

Intimate Partner Abuse: Wife Beating among Civil Servants in Ibadan, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Wife beating is one of the most common forms of violence against women by husbands or other intimate male partners. Although violence against women is pervasive, there are only few studies documenting the magnitude of the problem especially among the working class. The civil service comprises of persons from all socio-economic levels and different backgrounds. They act in advisory capacity and assist those responsible for making state policy. Thus, 431 civil servants of the Oyo State government service were interviewed using a 44-item self-administered questionnaire. Results revealed that prevalence of wife beating was 31.3%. Ninety one (42.5%) men had been perpetrators, while 44 (23.5%) women had been victims. Consuming alcohol and growing up in an environment where parents fight publicly were significantly associated ($p < 0.05$) with men beating their wives; while being young, unmarried and a parental background of fighting was significantly associated with women being beaten ($p < 0.05$). Female respondents justified reasons for various types of domestic violence, including beating, more than the males ($p < 0.05$). Younger respondents had significantly worse attitudes ($p < 0.05$), while married and educated respondents had better attitude ($p < 0.05$). "Not wanting the children to suffer" (60.7%) and "hoping that partner will change" (28.8%) were reasons given for remaining in abusive relationships. There is an urgent need for education of the women on their rights, sensitisation of the men on gender-based violence and punishment for perpetrators. Supportive care and counselling services should also be provided for victims of violence. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2005; 9[2]: 54-64)

RÉSUMÉ

La violence domestique est une des formes de violence contre la femme par les maris ou par les autres partenaires mâles intimes les plus communes. Quoique la violence contre la femme soit faite sentir un peu partout, il existe très peu d'études qui documentent l'ampleur du problème surtout parmi la classe ouvrière. La fonction publique comprend les gens de toutes les couches socio-économiques et de tous les milieux différents. Leur rôle est de donner des conseils et d'aider ceux qui sont chargés de formuler la politique de l'état. Ainsi, 431 fonctionnaires dans le service du gouvernement de l'état d'Oyo ont été interviewés à l'aide d'un questionnaire auto-administré qui comportait 44 points. Les résultats ont montré que la fréquence de la violence domestique était de 31,3%. Quarante-deux pour cent (42,5%) avaient été des auteurs alors que 44 femmes avaient été des victimes. La consommation de l'alcool et le fait de grandir dans un milieu où les parents se battent en public étaient associés de manière importante ($p < 0,05$) à la violence domestique perpétrée par les hommes contre leurs femmes; alors que le fait d'être jeune, célibataire et d'être issu d'une famille où l'on se bat, étaient associés de manière importante à la violence domestique contre la femme ($p < 0,05$). Les femmes interviewées ont trouvé plus des justifications que les hommes pour les différents types de violence domestique y compris la violence contre la femme ($p < 0,05$). L'attitude chez les plus jeunes interviewés était encore pire ($p < 0,05$) alors que l'attitude des interviewés mariés et instruits était meilleure ($p < 0,05$). Parmi les raisons avancées pour justifier le fait qu'elles continuent à entretenir les rapports abusifs étaient les suivantes: "Elles ne voulaient pas que les enfants souffrent" (60,7%) et "Elles espéraient que les partenaires changeront leur attitude" (28,8%). Il y a une nécessité pour que les femmes soient éduquées sur leurs droits, pour que les hommes soient sensibilisés à la violence basée sur les sexes et la punition réservée aux auteurs. Il faut aussi assurer le soin de soutien et les services d'orientation pour les victimes de la violence. (*Rev Afr Santé Reprod* 2005; 9[2]: 54-64)

