

## Pattern of spousal physical abuse and associated factors among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic in Uyo, Nigeria

Augustine Umoh<sup>1,\*</sup>, Emmanuel Inyang-Etoh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, <sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer, Dept. of Obstetrics & Gynecology, University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, Nigeria

**\*Corresponding Author:**

Email: avumoh@gmail.com

### Abstract

**Background:** Spousal physical abuse among pregnant women continues to occur in our environment due to dysfunctional marital social relationships, against the backdrop of violation of the rights of affected women with possible untoward consequences on their pregnancy.

**Methods:** Relevant information were obtained through structured self-administered questionnaire administered through simple random sampling technique to consenting women attending antenatal clinic in the centre studied.

**Results:** The prevalence of spousal physical abuse among respondents was 10.2%, and 8.6% of the respondents reported spousal abuse in the index pregnancy. The mean age of respondents was 29.1years + 5.2 and most (88.9%) of the respondents who reported spousal abuse were married. Over half (51.1%) of the respondents who reported spousal abuse had attained tertiary level of education. Husbands of respondents with higher levels of education were more likely to abuse their spouses than those with lower levels of education;  $p < 0.001$ . The majority (31.2%) of the husbands who abuse their spouses were civil servants. Respondents' husbands who performed unskilled/low-skilled jobs were significantly more likely to abuse their spouses than husbands who engaged in high-skilled jobs;  $p < 0.001$ . More than a quarter (26.7%) of the respondents who reported abuse were slapped by their husbands and spousal abuse was an occasional occurrence in more than half (53.4%) of the respondents.

**Conclusion:** Spousal physical abuse is a continuing social problem in Uyo and men with higher levels of education and those with un-skilled/low-skilled jobs were significantly more likely to physically abuse their wives in the study population.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, Pattern spousal violence, Violence in pregnancy, Spousal abuse, Physical abuse pregnancy, Nigeria

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### Introduction

Spousal physical abuse is a major public health issue because of the impact it could have on the health of victims. Every aspect of the victim's health could be interrupted and this include the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the individual.<sup>(1,2)</sup> While an abuse could result in physical injuries to the abused partner, requiring medical intervention, the relationship between the couple could become estranged with attendant adverse social consequences.<sup>(2,3)</sup> Living with an abusive spouse could also pose a source of psychological trauma to the abused partner.<sup>(3,4)</sup>

Women are more vulnerable to spousal abuse because they are physically weaker than the men; and pregnancy further compromises their physical strength. When spousal abuse occurs in pregnancy, the impact can be devastating with dire consequences on the woman, her pregnancy and the unborn child.<sup>(5,6)</sup> Conditions that could complicate pregnancy following physical abuse include: miscarriage, premature rupture of fetal membranes, preterm labour, placental abruption, intrauterine fetal death and postpartum depression.<sup>(6,7,8)</sup>

Physical abuse may take the form of slapping, beating, hitting, kicking, biting, assaulting or threatening to assault with a weapon.<sup>(9,10)</sup> Other forms

of abuse include a spouse rough-handling her partner or using physical force with the intention of causing harm.

A number of social, family, environmental and cultural factors have been identified to predispose to spousal physical abuse. Some research workers have found young age of the woman, low socioeconomic circumstance of the couple, and uncontrolled fertility with attendant frequent pregnancies and childbirth to predispose to physical abuse.<sup>(9)</sup> Other factors identified include: gender inequality, adverse cultural beliefs, and dysfunctional family settings, which tend to make the woman assume a second-fiddle position in the family.<sup>(10,11)</sup>

Spousal physical abuse cuts across all societies and socioeconomic strata. Cases have been reported among the rich and the poor; the educated and the illiterate; the celebrity and the peasant.<sup>(12)</sup> In a developing country like Nigeria, the majority of women, especially those living in rural areas are uneducated and unaware of their rights. The prevailing culture on the other hand tend to give men overriding control over their wives.<sup>(11,12)</sup> These anomalies set the stage for dysfunctional family social relationship between the man and his wife often resulting in physical violence.

