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FOR BETTER FOR WHAT? SOME PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS IN MARITAL VIOLENCE.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of self-esteem, socio-economic status and age on marital violence. Marital violence is a phenomenon that is found to be pervasive in all cultures of the world, people go to the Altar to take marital vow, to love, cherish and keep one another for better for worse, in sickness and in health. However, the situation in most homes is a far cry from the vow willingly taken by couples, rather, homes are riddled with physical, psychological and other forms of violence. Results from this study revealed that self-esteem has no direct effect on initiating and maintaining marital violence, while socio-economic status does; also, no relationship was observed between age and marital violence. Recommendation was made on approach that may be adopted to reduce incidence of marital violence.

KEY WORDS: Marital Violence, Self-Esteem, Age, and Income.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage as an institution is considered to be the oldest and most prevalent institution the world over, and in all cultures there is a particular sanctity attached to this institution so much that it is considered to be the building block of society. The vices and dysfunction presently observed in various societies are often therefore said to be as a result of the violation of the values inherent in marriage. The pivotal position of marriage has made marital violence a subject of interest to various disciplines, government, religious sects and other professionals. Studies on marital violence all over the world have revealed that there are numerous dimension to the causes and maintenance of marital violence. Of importance in this write-up however, is the recognition that there are psychological factors inherent in initiating and maintaining marital violence (Barwett & La Violette, 1993; Campbell, 1995, Chalk and King, 1998). But then, what is this marital violence?

The definition of marital violence is often dependant upon the framework of approach, cultural background and

government policies. However, there is a general agreement as to the incidence and prevalence of marital violence in all nations of the world. This much was confirmed at the fourth United Nations (UN) International conference on Women held in China in 1994, none of the countries present at the conference reported an absence of marital violence (United Nations, 1996). The American Psychological Association (APA, 1996) defined marital violence as a pattern of abusive behaviours including a wide range of physical, sexual and psychological maltreatment used by one person in an intimate relationship against another to gain power unfairly or maintain that person's misuse of power, control and authority.

In line with the above stated definition is the assertion of Bowlby (1988), that says couples engage in marital violence to control that other partner and keep him/her from departing from the relationship. The question then is how well violence has been able to achieve his end going by rates of divorce and separation which can be used as indices of measuring marital violence. Confirming the American Psychological Association (APA) definition is the finding of Osiki, Aremu and Balogun (1999) that marital violence is both physical and psychological in nature; the physical aspect of violence though visible is not as dangerous in effect as the psychological dimension. This is because the physical bruises and wounds occasioned could heal up in no time with adequate cares but the psychological may stay with the victims for a whole life time, affecting his/her functioning and adjustment in many different ways; and this of course, has implication for the mental health of that particular household.

A critical look at the definitions of marital violence will reveal that they assume the dimensions of portraying women as the victims bearing the brunt of marital violence while men are seen more as perpetrators. This could be as a result of the wide held beliefs that women are the weaker sex, while men are by right, the head of the family that must be obeyed or culturally practices especially in Africa, where women are largely considered as objects and possessions of men that can be used and treated as men

deem fit including beating when there is need for it. Research has shown that 20% - 50% of women in most countries have experienced spousal abuse at least once in their lives (Heise, Raikes, Watts, & Zwi, 1994). Nigeria as a country has her own fair share of marital violence, which can be seen in the rates of divorce, separation and marital disharmony in the country. In a study on wife battering in Western Nigeria by Ajila (2000) it was found that 32% of women indicated that they have experienced battering, 21% believe strongly that wives should be beaten while 72% believe that wives should be beaten once in a while.

These findings might not be unconnected with cultural practices that treat women slightly better than slaves in the home, where a wife is expected to be submissive not only to the husband but other members of the husband's family. In this way, violence is sanctioned by culture. In the word of Caceres (1993), marital violence has become to women a daily experience, a way of life. Marital Violence is further reinforced and maintained by the belief that it is a way of expressing love in an intimate relationship, and in a culture like that of Nigeria where divorce is seen as a stigma wife battering is seen as a better option to divorce. This view was supported by Ajila (2000) who found in a study that 21% of people supported wife battering as against 8% that did not.