KEY WORDS: Women, violence, abuse, workers

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Introduction

Intimate partner abuse is a behaviour, attitude and belief in which a partner in an intimate relationship attempts to maintain power and control over the other through the use of psychological, physical and/or sexual coercion.^{1,2} It is one of the most common forms of violence against women by husbands or other intimate male partners. Partner abuse can take a variety of forms including physical assault such as hitting, slapping, kicking and beating; psychological abuse such as constant belittling, intimidation and humiliation and coercive sex.³ Justification for violence frequently evolves from social norms about the proper roles and responsibilities of men and women.⁴ Typically, men are given relatively free reign as long as they provide financially for the family. Women on the other hand are expected to tend the house, mind the children and show their husband obedience and respect. If a man perceives that his wife has somehow failed in her role, stepped beyond her bounds, or challenged his rights, then he may react violently.⁴

Intimate partner abuse occurs in all countries and transcends social, economic, religious and cultural groups.⁵ In nearly 50 population-based surveys from around the world, 10–50% of women reported being hit or physically harmed by an intimate male partner at some point in their lives.³ Although both women and men experience domestic violence, women are disproportionately affected. A national violence against women survey in the United States found 76% of female victims to have been assaulted by an intimate partner, compared to 18% among male victims.⁶ In Africa, the situation is not different, with two out of three women (66.7%) in Sierra Leone reporting being beaten by a male partner, while 50% reported ever being forced to have sexual intercourse.⁷ In Nigeria, Fawole et al found that 24% of young women had been violated by partners.⁸ In Lagos, Odujinrin et al found that 31% of adult women had been physically assaulted by an intimate partner.⁹ Ilika et al reported

that 39.3% of women of childbearing age in Anambra State had experienced physical violence,¹⁰ while 78.8% of women in Imo State reported being battered by their male counterparts.¹¹ Unfortunately, there is a high level of tolerance and acceptance of violence against women (VAW), and it is culturally sanctioned as a form of discipline.^{2,3}

The negative consequences of abuse extend beyond women's sexual and reproductive health to their overall health, the welfare of their children, and the economic and social development of nations.¹² In addition to causing immediate physical injury and mental anguish, violence increases women's risk of future ill-health. Yet, in spite of the health consequence, inter-generational repercussions and economic loss of partner abuse, women are reluctant to disclose cases of victimisation.^{11,13,14} Unless asked directly about violence, many prefer to suffer in silence.¹⁰ Thus, documentation and extent of physical abuse in the different work groups and social classes is a crucial first step to ending intimate partner abuse.

Civil servants can give an insight into the magnitude, types and reasons for abuse in the general population. The civil service can act at advisory capacity and assist those responsible for state policy. It is expected to provide proper organisation for the implementation of policies.¹⁵ The civil service comprises of persons who are employed in the administration of the internal affairs of the state, hence, they come from all socio-economic strata, and different backgrounds are represented. Thus, this study was to document the prevalence, factors associated with, and justification for partner abuse among public workers in the Oyo State civil service. The results of the study will be used to sensitise staff and serve as an advocacy tool to government on ending all forms of gender-based violence. It will serve as a guide for the development of policies on the prevention of abuse and the development of appropriate treatment, counselling and support services.

Materials and Methods

This study was carried out in Ibadan, Oyo State of Nigeria, among the state civil servants. Ibadan is the administrative headquarters of Oyo State. The Oyo State Government secretariat is situated in Agodi, Ibadan. It was the first government secretariat complex in the country. It has a number of establishments, comprising of 17 ministries, six parastatals and over 500 institutions. The total workforce of the state is 32,285 workers. This consists of 14,603 teachers in primary and secondary schools, 11,762 civil servants in the ministries, 2,656 in parastatals and 3,264 lecturers in tertiary institutions.¹⁵ Each ministry is headed politically by the commissioners and technically by the permanent secretary.

This was a descriptive study with cross-sectional survey research design. Sample size was estimated with the assumption that the proportion of the target population that abuse their intimate partner was 31%.⁸ Thus, a minimum sample size of 328 respondents was calculated. Proportionate sampling method was used to determine the number of participants to be interviewed from the four major workgroups in the service, namely, teachers, workers in the ministries, parastatals and lecturers. Based on the total number of staff in these sectors, a ratio of 5:4:1:1 was used to select the teachers, ministry and parastatal staff, and lecturers interviewed respectively. Thus, a total of 431 respondents were interviewed; 196 from primary and secondary schools, 157 were from the ministries, 45 from parastatals and 33 from tertiary institutions.

