Domestic Violence and Rural Women in Ikwo Communities of Ebony State, Nigeria

By

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women is a global challenge ravaging the human society irrespective of culture, educational and economic status, or race. It has attracted much attention in recent times because of its devastating effects on the victims and society. However, not much has been documented in Nigeria regarding rural women because their experiences are under-reported. Hence, this study explored Ikwo women's understanding of what makes up domestic violence and their awareness of laws protecting their rights. This study was a cross-sectional survey, and it used both qualitative and quantitative data. Sixteen respondents, comprising ten females and six males were purposively selected for in-depth interview (IDI) from eight communities in Ikwo. One thousand and six hundred copies of a semi-structured questionnaire were administered, while one thousand, five hundred and sixty-eight (representing 98 per cent) were filled and returned valid. Those who understood domestic violence against women were 83.4 per cent, while 68.4 per cent of the female respondents had experienced an act of violence within 1-10 years of being in a marriage, and by their spouses. Similarly, 63.8 per cent of the victims were not aware of the extant laws that protect their rights, had not reported cases of violence to formal institutions saddled with the authority to deal with such offences, and had not sought redress for acts of violence. Finally, this study found that rural women in Ikwo understood domestic violence and had experienced acts of violence. They were, however, ignorant of services and laws protecting them. Thus, there is the need for state and local government authorities to domesticate laws against domestic violence, intensify

aggressive enlightenment programmes to curtail the prevalence of violence against women in Ikwo and rural women generally.

Keywords: Domestic violence, rural women, Ikwo communities, Nigeria

Introduction

State and non-state actors, in recent times, have increased efforts and advocacy to curb violence against women in all its forms, although without much result. Consequently, women have continued to be in great danger in their families where they should be safest. Domestic violence has defied all solutions and has persisted, affecting many people mentally, emotionally, physically, psychologically, sexually, and economically (Christiana, 2012). It is among the foremost, persistent human rights abuses (World Bank, 2019); it denies its victim equality, self-esteem, and the right to basic liberties (UNICEF, 2002). Violence and its associated forms against women exist in all nations regardless of culture, race, religion, class, education, social status, income, ethnicity, and age (Olawole-Isaac, Oladosun, and Oni, 2017; Solanke, Amoo and Idowu, 2017).

Numerous studies have recorded a noticeable upsurge in violence against women within the family, especially in its frequency (Heise, 1989; Jewkes, 2002; Fareo, 2015). For example, each year, women in the United States of America experience over 4.8 million close or intimate partner-related physical violence attacks (Djaden and Thoennes 2002, cited in Aihie, 2009). In India, research revealed that fifty-six per cent of the women sampled by an agency justified wife-beating on the premise of not being able to cook good food, being rude to husband's relatives and in-laws, giving birth to more female children, and leaving home without permission from the spouse, among others (Bazza, 2010; Kingdom and Udoh, 2018). In Africa, studies also showed that the reported rate of physical abuse and violence was highest with virtually half of the countries recording lifetime experiences of over forty per cent. In Asia, the range of lifetime physical abuses and violence was lower, from thirteen per cent in Azerbaijan (2006) to almost forty per cent in Timor-Leste (http://unstats.un.org/). In Nigeria, the likelihood of women experiencing intimate person violence (IPV) from their present husbands or partners in their lifetime is high and is projected at nineteen per cent, while emotional intimate person violence stood at fourteen per cent (Mapayi, Makanjuola; Mosaku; Adewuya; Afolabi and Aloba et al., 2013; NPC, 2013).

Around the globe, particularly in Nigeria, there are recorded pieces of evidence of high incidence of violence against women in urban areas (Ajala, 2003,; Aborisade, 2012,; Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2013,; Azeez, 2016;, Benebo, Schumann, & Vaezghasemi, 2018). However, not much has been done on the rural women in Nigeria, who are most vulnerable and

poor, predominantly peasant farmers with little or no access to good health care facilities, and with limited education, whose voices are suppressed, and face discrimination. Hence, this research becomes imperative to fill the gap by focusing attention on the rural women. This is to explore the extent of the rural women's understanding of the laws that protect their rights against violence in Nigeria.