This aberrant practice continues to occur in our society unabated against the backdrop of the United Nations Millennium Developmental goal number 3,

which sets the year 2015 for global attainment of gender equality and women empowerment.<sup>(13)</sup>

This study was designed to determine the pattern of spousal physical abuse, as well as the associated factors among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic in the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, Uyo, Nigeria. It is envisaged that the findings of this study would help us make a case for the eradication of this aberrant practice from our society.

**Materials and Methods**

**Study setting:** The setting was the antenatal clinic of the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, located in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The hospital is the only tertiary health care facility, which provides specialist maternity services to women from Akwa Ibom state and its environs. The hospital receives patients who present themselves voluntarily to the centre as well as those who are referred from lower levels of health care from both public and private health facilities. Akwa Ibom State has a population of 3.9million people, 50% of which are women.<sup>(14)</sup>

**Recruitment and Data Collection:** This was a cross-sectional questionnaire-based survey, which was conducted within two months from among pregnant women attending antenatal clinic in the University of Uyo Teaching Hospital. The questionnaire was pretested and necessary corrections made. On each clinic day, the women were counseled on the purpose of the study and assured that participation was voluntary and that their privacy and confidentiality were guaranteed. The questionnaires were administered to the women who volunteered to participate in the study using simple random sampling technique. The minimum sample size required was computed using the formula:  $N_0 = Z^2pq/e^2$

Provision was made to cater for attrition. The questionnaire which contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions was answered by each respondent. Research assistants who had been trained were available to assist respondents who needed clarifications on some questions they did not understand. Respondents were encouraged to complete the questionnaires independently and to avoid undue external influences on their responses. The questionnaires were collected from the respondents as soon as they indicated that they had finished completing them.

**Data analysis:** The data generated from the study were analysed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS), Version 17 for windows (SPSS Inc. IL, USA). Some data are presented in the form of numerical, percentage and simple proportion. Other data are presented in tabular form for ease of perusal. The X<sup>2</sup> test was used to compute for any significant difference in the prevalence of spousal abuse between respondents’ husbands’ educational levels and

occupations in the study population. A p-value of 0.05 was considered statistically significant. Conclusions were drawn using descriptive and inferential statistical principles.

**Results**

A total of 500 questionnaires were administered, out of which 442 (88.4%) were retrieved and used for the analysis. Forty-five pregnant women reported having been physically abused either in the index pregnancy or in a previous pregnancy. This gave a prevalence of spousal physical abuse of 10.2% among women in the study population. Thirty-eight (8.6%) of the women reported spousal physical abuse in the index pregnancy. The mean age of respondents was 29.1 years ±5.2 with a range of 16 to 45 years of age.

Table 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of women in the study population. A majority of the women belonged to the 30-34years age group. Women belonging to the 20-24years and those over 40years were least likely to be abused by their spouses. Most (88.9%) of the respondents were married with 37.9% of them having had two previous deliveries. Even though 31.1% had attained tertiary level of education, over half (51.1%) of the respondents were unemployed.

**Table 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents in the study population**

Characteristics	No. (%)
<b>Age Groups</b>	
15-19	3(6.7)
20-24	2(4.4)
25-29	15(33.4)
30-34	18(40.0)
35-39	5(11.1)
>40	2(4.4)
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	2(4.4)
Married	40(88.9)
Engaged	3(6.7)
<b>Parity</b>	
P0	6(13.3)
P1	13(28.9)
P2	17(37.9)
P3	6(13.3)
P4	2(4.4)
P5	1(2.2)
<b>Educational Level</b>	
Primary	3(6.7)
Secondary	13(28.9)
®Post-secondary	6(13.3)
¥Tertiary	23(51.1)
<b>Occupation</b>	

Unemployed	14(31.1)
Peasant Farming	1(2.2)
Petty Trading	12(26.7)
Artisan	2(4.4)
Civil Service	12(26.7)
Professional	4(8.9)
Total	45(100.0)