Recruitment of Participants

To ensure full support for the study, the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Establishment was approached to obtain permission and seek cooperation. In addition, the heads of the institutions were approached to inform them about the study. The interviewees comprised of both male and female civil servants. Participants were randomly selected from their offices by the

study team. The purpose of the study was explained to each participant and they were free to decline or participate. Informed consent was obtained before data collection. Respondents were also assured of confidentiality of all responses and were encouraged to write only the truth. No names were recorded on the questionnaires. The questionnaire was filled out in private and dropped into a box on completion.

Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

The instrument for the survey was developed following discussions with researchers working on women's rights. To further ensure reliability, relevant literature was reviewed^{8,10,16-18} and the contribution of experts sought. In addition, suggestions of some of the civil servants were considered, which included questions on economic forms of violence. Finally, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on 10 workers who were randomly selected from two institutions. After the pilot study, some questions were amended and others recast before data collection commenced.

The instrument consisted of a semi-structured self-administered questionnaire, which comprised of 44 questions. Responses to the questions were varied; in some questions the respondents answered 'yes' or 'no' or 'agree', 'not sure' or 'disagree' as appropriate, while in others they circled one correct answer from a list of options, while some questions were open-ended. The questionnaire addressed the following issues:

1. Socio-demographic characteristics, to have an insight into the civil servants' background and work experience. Information on social behaviour, such as smoking and alcohol consumption, was also solicited.
2. Reasons justifying violence and questions on approval of wife beating were asked to document attitudes of both men and women to wife beating. Questions on situations or circumstances that may trigger

partner abuse in the home such as "refusing him sex", "lack of respect for husband", "talking back", "infidelity", "inadequate care of the children", "using family planning without his consent", "food not ready on time", "insufficient housekeeping allowance", "engagement in social activity outside the house", "keeping company not approved by husband" and "not doing what she is told" were documented.^{2,3,5}

3. Personal experience of violence against women, which enabled the researchers to document the prevalence of wife beating within and outside marriage, and from the angle of both the perpetrators and the victims. It also enabled a better appreciation of the seriousness of these acts.
4. Reasons for wife beating among victims and perpetrators. This was obtained to identify factors that trigger violent behaviour in the home.
5. The reasons for remaining in abusive relationships were documented to know why the victims stay, and solutions identified for those in violent relationships.
6. Respondents were asked to make suggestions on issues to be addressed by programmes aimed at ending violence.

The questionnaire was essentially self-administered by the respondents. However, for a few respondents who were uneducated or who had visual problems, trained research assistants administered the questionnaire. The research assistants consisted of four undergraduates and post-secondary school students, who were trained on how to administer the questionnaire and on issues relating to violence against women. Training of research assistants and pre-testing of questionnaire was done over a period of one week. Data collection was done from April to July 2004. The results were entered into a computer and analysed using EPI-INFO and SPSS statistical software packages.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics

Of the 431 respondents who took part in the study, 424 (98%) were of the Yoruba ethnic group. Most (80%) of them were married, 16.5% were unmarried, while 3.5% were divorced or widowed. One half (50.3%) were females, while 49.7% were males. Two hundred and ninety seven (68.9%) of them were Christians, 128 (30.7%) Muslims and 6 (1.4%) were of the African traditional religion. Forty two (9.7%) had primary education, 69 (16.0%) had secondary, while 320 (74.2%) had tertiary education. Using the salary scale as grade levels, respondents were grouped into three: junior cadre (9.7%), comprising levels 1–5 workers; middle class on levels 6–10 (62.6%) and senior workers on levels 12–17 (27.6%). Sixty two (14.4%) of the workers were unskilled, 184 (42.7%) were skilled, while 185 (42.9%) were professionals. Twenty one (4.9%) smoked, 68 (15.8%) were regular alcohol consumers, 116 (26.9%) had parents who constantly fought while growing up, and 56 (13%) lived in their traditional family house. All the respondents were aware of intimate partner violence and could give examples of acts that constitute this form of violence.