This study provides insights into the understanding of domestic violence from the rural women's perspective. Besides, it brings to the fore the predicament of rural women who daily face abuses from their spouses, albeit unreported. Therefore, the objectives of the research are to:

a. ascertain the rural woman's understanding of violence against women in the Ikwo community;
b. determine the prevalence of domestic violence against rural women in Ikwo;
c. identify the classes or categories of women that experience domestic violence more; and
d. determine the awareness of relevant laws that protect the rights of women against forms of violence.

Conceptual Discourse: Violence and Domestic Violence

Different scholars have defined what constitutes violence in many ways. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, eleventh edition, defines violence as the "use or application of brute or physical force to injure, damage, or destroy…. it is an unjust or callous application of force or power, in violating the right of someone and their sensibilities". It is also viewed as the conscious utilization of raw force or power to threaten or harm oneself, an individual, a group, or community, whose likely outcome could be an injury, death, mental and emotional or psychological harm, or deprivation (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg and Zwi, 2002; WHO, 2002). In other words, violence is a sort of aggression that adopts the application of force or threats to violate, intimidate, subdue, harm, damage, or kill someone.

Salami (1993), cited in Aborisade (2012), describes violence as an avoidable act that violates the fundamental rights of humans, in its broadest meaning, or which inhibits the realization of the basic needs of others. Whenever people cannot afford or are deprived of food based on socio-economic or political reasons, those individuals or groups of individuals can be rightly regarded as victims of social violence. The interpretation given by Salami points to various forms of violence, which include cultural, psychological, physical and social violence (Galtung, 1969). There are also structural, direct, and domestic violence (Aremu, 2008).

Structural Violence

This form of violence is entrenched in the socio-political and economic system. This is subtle violence embedded within a system; it prevents an individual or groups of individuals from attending to some desired legitimate goals. It connotes indirect, subtle, or hidden violence, and it suggests a situation in which the lives of a people are endangered and self-realization becomes impossible owing to socio-economic discrimination officially designed to limit their targets. This includes hunger, starvation, unemployment, non-access to qualitative health care, and illiteracy. Structural violence creates a society that indoctrinates people to perpetrate pains on others, believing it is normal.

Direct Violence

This is neither subtle nor hidden; it is visible and perpetrated directly towards an individual, group, community, or a selected group marked out for subjugation or annihilation. The manifestation of frustration and aggression are among the most likely factors that can result in direct and physical violence. The crises in the Niger Delta and Northeast Nigeria are good examples.

Domestic violence (more often referred to as domestic abuse or family violence). This form of violence is unlawful violent behaviour within a household, especially that which involves spouses or domestic partners (Schechter and Edelson, 1999). It is a kind of violence or other abuse carried out within the domestic environment by one person against another who resides or shares the same abode or a member of the same household.

The term "domestic violence against rural women" in this study refers to violence against the females who are married or cohabiting and reside in remote areas of villages with little or no social amenities, compared with other women dwelling in the city. Although this study recognizes the existence of other forms of violence, it does not cover violence inflicted on women by strangers outside the home.

Theoretical Orientation

Heise's (1998) social ecology theory asserts that violence is a function of multilayer features that fuse at varied points or stages of the "social ecology", not limited to the individual level, but also within her family, community, and society. This theory does not postulate that violence against women and girls has a single causative factor. Rather, it claims that violence is influenced by numerous interrelated factors that interact at several levels of the social ecology, which include the following:

(a) Personality idiosyncrasies and experiences the two opposite sex bring to their relationships;

(b) Positional and contextual issues that form their everyday lives; and
(c) Orientation and cultures that are emboldened by close associates with family ties and social institutions as proper behaviour for both sexes (Jennifer and Rohini, 2014).

According to Heise (2011, vi): "these norms and expectations are in turn shaped by structural factors –such as religious institutions and ideology and the distribution of economic power between men and women –that work to explain certain ideas, beliefs and norms about violence and structure women's choices for absconding violent relationships." Social and cultural issues can be examined from two perspectives: from well-entrenched structures which impose unswervingly on the person's direct situation; and from the wider social norms that influence those structures.

