDG 5 which states; to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”. The goal is to be achieved via 9 targets and 14 indicators. In spite of the broad dimensions of SDG 5, this study focused on Targets 5.1 and 5.2 which set out to end all forms of discrimination and violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation. (UN, 2015).

This research is therefore a focused attempt towards supporting SDG 5 at the local level through the listed targets as outlined in UN (2015) resolution. Though the SDG was specific on women, the research modified the focus to also cover the situation with men. This is also in line with the UN Resolution 68/261 which recommends that, SDG indicators should be disaggregated by ethnicity, geographical location, age, sex, income, disability, migratory status or other characteristics in accordance with the fundamental Principles of Official Statistics (UN, 2014).

Methodology

The study Area

Benue State is one of thirty-six states that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is in the central region of the Country and is made up of twenty-three Local Government Areas that occupy a total landmass of 34,059 Square Kilometers (Anule, 2023). The state has a total population of 6,141,300 people and a density of 199 persons per square kilometer and a growth rate of 2.3% (NPC, 2022). This population consists of three major ethnic groups namely the *Tiv* who constitute more than half of the entire population spreading mainly over fourteen (14) Local Government Areas; the *Idoma* who are dominant in seven (7) Local Government Areas, and the *Igede* that make up the dominant single group in two Local Government Areas. (See Fig.1).



Fig.1 - Map of Benue State showing the distribution of the dominant ethnic nationalities.

Source: Adapted and modified from the Ministry of Lands and Survey, Makurdi.

Inset: Map of Nigeria showing the position of Benue State

Other smaller indigenous ethnic groups include the Etulo (*Utur*), Abakpa and Nyifon in Buruku Local Government Area, Jukum in Makurdi and Guma Local Government Areas, Utonkon (Ufia) in Ado Local Government Area and Akpa in Otukpo Local Government Area. There is also a considerable number of other ethnic groups that are not originally from the State such as the Hausa, Igbo, Igala, Ijaw among others who are based mainly in nucleated centres of the state and are engaged in secondary activities such as trading and public service. There exists some marked disparity in the distribution of population among Local Government Areas. Generally, the Tiv people who dominate the state's population are known to cherish scattered settlements but they exhibit communalistic features. The Idoma and Iggede on the other hand are known to live in nucleated settlements peopled mainly by members of the extended family. Their traditional festivals, widowhood practices, child naming, belief in polygyny as well as burial rites are central to their lifestyles and these are guarded jealously (Anizoba and Johnson, 2021; Onoh *et al.*, 2013).

Apart from that, there are no significant variations in the cultural setting and social order among and the main ethnic groups in the state. In all cases, the compound is the basic socio-political and economic unit and it is peopled by extended family that includes grandparents, uncles and grandchildren typically headed by the oldest male based on a gerontocratic structure. From this structure emerged a patriarchal socialization in which adult males often assume the dual roles of perpetuators and jury. The outcome is the treatment of domestic violence as a family affair thereby disrupting the channels of reporting for abuses outside the family unit.

Agriculture forms the backbone of the State's economy engaging over 70% of the labour force (Nyagba, 1995). Virtually all rural households are involved in some form of agriculture which could be subsistence crop farming, livestock keeping or cash crop production. Though the farms are generally small (ranging from less than one hectare to more than six hectares) and the agricultural system is largely rain-fed and un-mechanized, total crop yield is generally impressive due to the large number of small scale farmers. The people of the state are famous for their cheerful and hospitable disposition as well as rich cultural heritage.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopted descriptive cross-sectional design using structured questionnaire, focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews. Research subjects were males and females within the study area from the age of 18 years and older who have ever been in an intimate relationship. A sample of Eight (8) Local Government Areas out of twenty-three (23) was selected for the study to reflect cultural diversity within the state. To do this, the twenty-three Local Governments were first divided according to the three major ethnic groups in the state. Within the subsets, the Local Government Areas to be studied were randomly selected based on a ratio of Five (5) for Tiv speaking LGAs, Two (2) for Idoma and One (1) for Iggede speaking area reflecting the actual population ratios. All ethical issues related to data collection were followed and respondents were informed that the information gotten from them will be solely used for this research.