Justification for Beating

On comparing responses by gender to various acts to determine if respondents justified violence, female respondents were found to justify violence more than the males. For example, 17.5% of those who felt beating is justified because a wife was disrespectful were men, compared with 82.5% of the women ($p < 0.05$). Similarly, 34.5% of the male respondents, compared to 65.5% of the females, felt beating is justified if meals were late ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1). Cross tabulation of justification of violence by age using the mean age as the measure showed that the younger respondents (< 36 years) had significantly ($p < 0.05$) worse attitude to all the statements justifying vio-

Table 1 Justification of Violence by Age, Sex and Education

	Sex		Age		Education	
	Male n = 214	Female n = 217	< 36yrs n = 222	> 36 yrs n = 209	< Sec n = 111	>Sec n = 320
Wife beating justified if						
Refuses him sex	25 (11.7) $\chi^2 = 0.17, p > 0.05$	34 (15.7)	42 (18.9) $\chi^2 = 10.6, p < 0.05$	17 (8.1)	20 (18.0) $\chi^2 = 2.37, p > 0.05$	39 (12.2)
Disrespects husband	10 (4.7) $\chi^2 = 27.0, p < 0.05$	47 (82.5)	44 (19.8) $\chi^2 = 17.3, p < 0.05$	13 (6.2)	29 (26.1) $\chi^2 = 21.1, p < 0.05$	14 (4.4)
Unfaithful	44 (20.6) $\chi^2 = 20.2, p < 0.05$	88 (40.6)	85 (38.3) $\chi^2 = 12.6, p < 0.05$	47 (22.5)	43 (38.7) $\chi^2 = 4.6, p < 0.05$	89 (27.8)
Children lack care	23 (10.7) $\chi^2 = 18.0, p < 0.05$	58 (26.2)	67 (30.2) $\chi^2 = 38.8, p < 0.05$	14 (6.7)	36 (32.4) $\chi^2 = 18.2, p < 0.05$	45 (14.1)
Uses family planning without husband's consent	29 (13.6) $\chi^2 = 0.38, p > 0.05$	34 (15.7)	46 (20.7) $\chi^2 = 13.6, p < 0.05$	17 (8.1)	30 (27.0) $\chi^2 = 18.4, p < 0.05$	33 (10.3)
Food is not ready on time	19 (8.9) $\chi^2 = 5.7, p < 0.05$	36 (16.6)	41 (18.5) $\chi^2 = 13.3, p < 0.05$	14 (6.7)	24 (21.6) $\chi^2 = 31.7, p < 0.05$	31 (9.7)
Does not do what she is told	19 (8.9) $\chi^2 = 6.4, p < 0.05$	37 (17.1)	40 (18.0) $\chi^2 = 102, p < 0.05$	16 (7.7)	30 (27.0) $\chi^2 = 26.0, p < 0.05$	33 (10.3)

lence (Table 1). Forty (71.4%) of respondents less than 36 years old maintained that beating is justified if a woman did not do what she was told to do, while only 28.6% of those older than 36 years felt this way. Seventy three per cent of the younger respondents approved of wife beating if a woman used contraceptive without the husband's consent, compared to 17 (27%) of the older respondents. Comparison of approval of wife battering by educational level showed that civil servants with higher education had better attitudes. Thirty two per cent of respondents with secondary education or lower mentioned that wife beating is necessary if the children lacked care, compared to 14% among those with post-secondary and tertiary education. Wife beating was considered justified if wife refused her husband sex by 34% of the less educated respondents, compared to 25% by the more educated ones ($p < 0.05$). Similar results as with education were obtained when level of income (salary level) was compared with the above justifications for VAW.