From Heise's (1998) perspective, this study arrived at the following description of social ecology strata: Social norms are the accepted socio-cultural standards and philosophies that link all other strata of the social ecology and that stimulate changes in these other strata of interaction. Institutions and systems factors are the formal and informal structures, such as socio-economic, legal, political, and religious factors that affect a person's immediate environment and determine the changes in those settings. At this level, this can include local community factors, which "are often the consequences of changes taking place in the larger social and environmental condition" (Heise 1998: 273). Family and association influences relate to the interfaces in an individual's direct environment in which a person unswervingly gets involved with others, and the personal meanings assigned to those interactions.

Finally, specific issues are those structures of an individual's developmental experience or personality that shape his or her response to stressors within the household and in interpersonal relationships, as well as in the local community. A key strength of the ecological framework is its power to identify the level or multiple levels of interaction at which violence occurs.

Russell Kabir and Hafiz T. A. Khan (2019) carried out cross-sectional research to investigate intimate partner violence and barriers to the empowerment of women in Armenia. The study used panel data on Armenia Demography and Health Survey 2015-16 and selected 6,116 women from 8,749 families at both cities and rural areas of Armenia for in-depth interviews using a multistage cluster sampling technique. The logistic regression analysis result indicated that the age of the respondents, number of children in the family, wealth index, social status, and empowerment status were significantly linked with intimate partner violence. Thus, the researchers concluded that women of low status and

less income stand higher chances of experiencing intimate partner violence in contrast to those women who are empowered and independent financially in the Armenian society.

In a related study, Sardinha and Nájera Catalán (2018) carried out research on attitudes towards domestic violence in 49 low- and middle-income countries. The study employed records from 49 Demographic and Health Surveys carried out from 2005 to 2017, United Nations Statistics, and topic-specific meta-databases. The findings of the survey revealed that domestic violence tolerance was among the reason for "wife-beating" in at least one of five situations and by the cumulative scale. They researchers also used stepwise multiple linear regressions to examine country-specific socio-political and economic empowerment predictors of societal acceptance of domestic violence (DV) amongst women, men, and the aggregate gender difference. The outcome of the analysis showed that women even justified DV in West Africa more than men, while in South (east) Asia there was widespread acceptance of DV compared with Latin America, the Caribbean, Central, and West Asia, and Europe. Furthermore, political skirmishes and limited economic rights for women were linked with a higher rate of DV acceptance amongst women and men. Besides, men in more developed and stable democratic nations were less likely to defend or justify DV. Among women, the higher the national literacy the lower the chances of justifying DV were. In other words, in a society where women's literacy is higher, there is the likelihood that DV is not accepted and justified among women. The study also revealed that there were higher levels of DV acceptance amongst women and a wider aggregate gender difference in countries with a greater representation of women in the national parliament. In other words, justification of DV is widespread amongst women and men in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), with acceptance rates changing across countries and regions.

Azeez (2016), adopting the multi stage-sampling procedure, investigated the victim's experiences and responses against gender-based violence among 327 respondents in Ibadan, Nigeria. His study revealed that 68.5 per cent of the respondents who reportedly reacted to non-physical gender-based violence left redress for God; only 7.3 per cent of the respondents took legal action and 9.7 per cent reportedly fought the perpetrators of such actions. In effect, 83 per cent of the perpetrators are likely to continue such an act because the victim's responses are passive. This implies that a greater number of the victims of gender-related violence do not take decisive action to protect their rights according to the relevant laws of the country. They rather turn to religion, that God will fight their battles. This attitude encourages perpetrators of gender-based violence to continue such an act. Affected individuals should be encouraged to seek legal redress through media and local

initiatives, which are pivotal in achieving gender equality, particularly Sustainable Development Goals.

From the previous studies reviewed so far, it is obvious that much literature and research on domestic violence abound, but not enough is available in Nigeria on the effects of domestic violence on rural women and their understanding of domestic violence. Thus, the focus of this current work is on domestic violence against rural women, and as such, it fills the gap by bringing to the fore the plight of the rural women who face domestic violence in Nigeria, specifically in the Ikwo community.