®Lower than University/Polytechnic

¥University/Polytechnic

Table 2 shows the cross-tabulation of the level of education of respondents' husbands against spousal abuse. While 0.5% of the husbands of respondents who did not report spousal abuse had no formal education, the lowest level of education among husbands of respondents who reported abused was primary, which occurred in 6.7% of them. Tertiary level of education was in the majority among husbands of respondents in abused (57.8%) and non-abused (72.5%) groups respectively. Comparing the prevalence of spousal abuse between husbands who had primary or secondary level of education and those who had post-secondary level of education or higher revealed that the difference in spousal abuse between the former and the latter was statistically significant;  $X^2= 11.00$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p< 0.001$ .

**Table 2: Educational level of husband of respondents in the study population**

Educational level	Abuse present No. (%)	Abuse absent No.(%)
None	0(0.0)	2(0.5)
Primary	3(6.7)	1(0.3)
Secondary	10(22.2)	69(19.2)
®Post-secondary	6(13.3)	27(7.5)
¥Tertiary	26(57.8)	261(72.5)
Total	45(100.0)	360(100.0)

®Lower than University/Polytechnic

¥University/Polytechnic

**Table 3: Occupation of husbands of respondents in the study population**

Occupation	Abuse present No. (%)	Abuse absent No.(%)
Unemployed	4(8.8)	5(1.5)
Peasant farming	2(4.4)	155(45.5)
Petty trading	12(26.7)	3(0.8)
Artisan	3(6.7)	58(17.0)
Civil service	14(31.2)	90(26.4)
Professional	8(17.8)	10(2.9)
Others	2(4.4)	20(5.9)
Total	45(100.0)	341(100.0)

**Table 4: Pattern of physical abuse among respondents in the study population**

Pattern	No.(%)
<b>Types</b>	
Slapping	12(26.7)
Beating	5(11.1)
Hitting with a fist or stick	7(15.6)
Kicking	5(11.1)
¥Threatening/ actual use of weapon	10(22.2)
®Others	6(13.3)
<b>Frequency</b>	
Everyday	2(4.4)
At least once per week	7(15.6)
At least once per month	6(13.3)
At least once per year	2(4.4)
Occasionally	24(53.4)
Rarely	4(8.9)
<b>Associated factors</b>	
Spouse unemployed	2(4.4)
Spouse having financial difficulty	25(55.7)
Spouse having problems at work	2(4.4)
Disagreement with children discipline	2(4.4)
Spouse coming home drunk	4(8.9)
Respondent accused of infidelity	4(8.9)
Problems with in-laws/ house servants	6(13.3)
Total	45(100.0)

®Other forms of abuse included choking, pushing, throwing things at the victim & raping in a violent manner.

¥One woman reported that her husband threatened her with a gun.

The cross-tabulation of respondents' husbands' occupation against spousal abuse is shown in Table 3. The majority (31.2%) of the husbands of respondents who abused their spouses were civil servants, whereas peasant farmers were less likely (4.4%) to abuse their spouses. Grouping of the occupations of the husbands of respondents under unskilled/ low-skilled (unemployed, peasant farming, petty trading, artisan) and high-skilled (civil service, professional), revealed that the difference in spousal abuse between the former and the latter was statistically significant;  $X^2= 14.104$ ,  $df= 1$ ,  $p< 0.001$ .

Table 4 shows the pattern and associated factors of physical abuse reported by women in the study population. More than a quarter (26.7%) of the women who suffered physical abuse from their spouses were slapped. Beating and kicking, which accounted for 11.1% each were the least frequent type of abuse

reported by respondents in the study population. The majority (53.4%) of the respondents reported occasional abuse from their spouses. Only 4.4% of the respondents reported spousal abuse every day. Most of the men who abused their spouses in the study population were experiencing financial difficulty at the time of the abuse.