Comparison by marital status showed that single respondents said violence is justified more often than married respondents. For instance, 13.3% felt that a woman should be beaten if the children lacked care, compared to 39.4% of single respondents. Also, 7.2% of married respondents stated that a wife should be battered if she was disrespectful to her husband, compared to 25.4% of the not yet married respondents ($p < 0.05$).

To the question on the major reason beating was justified, unfaithfulness ranked first and was stated by 11.1% of respondents, followed by stealing or murdering by 3.7%. Eighty per cent gave no excuse for violence.

Attitude Score

Attitude score was computed by awarding one mark for each correct response to 10 questions that assessed respondents' opinion on wife battering to the triggers of violence. Scores obtained ranged from one to 10, with a mean score of 8.3. Three hundred and eighty eight

Table 2 Characteristics of Prejudiced and Non-Prejudiced Respondents

Characteristic	N	Prejudiced No. (%) (n = 43)	Non-Prejudiced No. (%) (n = 388)	χ^2	p value
Age (years)					
< 36	222	36 (16.2)	186 (83.8)	19.8	< 0.05
> 36 years	209	7 (3.3)	202 (96.7)		
Sex					
Male	214	5 (2.3)	209 (97.7)	25.96	< 0.05
Female	217	38 (17.5)	179 (82.5)		
Education					
Secondary or less	111	29 (26.1)	82 (73.9)	43.4	< 0.05
> Secondary	320	14 (4.4)	306 (95.6)		
Marital status					
Ever married	360	25 (6.9)	335 (93.1)	22.3	< 0.05
Never married	71	18 (25.4)	53 (74.6)		
Religion*					
Christian	297	29 (9.8)	268 (90.2)	0.02	> 0.05
Moslem	128	12 (9.4)	116 (90.6)		
Alcohol consumption					
Yes	68	14 (20.6)	54 (79.4)	10.1	< 0.05
No	363	29 (8.0)	334 (92.0)		
Parents fighting					
Yes	116	22 (19.0)	94 (81.0)	14.2	< 0.05
No	315	21 (6.7)	294 (93.3)		

Prejudiced respondents had attitude scores less than 5

*Six respondents who were of the African traditional religion were excluded from the analysis.

Table 3 Comparison of the Profile of Perpetrators with Non-perpetrators of Violence

Characteristic	N	Perpetrators No. (%) (n = 91)	Non-Perpetrators No. (%) (n = 123)	χ^2	p value
Age					
< 36 years	93	41 (45.1)	52 (42.3)	0.79	>0.05
> 36 years	121	50 (54.9)	71 (57.7)		
Education					
Secondary or less	48	12 (13.2)	36 (29.3)	0.17	>0.05
Secondary	166	79 (86.8)	87 (70.7)		
Marital status					
Ever married	173	70 (76.9)	103 (83.7)	0.31	> 0.05
Never married	41	21 (23.1)	20 (16.3)		
Religion					
Christian	149	56 (61.5)	93 (75.6)	4.90	< 0.05
Moslem	65	35 (38.5)	30 (24.4)		
Consumes alcohol					
Yes	46	30 (33.0)	16 (13.1)	12.13	< 0.05
No	123	61 (67.0)	107 (86.9)		
History of parents fighting					
Yes	54	44 (48.4)	10 (8.2)	44.40	< 0.05
No	159	47 (51.6)	113 (91.8)		
Attitude score					
Prejudiced	209	87 (95.6)	122 (99.2)	2.9	> 0.05
Non prejudiced	5	4 (4.4)	1 (0.8)		