Research Method

Study Design

To accomplish the objectives of this study, a mixed research design was adopted. This comprised qualitative and quantitative methods of research and involved the use of a cross-sectional survey using open-ended questionnaire and key informant and in-depth interviews. Owing to the complexity of the topic under investigation, key informant interviews (KII) complemented the information gathered with the questionnaire. This was because the meaning and depth of domestic violence as well as its manifestations and relationship with human rights abuses vary and depend on some factors, such as cultural, social, political and environmental constraints that may not be easily captured by the open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

The rationale for the adoption of mixed methods is that, apart from gaining in-depth information on the victims' and participants' experiences, this approach is specifically expedient in understanding and integrating ambiguities between quantitative results and qualitative findings (see Fetters and Freshwater, 2015). It also reflects participants' points of view and gives voice to study participants so as to ensure that the study findings are grounded in participants' experiences. Essentially, it tries to develop a deep understanding of the problem of domestic violence from an individual's perspective.

Research Setting

This study took place at Ikwo, where Alex Ekwueme Federal University is located. Ikwo is the largest local government area in Ebonyi State; it is a densely populated rural area, consisting of subsistence agrarian communities with a projected population of 284,400 (NPC, 2016; NBS, 2018). The local government area has a landmass of approximately 500 square kilometres, situated in the eastern part of the state, and it shares borders with Abakaliki, the state capital, Izzi and Ezza Local Government Areas, as well as Cross River State.

The people of Ikwo are regarded as the largest producers of Abakaliki rice; yams and cassava are the most popular crops in the area. Ikwo, like other parts of Ebonyi State, is endowed with abundant natural resources that are largely untapped, including limestone, lead, zinc and salt, and laterite deposits in various parts of the community. Ikwo Local Government was made up of five principal communities, namely Unweka, Alike, Mgbabu, Echara, and Okpitumo. However, these former five principal communities have been further split into 12 autonomous communities. The people of Ikwo are known for continuous violent conflict with theit neighbours over land and its resources.

Study Frame

A semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. It included questions on socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, along with issues that elicit discussions related to the act of domestic violence, and spousal battering. Pre-testing of the questionnaire with married couples in area not sampled for the study was carried out and necessary adjustments were made in the questionnaire. Research assistants were trained concerning ethical and sensitive issues in research that have to do with real-life experiences (Bhatta, 2013). Those respondents who voluntarily accepted to be part of the survey were adequately briefed about the purpose and objectives of the research and the privacy of data to be collected. Each respondent's verbal consent was obtained, with the assurance of confidentiality.

Primary data were gathered through the in-depth/one-on-one interview technique. The face-to-face interview was conducted at the respondent's place of choice without the presence of a third party from the community, except the research assistant who was neither an indigene of Ikwo nor a resident of the community. These measures were taken to ensure absolute confidentiality.

An attempt was made to locate and include women who had been separated or divorced from their spouses due to domestic violence and maltreatment. The number of women was thrice that of men because they were the focus of the study; besides, the literature indicates they were more vulnerable to domestic violence. Men were included in the study because men mostly commit domestic violence. So including men in the survey would make the outcome robust and ensure balance. It is pertinent to note that the men and women in this study do not imply couples. Couples were not interviewed so as to reduce the chances of biased responses and under-reportage, which could occur if couples are interviewed concurrently.

Sample Size

Eight communities (Ekpelu, Ekpaomaka, Ndegu Amegu, Okpitumo, Ndufu Alike, Ndufu Echara, Ekawoke, and Ndufu Amegu) out of the twelve Ikwo communities were selected purposely because of certain similarities. They still practise early marriage (involving teenagers) for both males and females, which makes many of the inhabitants have limited education. As such, their women are not independent, neither do they have steady means of income; rather, they depend heavily on their spouses for sustenance. Also, the eight communities are predominantly peasant farmers and have the remotest villages in the local government, with limited social amenities that enhance healthy living.

A multistage sampling technique employing probability sampling methods (stratified and systematic) in the various stages was used to select a sample of 1600 female respondents from and 400 male respondents. This ensured even representativeness of the data subsequently collected. Then eligible respondents were selected with the aid of the simple random. In the eight communities, only people who were willing to respond to the research instrument were interviewed.