According to Mills (1985) marital violence against women takes a gradual process that starts when a woman enters a violent relationship and ends in an attempt to restructure herself psychologically. In a similar effort, Bakare (1986) identifies marital conflict to exist along a particular continuum, which are: (1) Occasional Verbal quarrels, (2) Frequent verbal quarrels, (3) Occasional physical quarrels, (4) Frequent physical quarrels, (5) Psychological separation, (6) Physical separation; and (7) Divorce. A look at these continuum shows that the stages are gradient in nature; a particular couple is expected to go through the whole stages. But this is not necessarily so in all situations. Some couples get to the divorce stage without going through physical quarrels and physical separation while some resolve the conflict completely before it gets to the divorce stage. However, Aremu, Osiki and Balogun (2000) Opined that the Bakare continuum is indication of the fact that marital conflicts is elastic, and unfortunately, most people involved seem to do nothing to arrest the elasticity until it results in violence.

Research has indicated that marital violence through prevalent in Nigeria, it is still largely underreported. If reported at all, causes of marital violence can be seen in two broad categories: traditional causes and contemporary causes of marital violence. The traditional causes cure those factors that are commonly seen and discussed as leading to fighting amongst couples, they are immediate causes that can be easily pin pointed as leading to violence in the home.

These include among others: sex role, sexual dissatisfactions and infidelity (Ibokete, 1994), ego massage, macho feeling and staying in control (Okagbue, 1997), incompatibility, religious conflict, alcohol consumption, money matters, childlessness, influence of in-laws etc (Arena, 1999).

On the other hand, contemporary causes of marital violence are those remote underlying factors that are not easily seen or implicated, yet they influence violent behaviours in marital relationship. These factors have come to the fore through research effort in marital disharmony and violence. For instance, Fawcett, Heise, Espejel and Pick (1999) in a study found that lack of education and economic hardship are related to marital violence. Apart from these two, self-esteem can as well be a predisposing factor to marital violence though the effect may not be too direct but routed through some of the traditional causes mentioned earlier. An example of this kind of re-routing is that of man with low self esteem who is likely to indulge in alcohol consumption, which may eventually lead to violence at home.

Against the background that there exist a prevalence of marital violence and the identification of some psychosocial variables that are likely to be responsible for initiating and sustaining the phenomenon, it becomes imperative to answer the following questions;

- (i.) Does the self-esteem of couples predict marital violence?
- (ii.) Will income and age predict marital violence?

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be a significant difference in the levels of marital violence of people with low self-esteem and those with high self-esteem.
2. There will be no significant difference in the level of marital violence found between couples from various socio-economic categories.
3. There will be significant positive relationship between age of participants and marital violence.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study employed the survey research design. The independent variables are psychosocial factors (self - Esteem, income and age) while the dependent variable is marital violence.

Subjects

A total of two hundred and ten (210) participants were randomly drawn from the city of Ibadan. Seventy-one (33.81%) came from the business sector, 47 (22.38%) from the banking sector while 92 (43.81) are civil servants. The range of participants' age was between 21 and 57 with

a mean of 36.49 and standard deviation of 6.79. Self esteem scores ranged between 9.00 and 38.00 with a mean of 19.46 and standard deviation of 6.06. Thirteen of the participants were from high socio-economic class, 137 from the middle socio-economic class, while 60 were from the low socio-economic class.

INSTRUMENTATION

Two instruments were used in this study. These are self-esteem scale and marital violence scale. The self-esteem scale was constructed by Adanijo – Oyefeso (1986), it has two sections. Section A which measures demographic variables while section B contains 15 items which has a reliability coefficient of 0.79, while revalidation of the scale for this study yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.67.