Table 4 Comparison of Profile of the Oppressed and Not Oppressed Women

Profile	N	Oppressed No. (%) (n = 44)	Non-Oppressed No. (%) (n = 173)	χ^2	p value
Age (years)					
< 36 years	129	30 (68.2)	99 (57.2)	1.30	> 0.05
> 36 years	88	14 (31.8)	74 (42.8)		
Education					
Secondary or less	62	11 (25.0)	51 (29.5)	0.20	> 0.05
> Secondary	155	33 (75.0)	122 (70.5)		
Marital status					
Ever married	188	37 (84.1)	151 (87.3)	0.09	> 0.05
Never married	29	7 (15.9)	22 (12.7)		
Religion					
Christian	148	22 (50.0)	126 (75.5)	9.59	< 0.05
Moslem	63	22 (50.0)	41 (24.5)		
Partner consumes alcohol					
Yes	21	5 (23.8)	39 (19.9)	0.18	> 0.05
No	196	39 (76.2)	157 (80.1)		
History of parents fighting					
Yes	60	23 (38.3)	21 (13.4)	16.7	< 0.05
No	157	37 (61.7)	136 (86.6)		
Attitude score					
Prejudiced	180	36 (81.8)	144 (83.2)	0.05	> 0.05
Non prejudiced	37	8 (18.2)	29 (16.8)		

(90%) had scores above five. Respondents with scores less than five (43 respondents) were considered to be "prejudiced". The "prejudiced" respondents were considered to be discriminatory, unfair or intolerant. The profile of the "prejudiced" respondents is shown in Table 2. They were mainly less than 36 years (16.2% vs. 3.3%, $p < 0.05$) of age, were of the female sex (17.5% vs. 2.3%, $p < 0.05$), single (25.4% vs. 6.9%, $p < 0.05$), had secondary or less education (26.1% vs. 4.4%, $p < 0.05$), 21% husbands consumed alcohol ($p < 0.05$) and 19% witnessed parental violence ($p < 0.05$), compared to the lower figures (8.0% and 6.7% respectively) in their "non prejudiced" counterparts.

Prevalence of Wife Beating

The overall prevalence of wife battering in the last one year was 135 (31.3%). This included responses from both the perpetrators and victims. Ninety one men (42.5%) had beaten their part-

ners, while 44 (23.5%) women had been beaten. Among the married men, prevalence of beating was 35.3%, while among the married women prevalence was 14.4%. Review of the demographic characteristics of the men who perpetrate violence showed that they were generally younger (< 36 years) respondents (45.1% vs. 42.3%, $p > 0.05$), had higher education (86.8% vs. 70.7%, $p > 0.05$), more were unmarried (23.1% vs. 16.3%, $p > 0.05$) and were mainly Moslems (38.5% vs. 24.4%, $p < 0.05$), compared to the non perpetrators (Table 3). A significantly higher proportion ($p < 0.05$) of them (33.0% vs. 13%) consumed alcohol and had childhood experience of observing parents in constant fights (48.4% vs. 8.2%, $p < 0.05$). More of them belonged to the prejudiced group (4.4% vs. 0.8%, $p > 0.05$) with attitude scores less than five. The women victims (Table 4) were mostly below 36 years (68.2% vs. 57.2%, $p > 0.05$), had higher education (75.0% vs. 70.5%, $p > 0.05$) and were single (15.9% vs. 12.7%, $p > 0.05$). The husbands of 23.8% of the women

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consumed alcohol as opposed to 19.9% among the victims ($p > 0.05$). Twenty three (38.3% vs. 3.4%, $p < 0.05$) of the women came from families where their parents were constantly fighting and 18.2% ($p > 0.05$) were prejudiced. The total number of episodes of beating received from partner ranged from one to six. Almost a quarter of the (23.3%) women had experienced beating more than just once, while 54.8% of men admitted beating their wives on several occasions. Average episode of beating in the last one year was one. All forms of physical abuse were reported, including slapping, pushing, hitting, punching, kicking and stoning with objects.