Data Analysis

Socio-demography of the Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are summarised in the table below:

Table 1: Summary of the socio-economic Variables of the Participants

Variable	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Sex		
Male	285	18.2
Female	1284	81.8
Total	1568	100
Age		
18-28	285	18.2
29-39	574	36.6
40-50	512	32.6
51 >	197	12.6
Total	1568	100
Marital Status		
Married	832	53.0
Separated	500	32.0
Widow	236	15.0
Total	1568	100
Education/ Qualification		
Tertiary education	410	26.1
Secondary	850	54.2
Primary	108	7.0
Non	200	12.7
Total	1568	100
Years of Marriage		
1-10	796	50.7
11-20	342	21.8
21-30	241	15.4
31 >	189	12.1
TOTAL	1568	100

Table 1 represents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents of Ikwo communities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Out of 1600 copies of the questionnaire distributed,

1568 (97.9%) were correctly filled and returned valid; while 32 (2.1%) were either incorrectly filled or were not returned. Regarding the socio-demographic profile of the participants, their ages ranged from 18 to 51 years, with a median age of 39 years and the most frequent age range from 29 to 39 years. This means that age of the respondents was in the following order: 18-28 (18.2%), 29-39 (36.6%), 40-50 (32.6%), 51 and above (12.6%). This indicates that the respondents within the age bracket of 29-39 had the highest number of 574 (36.6%) among the total participants.

Similarly, the data collected showed that 1284 (81.8%) of the respondents were female, while 285 (18.2%) were males. This is consistent with most of the findings of studies on domestic violence, which showed that females are dominant in most issues related to spouse and intimate partner violence (See Fareo, 2015; Kingdom and Udoh, 2019). The respondents in 1-10 years of marriage constituted the highest number, 796 (50.7%). On educational attainment, the data showed that the majority [796 (50.7%)] of the participants had secondary school as their highest level of education, followed by tertiary education, with 342 (21.8%), while participants with non-formal education and those that obtained primary education were 200 (12.7%), and 108 (7.0%), respectively.

Analysis Based on the Research Questions

Table 2: RQ1. What do you understand by domestic violence against women * Response cross-tabulation

	Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
When a man beats a woman at home or within the family	1300	216	26	26	1568
	83.0%	13.8%	1.6%	1.6%	100.0%
When a man abuses a woman verbally within the family or home	1137	296	92	43	1568
	72.5%	18.9%	5.9%	2.7%	100.0%
When a man sexually assaults the wife or a woman within the home/ family	1050	341	105	72	1568
	67.0%	21.7%	6.7%	4.6%	100.0%
When a man threatens a woman to a submission within the family/ home	1196	71	215	86	1568
	76.3%	4.5%	13.7%	5.5%	100.0%
When men do not allow women to associate with others or friends of their choice	886	381	201	381	1568
	56.5%	24.3%	12.8%	24.3%	100.0%

Table 2 shows the respondents' understanding of domestic violence against women. Of the respondents, 1300(83.0%) and 216 (13.8%) strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that domestic violence against women is when a man beats a woman at home or within the family, while 1137(72.5%) and 294(18.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that domestic violence also takes place when a man abuses a woman verbally within the family or home. Moreover, 1050 (67.0%) and 341 (21.7%), respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that domestic violence against women also occurs when a man sexually assaults the wife or a woman within the home/ family. Similarly 76.3% of the respondents associated domestic violence with a man threatening a woman into submission within the family/home, while 56. 5% and 24.3%, respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that, when a man does not allow a woman to freely associate with others, domestic violence has taken place.

Similarly, on the respondents' understanding of domestic violence against women, a female respondent in the Ndufu Echara community asserted that:

> Domestic violence involves physical abuse between husband and wife. That is when there is contact to cause feelings of pain, injury, intimidation, physical suffering, or bodily harm by punching with the fist, kicking with legs, hitting with a stick or banging head on the wall; also pushing, and many other kinds of body contact that result to physical and noticeable injury.

Table 3: RQ2 What is the prevalence of domestic violence Against women in your community * Response Cross tabulation

	Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
I have experienced consistent domestic violence in the past 1 (one) year of my marriage	780 49.7%	441 28.1%	158 10.1%	189 12.1%	1568 100.0%
I have been slapped, kicked, hit, or pushed by my husband in the past 6(six) months of my marriage	753 48.0%	415 26.5%	215 13.7%	185 11.8%	1568 100.0%
My husband has threatened to kill me with a stick, metal object, or knife in the past 3(three) weeks	900 57.4%	433 27.6%	155 9.9%	80 5.1%	1568 100.0%
I have been verbally abused in the public by my husband in the past 2 (two) weeks	760 48.5%	405 25.8%	133 8.5%	270 17.2%	1568 100.0%
My belongings have been thrown out of the home in the past month by my husband	619 39.5%	309 19.7%	480 30.2%	160 10.2%	1568 100.0%

Table 3 above illustrates that 780 (49.7%) and 442 (28.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that in the last year, they had experienced domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands. Similarly, 753 (48.0%) and 415 (26.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that they had either been slapped, kicked, beaten, hit with a fist, or pushed to the wall by their husbands in the past six months.