The marital violence scale was authored by Osiki, Aremu and Balogun (1999). It is a 20 item scale in Likert format dealing with husband - wife battering activities. It has a test-retest reliability of 0.78.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

The t-test for independent means, one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and person product moment correlation were the statistical methods used for hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 respectively.

RESULTS

The result in respect of the first hypothesis, which stated that there would be a significant difference in marital violence of couples with low self-esteem and those with high self-esteem, is presented in Table 1 below.

TABLE 1
Summary table of independent t-test showing subjects on the basis of self-esteem

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	t'obs	P
Low	126	9.09	1.60	208	1.04	>.05
High	84	9.09	1.89			

Result in table 1 above shows that there is no significant difference in marital violence of couples with low self-esteem and couples with high self-esteem ($t = .000$; $df 208$; $p > .05$).

Result of hypothesis two which predicted a significant difference in the level of marital violence found between couples from different socio-economic classes is presented in table 2 below:

TABLE 2
Summary table of one-way Analysis of variance showing subjects on socio-economic classes.

Source of variation	Df	SS	MS	F-Ratio	P
Between Groups	2	10.622	5.311	2.322	<0.05
Within Groups	207	473.473	2.287		
Total	209	484.095			

The above table shows that there was statistical difference in the level of marital violence among couples along socio-economic dimension ($df = 2/207$, $P < 0.05$). Result of hypothesis three expressing there will be positive relationship between age and marital violence is presented in table 3.

TABLE 3
Summary table of Pearson showing the relationship between age and marital violence.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	DF	r' cal	P
Age	210	36.49	6.79	208	-0.049	>0.05
Marital violence	210	9.09	1.52			

Result from table 3 shows that there is no significant relationship between age and marital violence ($r = 0.049$; $df = 208$; $p > .05$)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Going by the results presented in tables above, hypotheses 1 and 3 were rejected while hypothesis 2 was confirmed. The finding of this study as regards the first hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the expression and maintenance of marital violence due to self-esteem. Individuals with high self-esteem are capable of indulging in spousal battering and psychological violence as well as individuals with low self-esteem. In order words, self-esteem may lead to some other behaviours which may in turn lead to violence thereby having an indirect effect. An example of this can be that of an individual with low self esteem resorting to alcohol use (Fawcett et al 1999) which in turn may lead to violence. Although, this present study cannot conclusively confirm this statement it is a possibility that future research can look into.

From the result of the one way- ANOVA it has been found that difference exist in levels of marital violence in socio-economic classes, (i.e. couple in the middle and low socio-economic classes). This finding is a confirmation of the finding of Fawcett, et al (1999)

that marital violence is strongly related to economic hardship, specifically some of the subjects used in their study stated that sources of their spouses violence towards them include among other things money problems, alcohol, children's education, jealousy etc. Economic hardship as a variable will most likely make people direct their frustration and anger towards objects they have power over usually the spouse in this situation. Another factor that may account for the higher percentage of marital violence in the low socio-economic class is illiteracy existing in this class. This is in line with the assertion of Ayeni (1999) that illiteracy is a major cause of marital violence on the other hand, the low percentage of marital violence found in the high socio-economic class may not be unconnected with their status in the society as well as role expectation. This finding is not in agreement with the finding of Coley and Beckett (1988) which state that marital violence cuts across socio-economic classes. No significant relationship was however, found between age and marital violence. By implication both the young and the old are capable of marital violence. This is in agreement with the work of Aremu, Osiki and Balogun (2000) who found the existence of marital violence among the aged.

Whatever is the dimension and direction of marital violence, the reality on ground is that it is here with us and very prevalent, people all over the world are passing through physical, medical and psychological trauma emanating from this phenomenon, and because of these effects on our well being efforts must be made to save man from man. To be able to effectively reduce the occurrence of marital violence a multi-dimensional approach must be employed, which may include legal, moral, educational and religion dimensions.

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