Abusive Relationships

The reason for the last episode of beating was given by 61.4 % of women victims and 59.3% of the perpetrators. This was stated to include "disagreeing with what husband said" (48.1%) and "refusal to take to correction" (44.4%). Sixty one (13.9%) respondents were not sure if they would leave an abusive relationship, while 61.0% would stay. This comprised of 30 (14.0%) and 31 (13.8%) men, and 134 (62.6%) and 129 (59.4%) women in both groups respectively. Consideration for the welfare of the children was the main concern of both male and female respondents (33%) and hoping that partner would

Table 5 Respondents' Experiences of Violence

Experience	Male No. (%)	Female No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Violence avoidance strategies (n=431)			
Keep quiet	102 (47.7)	95 (43.8)	197 (45.7)
Move away/separate	63 (29.4)	61 (28.1)	124 (28.7)
Pray	27 (12.6)	35 (16.1)	62 (14.4)
Threaten	17 (7.9)	6 (2.8)	23 (5.3)
Dialogue	5 (2.3)	20 (9.2)	25 (5.8)
	214 (100.0)	217 (100.0)	431 (100.0)
Reasons for remaining in abusive relationship (n = 323)			
I don't want the children to suffer	74 (33.0)	122 (69.3)	196 (60.7)
He/she will change with time	56 (25.0)	37 (21.0)	93 (28.8)
It is against my religion	11 (4.9)	9 (5.1)	20 (6.2)
It is a disgrace to be separated/divorced	6 (2.6)	4 (2.3)	10 (3.1)
No where to go	0	4 (2.3)	4 (1.2)
	147 (100)	176 (100)	323 (100)

Table 6 Help-Seeking Behaviour among Abused Women and Suggestions on Stopping Intimate Partner Abuse

Source of succour/ redress (n = 44)	
Parents/relatives	15 (34.1%)
Friends	18 (40.9%)
Court	2 (4.5%)
Pastor	7 (15.9%)
Boss	2 (4.5%)
Suggestions on stopping intimate partner abuse (n = 431)	
Punish severely (fine or jail offender)	11 (2.5%)
Report cases to the police	25 (5.8%)
Public enlightenment	329 (76.3%)
No response	66 (15.3%)

change was stated by 29% and 28% respectively as reasons for remaining in abusive relationship (Table 5). Violence avoidance mechanism included keeping quiet (46%) and moving away (29%). Major sources of succour or redress to women in abusive relationships were parents/relatives (34.1%) and friends (40.9%). Suggestions on how to stop partner abuse included imposition of fines or jailing of offenders (8.3%) and public enlightenment (76.3%), amongst others (Table 6).

Discussion

Ideally, intimate partner relationship should be a complementarily peaceful co-existence between two people. Although certain circumstances may cause misunderstanding and disharmony in a relationship, there is no excuse for abuse. In our culture, men have the right to control their wives' behaviour, and women who challenge those rights may be corrected and punished. Beating is accepted as correction of an erring wife and this is supported by some parts of the penal code.¹⁹ Sadly, probably as a result of socialisation, more female respondents supported these cultural beliefs than the men, and many justified beating of women for certain transgressions. The school of thought held by some, that traditional forms of VAW cannot occur without the cooperation of the women themselves would appear to be justified. However, it is also believed that these traditional institutions only use other women to perpetrate gender-based violence but were actually established by men. "Justified reasons" for violence were often issues around unfaithfulness by the woman and not the man. It has been found that many perpetrators recognise that battering is wrong and try to justify their actions by accusing the women too of violence and rationalising levels of abuse. The acceptable levels of aggression were pushing and pulling, while more serious forms of violence were punching and beating with a cane or belt.³

The prevalence of violence was high among the study participants, although lower than

reported by some other researchers working in this environment.^{9,10} The prevalence is likely to be much higher, as some may deny for fear of been stigmatised. Secondly, this study focused only on the physical forms of violence. Violence is however often accompanied by psychological abuses, and in one third to over one half of cases by sexual abuse as well.^{3,10} Thirdly, prevalence of violence may be lower among this population because of high level of education in the study population. Educational level significantly influenced attitude to VAW. Fourthly, we would like to believe that intervention projects carried out by various agencies working on violence is positively influencing behaviour. Finally, our study also showed that women who were physically aggressive generally experienced multiple episodes over time. However, these measurements of violence do not describe the atmosphere that surrounds abusive relationships. Studies to quantify the psychological effects of abuse as well as sexual abuse are needed.