A total of Eight (8) FGDs (4 with women groups and 4 with men) were conducted to obtain information on the role of the family in identification and management of IPV. Information sought through the FGDs include, people's understanding of IPV, the types of IPV that pervades the selected communities, measures reasons why victims endure the practice, channels of reporting for IPV as well as cultural practices that tend to promote IPV. IPV within the study area was classified into four groups viz; physical abuses, emotional abuses, economic abuses and controlling behaviors (see appendix 1 for details of the categorization).

Each selected Local Government area had one FGD for men and one for Women respectively. FGD groups contained 8 participants who were randomly selected among people found within the selected communities. In addition, two thousand and sixty (2060) copies of a structured questionnaire were administered within the sample frame. Data were collected by sixteen (16) trained field assistants and four supervisors from July-October, 2021. Bivariate analysis was performed to identify factors that determine IPV with P-values of less than .05 accepted as significant.

Results

The median age of respondents was 26.5 years (18-39 years). About 47% were married and 22% single, while about 43% had secondary education (Table 1). Roughly 49% of respondents were of Tiv ethnic origin while most (90%) were Christians and 36% as traders.

Table 1. Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Socio-demographic category	Frequency (N=2060)	%
Age group (years)		
18-39	1220	59.22
40 and above	840	40.78
Marital status		
Single	453	21.99
Married	964	46.80
Widowed	533	25.87
Divorced	110	5.34
Highest educational attainment		
No formal education	248	12.04
Primary	632	30.68
Secondary	882	42.82
Tertiary	298	14.46
Tribe		
Tiv	1004	48.74
Idoma	584	28.35
Igede	370	17.96
Others	102	4.95
Religion		
Christianity	1864	90.49
Islam	167	8.11
Traditional	29	1.40
Occupation		
Trader	733	35.58
Civil servant	478	23.20
Artisan	391	18.98
Cleric	64	3.11
Unemployed	394	19.13

Of the 2060 respondents, 30.24% had experienced IPV. Based on the category of IPV, economic violence topped the list with 27.81% while physical violence was the least reported with 13.50% physical (Table 2). A further interrogation of IPV based on ethnic groups (Figure 1) showed that, though IPV is common place in all the ethnic groups, it manifests most in form of economic violence which is most prevalent among the Idoma ethnic group (32%). The Tiv ethnic group consistently recorded higher incidence of IPV across the other categories recording 17%, 24% and 25% in physical and emotional violence as well as controlling behaviours respectively.

Table 2. Incidence of IPV Gender based violence

Indicator	Frequency (N=2060)	%
Experience of IPV		
Yes	623	30.24
No	1437	69.76
Emotional		
Yes	428	20.78
No	1632	79.22
Physical		
Yes	278	13.50
No	1782	86.50
Economic		
Yes	573	27.81
No	1487	72.19
Controlling Behavior		
Yes	472	22.91
No	1588	77.09