Also, 900 (57.4%) and 433 (27.6%) of the women, strongly agreed and agreed, respectively, that they had felt threatened to be killed with a stick, metal, knife, and other hard objects by their husbands in three weeks; while 155 (9.9%) and 80 (5.1%) strongly disagreed and disagreed, in that order, that they had been threatened within the period. Furthermore, 760 (48.5%) and 405 (25.8%) of the respondents, respectively, strongly agreed and agreed that they had been humiliated publicly by their husbands by being shouted at and abusive words in the last two weeks. Also, 619 (39.5%) and 309 (19.7%), in that sequence, strongly agreed and agreed that their belongings had been thrown out of their matrimonial homes in the past month.

One of the respondents in the IDI, a middle-aged female narrated her experience of domestic violence and ordeal at the hands of her husband:

> While my husband was alive, he would always beat and kick me with little or no provocation. If he did not complain that I came back late from the farm, he would complain I did not cook a delicious meal or that I keep too many friends. It was horrifying to the extent that I was considering suicide because my parents did not agree with my idea of separation.

Another female respondent narrated that:

> My husband had once slapped me inside the market for refusing to accept his choice of wrapper for me. He called me a greedy woman who always desires to hang her bag beyond her reach *(proverb signifying a woman that likes living above her means/income).* It was one of the worst moments of my marriage experience. I could not go to that market for more than 2 months. (July 2020)

Table 4: RQ3 What classes/ categories of women experience domestic violence the most

	Response				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Total
Women in the rural area experience domestic violence more than women in the city.	1249 79.7%	137 8.7%	103 6.6%	79 5.0%	1568 100.0%
Literate women experience domestic violence more than illiterate women.	103 6.6%	65 4.1%	1026 65.4%	374 23.9%	1568 100.0%
Women without a steadily and sustainable means of income experience domestic violence more.	1162 74.1%	283 18.0%	93 5.9%	30 2.0%	1568 100.0%
Full-time housewives experience domestic violence more than the working-class women.	760 48.5%	416 26.5%	123 7.8%	269 17.2%	1568 100.0%
Married women experience domestic violence more than single women.	550 35.1%	104 6.6%	630 39.5%	294 18.8%	1568 100.0%

The results above on the categories of women who are more prone to domestic violence indicated that 1249 (79.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that rural women experience domestic violence more than women in the city, while 1026 (65.4%) of them strongly disagreed that literate or educated women experience domestic violence more than women who are not literates. In the same vein, 74.1 per cent of the respondents strongly agreed that women without a steady and sustainable means of income experience more domestic violence than those who are independent of their spouses; while 48.5% of

them strongly agreed that full-time housewives experience domestic violence more than their working-class counterparts. Besides, 39.5% of the participants strongly disagreed that women who did not marry experience domestic violence more than married women.

Responding to what class or categories of women experience domestic violence the most, A respondent from Ndegu Amegu asserted that*:*

There is no comparison because the rural woman faces the worst forms of domestic violence, no one listens to her. Rural women are deprived of their rights and entitlements

	Response				
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Total**
I am aware of laws and institutions that protect women against domestic violence.	91 6.0%	64 4.0%	1306 83.2%	107 6.8%	1568 100.0%
I have reported issues of domestic violence to the authorities before now.	64 4.1%	41 2.6%	1145 73.0%	318 20.3%	1568 100.0%
Ebonyi State has laws that protect women against domestic violence.	73 4.7%	28 1.8%	1175 74.9%	292 18.6%	1568 100.0%
Some NGOs support women that suffer domestic violence.	92 5.9%	58 3.7%	341 21.7%	1077 68.7%	1568 100.0%
The church suspends men that use violence against women.	76 4.8%	42 2.6%	1190 75.9%	260 16.7%	1568 100.0%
There is no protection for women against domestic violence in Ikwo.	1109 70.7%	300 19.1%	86 5.5%	73 4.7%	1568 100.0%

The result above shows that 83.2% of the respondents were not aware of laws and institutions that protect women against domestic violence, equally 73.0 % of the respondents had never reported issues of domestic violence to any of the institutions or agents. A majority of the respondents, 74.9%, were ignorant of any law in Ebonyi State that protects women against domestic violence. The results also indicated that there is no protection for women against domestic violence in Ikwo based on the view of 76.4% of the respondents.