Perhaps due to immaturity and low socio-economic status, violence was more common among the young and less educated men. Poor pay, lack of funds and, ultimately, poverty occurs even within the state civil service. The minimum monthly wage is ₦6,500 (\$40), while the maximum wage in service is up to ₦150,000 (\$950). This is worsened by the depressed economy and the persistent inflation. Salaries are often insufficient to cater for family upkeep especially among the junior cadre, who earn much less and usually have larger families. This unfortunately promotes the occurrence of 'triggers' of violence, especially due to monetary problems when the wife requests for money for family upkeep and the husband is unable to meet up with these responsibilities. Among the females, young and single women were more vulnerable probably as a result of their age, lack of financial power and experience of life. Also, the beatings may be as a result of various forms of sexual harassment.

Law enforcement agents are not often used to settle domestic disputes. Women are generally reluctant to disclose abuse because of the feeling of self blame, shame, loyalty to the abuser or fear.³ Also, reporting to the police is seen as a burdensome, expensive and time-consuming venture. Police officers are sometimes the perpetrators of violence against women. Members of the public may therefore have no confidence in their judgment and refuse to approach them for help. Furthermore, even though most of the international laws against VAW have been adopted in the country, these laws place more emphasis on sexual violence and are less specific on the punishment for perpetrators of physical violence. Secondly, the laws are more protective on the abuse of children and youths than adult women in permanent relationships. Thirdly, these laws often include some combination of protective and restrictive orders, which allow judges to remove the abuser temporarily from home to seek counselling, treatment or pay maintenance and child support. If a man violates this order he may be arrested and jailed. However, procedural barriers and gaps and biases often undermine the law's ability to deter violence and actually protect women.^{2,5,20}

In this environment, marriage is usually considered to be a family rather than private affair. Resolving marital dispute is seen as one of the responsibilities of the extended family. This probably explains why family members, and probably friends with similar problems, were sources of succour. Although many women eventually leave violent relationships, many more remain in violent situations for years. Several reasons are given for this. First, people often react negatively to victims of violence and tend to blame the victim. Secondly, the victim may feel uncomfortable, guilty, afraid, confused and unsure about separating. Thirdly, the woman may lack the means to support herself and her children economically. Furthermore, family and friends may prefer to avoid such problems or may be unwilling to support, and believe the woman

should endure the marriage for the sake of the children.⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that the care and concern for the children was the major reason for staying on in an abusive relationship. The women may fear that if they leave, their children could become victims of both neglect and abuse. This highlights the need for more social and economic support for women in abusive relationships to enable them to leave. Even though a woman eventually leaves an abusive relationship when her children are grown or when abuse becomes severe, her health and safety cannot be guaranteed and this may not be without grave consequences to the well being of the children.³

In conclusion, changing the community norms and cultural attitudes and beliefs that give rise to men's abusive behaviour toward women is an important challenge. Public enlightenment programmes using both the electronic and print media may be one way to do so. Programmes designed to change these beliefs must draw people into discussion and encourage them to consider cultural norms that curb violence. Agencies that work on gender-based violence should make special effort to reach out to the male folks. In addition, education programmes should also be conducted for other important target groups such as the law enforcement agents. Perpetrators of violence should be severely punished to act as deterrent to others. Groups should be formed to campaign against perpetration of violence. Victim-friendly organisations that will help take up the social, economic and rehabilitation process of victims are needed. Female empowerment through education and employment is strongly recommended.

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