Source: Field work 2021

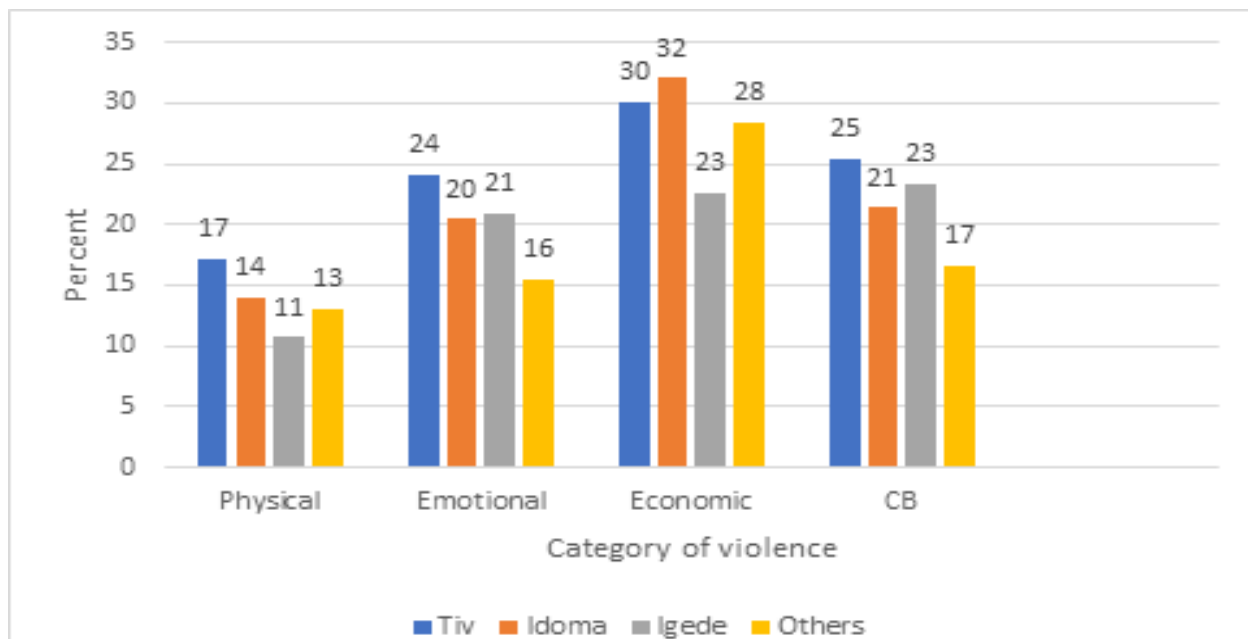


Figure 1. Percentage of respondents who experienced IPV by ethnic group

Bivariate analysis (Table 3) showed that variables significantly associated with experiencing IPV included marital status, highest educational attainment, religion, employment status and duration of courtship. No relation was found between IPV and age group with the calculated X^2 value for one degree of freedom (1.4) was higher than the p-value (3.8) at 5% confidence level.

Table 3. IPV by socio-demographic characteristics

Variable	IPV experience N=2060				5%		
	Yes	(%)	No	(%)	df	X ²	p-value
Age group (years)							
18-39	357	(29.3)	863	(70.7)	1	1.4	3.8
40 and above	266	31.7	574	68.3			
Marital status							
Single	171	37.7	283	62.3	3	177.9	7.8
Married	207	21.5	757	78.5			
Widowed	158	29.6	375	70.4			
Divorced	88	80.0	22	20			
Highest educational attainment							
No formal education	148	59.7	100	40.3	3	163	7.8
Primary	230	36.4	402	63.6			
Secondary	184	20.9	698	79.1			
Tertiary	61	20.5	237	79.5			
Religion							
Christianity	429	23.0	1432	77.0	2	475.9	6.0
Islam	166	98.8	02	1.2			
Traditional	28	96.6	03	3.4			
Employment status							
Employed	431	25.9	1235	74.1	1	79.3	3.8
Unemployed	192	48.7	202	51.3			
Length of courtship							
No courtship	86	94.5	05	5.5	4	1101	9.5
Less than one year	212	36.4	371	63.6			
2-3 years	184	25.4	540	74.6			
4 - 5 years	73	20.5	283	79.5			
Above years and above	68	22.2	238	77.8			

df = Degree of freedom

The reasons for enduring IPV included care for the children (68.4%), pressure from friends and family (66.5%), and fear of stigmatization (59.7%). Others included religious reasons, financial dependence on spouse and advanced age. On the coping strategies used by respondents, majority (53.3%) diverted attention to children, 49.1% took solace in family and friends while 34.4% got involved in church activities and 26.0% stayed longer at work. These underlying reasons were also reinforced from the FGDs as discussants highlighted the significant role of the clergy and other religious organs in guiding their decisions to endure marriages and often providing spiritual and emotional support that prevents them from leaving their marriages.

Table 4. Reasons for enduring IPV

Reason*	Frequency (N = 623)	%
Because of my children	426	68.4
Pressure from friends and family	414	66.5
To avoid stigmatization	372	59.7
Because of religious doctrine	223	35.8
Because of financial dependence on spouse	185	29.7
Too old to start single life	69	11.1

* Multiple responses

Suggestions on ways to prevent IPV were mostly obtained from the focused group discussions and key interviews. These included sensitization of the public regarding availability of prohibitive laws against IPV, proper enforcement of existing laws against IPV as well as collaboration between law enforcement agencies and traditional rulers.

The study determined the prevalence of IPV in Benue and unveiled the dominant variables at play.