Some other responses include the following:

> I am not aware of any law that stops men from beating or maltreating their wives in my community. Although the men knew that domestic violence against women is bad, I do not think of any existing law prohibiting the act in my community. (Female respondent)

> Women in my community are vulnerable and endure abuses from their husbands, despite knowing laws and government institutions that protect their rights; I cannot specifically mention what those laws contain or say about my right as a woman. So, it is as good as not being aware of the existence of such a law.

Discussion of Research Findings

The findings of this study indicated that rural women in Ikwo communities have adequate understanding and knowledge of what domestic violence against women implies and its various forms. Data from this study categorized domestic violence into physical violence, which involves battering and beating a woman to injure or cause physical harm; and verbal abuse, which comprises threatening persons or their possession, to cause psychological harm, or to emotionally and mentally harm a person to reduce self-worth and dignity. It also involves neglect and deprivation by not providing for dependents and denying women freedom of association, and sexual abuses. This study confirmed the several definitions of domestic violence by different scholars and the United Nations Commission Draft Declaration on the Status of Women which sees violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of acts such as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (UN, 1993). This also corroborates previous studies by Bazza (2009), Adekeye, Abimbola, and Adeusi (2011), Alokan (2013), Oluremi (2015), and Mboho and Udoh, (2018).

The eesults are also consistent with previous studies (CRDC, 2002 and McDonnel, 2013) that argue domestic violence is a subset of general gender-based violence that is present in every country, irrespective of culture, educational status, class, income, age, religion, place of residence and tribe. However, the findings of this study differ from those of earlier studies, in contending that rural women, full-time housewives, and unemployed women without sustainable incomes are most likely to experience domestic violence when compared with other categories of working and urban women.

On the women's knowledge of laws, services, and institutional frameworks available for the protection of women against domestic violence in Nigeria and the state, this study revealed that a majority of the rural women were unaware of laws that protect them against any form of violence. Also, they were unaware of government institutions and agencies, both state and non-state actors, that render services to victims of domestic violence. Consequently, none of the women had sought redress according to the relevant laws protecting their rights or reported cases of violation to the agents. Even the few that claimed knowledge of the laws did not have adequate information on how to seek support from relevant authorities. This finding is consistent with the findings reported by Nepal, DHS (2011) and Government of Nepal (2012), which posited that most victims of gender-based violence are unaware of the existence of laws against violence. This is also supported by findings from the 2013 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey (NPC and ICF International, 2014), which submitted that many victims of gender-based violence in the rural and semi-rural areas settle cases through informal channels occasioned by lack of knowledge of extant laws. The implication of this is that there is low public knowledge of these laws by victims of domestic or gender-based violence; therefore, presumably, there is also less awareness about their obligations under the law.

Conclusion

Domestic violence against women in Nigeria is widespread and has become a major threat to their well-being and development. Many studies concentrated on domestic violence in urban areas, while little was done on the rural women who, despite their proper understanding of what constitutes domestic violence, could not help themselves. The helpless situation of the rural women is not only because they are poor and have limited channels for expression, but also because they are oblivious of the extant laws that protect their rights and their responsibility under the law. Although the prevalence of domestic violence is high, the fact that most of the cases are unrecorded and unreported poses a great challenge to relevant authorities, as they could not take adequate measures to ameliorate the sufferings of the rural women concerning domestic violence.

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations become imperative:

- There is a need for aggressive and comprehensive enlightenment programmes and jingles in the media, churches, and mosques in the rural areas to educate the public on the socio-economic and health hazards of domestic violence against women.
- Government and state agents should encourage women to report cases of violence to relevant authorities
- Stiff punishment comparable to the harm caused should be imposed on the offenders to serve as a deterrent to other intending perpetrators.

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