## Discussion

Spousal physical abuse during pregnancy, which may occur due to dysfunctional social relationship between a couple is a violation of the woman's right with possible adverse consequences on her health and that of her fetus. The prevalence of spousal physical abuse of 10.2% obtained among respondents in this study has confirmed that this practice is a continuing social problem in our environment. This prevalence is however lower than the prevalence of 13.0% and 13.6%, which were obtained in Enugu and Ebonyi, both in south-east Nigeria.<sup>(15,16)</sup> Ezechi et al.<sup>(2)</sup> on the other hand, found a much higher prevalence of 49.2% of spousal abuse among antenatal attendees in Lagos, a cosmopolitan mega-city in Nigeria.

The mean age of respondents in this study was 29.1years + 5.2 with a range of 16-45years, which is comparable to the mean age of 28.0years + 4.3 reported in Abraka and 31.5years + 4.25 in Abuja, both in Nigeria.<sup>(17,18)</sup> This trend is probably reflective of the peak reproductive age of women in Nigeria. In contrast, Ameh and Abdul<sup>(19)</sup> found a much lower mean age of 26.7years + 3.3 among respondents in Zaria, Nigeria. This contrasting result may not be unconnected with the fact that the inhabitants of Zaria, which is located in north-west Nigeria are predominantly Muslims; and Islam is permissive of early marriage and procreation.

Most (88.9%) of the respondents who reported spousal physical abuse in this study were married, over half (51.1%) of them were unemployed and 31.1% had attained tertiary level of education. Efetie and Salami<sup>(18)</sup> in Abuja, Nigeria found a lower but comparable (85.2%) proportion of women in their study having attained tertiary level of education. Both results however failed to agree with results from Abraka and Zaria, both in Nigeria where the highest level of education attained by the majority of the respondents in those series was secondary respectively.<sup>(17,19)</sup>

Spousal physical abuse was found to be commoner among women who were married to husbands with tertiary level of education when compared with those with primary or secondary levels,  $p < 0.001$  in concordance with Efetie and Salami,<sup>(18)</sup> who also found higher educational status to be significantly associated with domestic violence in their study. Yusuf<sup>(20)</sup> et al. in Ibadan on the other hand found an association between spousal physical violence and young age of the husband and indulgence in harmful social habits like cigarette smoking and alcohol drinking. Studies carried out in Jos, Nigeria and India however revealed a situation

where low level of education of the spouse of respondents was significantly associated with spousal physical abuse.<sup>(9,21)</sup>

Spousal physical abuse was found to be commoner among respondents who were married to spouses of low socioeconomic status,  $p < 0.001$  in agreement with findings from Jos and Uyo, where significant association was found between spousal physical abuse among women who were married to men who performed unskilled/low skilled jobs.<sup>(21,22)</sup>

The majority (26.7%) of the respondents in this study who reported spousal physical abuse were slapped, followed by threats (22.2%), as opposed to results from Jos, Nigeria, where only 18.7% of the respondents were slapped; in a similar manner, only 16% of respondents reported being slapped by their spouses in India.<sup>(9,21)</sup> Ameh and Abdul<sup>(19)</sup> in contrast, reported that in their series, as much as 36.0% of the respondents were beaten. A comparable (22.2% and 20.3%) proportion of respondents reported being threatened by their spouses in this study and in a study in Jos, which is located in north-central Nigeria for an undetermined reason.<sup>(21)</sup>

The commonest associated factor for spousal physical abuse among respondents was financial difficulty, which could be psychologically distressing to affected men; and this corroborates findings from Lagos, Nigeria, India, as well as Enugu and Ebonyi, both in Nigeria.<sup>(2,9,15,16)</sup>

In conclusion, spousal physical abuse is an ongoing social problem in Uyo, Nigeria and respondents who had a positive history were either married to highly educated men or men who engaged in un-skilled or low-skilled occupations. The majority of the respondents were slapped by their spouses occasionally at a time the majority of the abusive husbands were experiencing financial difficulty. The need for a study that would focus on the effects of spousal physical abuse in pregnancy has become imperative.

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