A wide spectrum of prevalence was shown ranging from 13.50% to 30.24%. The overall prevalence (30.24%) recorded from the study was higher than the national average of 28% (NPC, 2013). The prevalence was lower than 46% in Nnewi, South Eastern Nigeria (Ilika et al., 2002) but within the same range as 28% in Zaria, north western Nigeria (Yusuf, *et al.*, 2011). However, the prevalence was higher than in Thailand 15.4% (Chuemchit, 2018). Economic violence was recognized as the most common form of IPV (27.81%), followed by controlling behavior (22.91%) and emotional or psychological violence (20.78%). The relatively low prevalence of physical violence (13.50%) may have resulted from the under-reporting of such cases due to its sensitive nature based on patriarchal values which are still firmly rooted in the society (Itimi *et al.*, 2014; Anizoba & Johnson, 2021).

Table 5. Coping strategies

Strategy*	Frequency (N = 623)	%
I diverted attention and affection to my children	332	53.3
I find solace in friends and family	306	49.1
I got involved in church activities to get my mind away	214	34.4
I started taking alcohol	188	30.2
I stay longer at work	162	26.0
I attempt to retaliate and had extra-marital affairs	72	11.6
I stay away from home	64	10.3

* Multiple responses

The study further revealed IPV as common place in the three major ethnic groups. Dim (2020), highlighted the pivotal role of ethnicity and place of residence in the social realities of Nigerian women, especially with their experience of IPV. The findings also reinforced the works of Onoh *et al.*, (2013) which acknowledged the prevalence of different categories of IPV across ethnic and cultural barriers.

Significant factors associated with IPV were marital status, educational attainment, religion, employment and duration of courtship. No relation was found between IPV and age group. Diverting attention to children (53.3%), taking solace in family and friends (49.1%), involvement in church activities (34.4%), alcoholism (30.2%) and staying longer at work (26.0%) were the major ways adopted by victims to cope with IPV.

Conclusion

This study confirms the high prevalence of IPV in Benue State despite its designation globally as a human rights violation. The findings should justify the acceleration of local actions in coordination with national policies to prevent IPV. It also contributes valuable data to a number of interest groups including policy makers, public health practitioners, activists, and community leaders. National policy change should work to eliminate the root causes of IPV. This can be in form of the establishment of a special agency solely responsible for providing comprehensive package of services (such as counselling, rehabilitation and referrals to additional health services as well as social and economic support) to victims of various forms of violence. In addition, there should creation of networks and engagement of local communities to challenge social norms that tend to reinforce and motivate violence and to ensure that violence is treated as a public rather than a family concern. Finally, media messaging should focus on promoting respect for human dignity and non-violent relationships.

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Author Contributions

Chinwe Moudumogu conceived of the study. Peter Anule designed the study, wrote the protocol and conducted literature searches. All the authors were involved with data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Peter Anule wrote the draft of the manuscript while all authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Appendix 1

Categories of intimate partner Violence (IPV)

PHYSICAL ABUSE

My partner slaps me
My partner twisted my arm
My partner pulled my hair
My partner punched me
My partner attacked me with a weapon/Flogged me
My partner beat me
My partner threw something at me
My partner kicked me
My partner dragged me on the ground

CONTROLLING BEHAVIOURS

My partner does not allow me to interact with the opposite sex
My partner does not allow me to interact freely with my family members
My partner does not allow me to interact freely with his/her family members
My partner does not allow me to make my personal choices
My partner does not allow me to attend weddings/parties
My partner does not allow me to attend meetings
My partner does not allow me to make personal choices
My partner checks my phone regularly
My partner does not allow me to use the social media (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc)

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

My partner does not allow me to handle money
My partner does not allow me to do business
My partner keeps away from home for weeks without money for housekeep
My partner does not allow me to join cooperatives
My partner does not allow me to go into entrepreneurship ventures
My partner does not want me to keep a paid job
My partner does not disclose his/her account details to me
My partner refuses to make financial commitments for family upkeep

EMOTIONAL ABUSE

My partner keeps late nights always
My partner keeps friends that I don't like
My partner disrespects me
My partner does not permit me to discipline the children
My partner does not allow me to take part in the decision making in the family
My partner stays away from the home for days without informing me
My partner supports his/her relatives to disrespect me
My partner insults me in front of the children
My partner insults me in front of relatives
My partner insults me in front of strangers
My partner keeps extra marital relationship
My partner is suspicious if I talk to opposite sex
My partner accuses me of being unfaithful
My partner always insists on knowing where I am
My partner ignores me purposefully and do not have sex with me for weeks