

SPOUSAL ASSAULTS TENDENCIES AMONG MEN IN LAGOS, NIGERIA, AS PERCEIVED BY MARRIED AND COHABITED WOMEN

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Abstract

The study surveyed what married and cohabited women perceived to be the personality traits of men capable of assaulting wives or cohabited partners. From the population of women in these categories, purposive sampling technique was used to sample 245 respondents (129 married and 116 cohabited women) across randomly selected Surulere, Kosofe and Alimoso LGAs of Lagos State. The samples were privately contacted via assistance of private and public Social Welfare Institutions and acquaintances of victims of spousal assaults. Data was collected using a researcher-made questionnaire titled Spousal Assaults Risk Assessment Questionnaire (SARAQ). Collected data were analyzed using percentages and Chi-Square statistic. Among the samples, 58.3% identified husbands capable of spousal assaults to be emotionally unstable and easily upset. Another 50.2% said they were traditional and unconventional in their held values and beliefs, 48.5% said they tend to be spiteful and jealous, and 48.5% said they were difficult to predict. Through hypothesis testing, significant difference was not found in the Chi-Square tests of the attributes identified by the sampled married and cohabited women. This implies that irrespective of being married or cohabited, the identified attributes were common to men who were spousal assaulters.

Keywords: Spousal, assaults, cohabited, tendencies, attributes

Introduction

Spousal assaults on women have become source of grievous concern in marital and interpersonal relationships. As used in this article, spousal assault is all forms of unlawful physical and sexual attacks by a partner on the other partner in marital or interpersonal relationships. Spousal assault can be categorized as simple assault if no weapon is used or if no serious injury is caused. Spousal assault is said to be an aggravated assault if the purpose of the assault is to inflict severe bodily injury and a weapon which may not necessarily be ammunition is used (Giddens, 2001). Spousal assaults can be carried out by husbands against wives or by wife against husband. It can also occur between cohabited partners. They are assaults that originate from sexual relationship and denial.

Spousal assaults are common marital and interpersonal experiences across countries (Giddens, 2001). Unfortunately, it is an experience hardly reported in African countries compared to advanced countries. In fact, the act was taught to be what was opposed only in Western culture and not in African culture (Mutalib & Hassan, 2020). This may account for why it was believed to be peculiar to foreign countries. Jones (2020) reported that wife battering was the leading cause of injury in American women. He claimed that spousal assaults send more than 1 million women to doctors' offices or emergency rooms for treatment every year and the act contributes one-fourth of all the suicide attempts by women in America. Also, 37% of all obstetric patients in the country were said to be battered during pregnancy (Jones, 2020).

Spousal assaults can take many forms. Apart from killing or injuring spouses, spousal assault can be perpetrated in many other ways. It can be informed of coercion or threats, for example threat to kill or

injure wife and children, threat to burn the house down or ride family car away. It can be in form of intimidation, such as displaying weapons to scare spouses, giving him/her looks that instill fear. Spousal assault sometime involves abusing spouse emotionally, like calling one's partner humiliating names, insulting, restricting the partner from taking personal hygiene or leisure, and sometime placing him/her on forced nudity (Swanson, Chamelin & Territo, 2003). Men also assault their partner through isolation: restricting their access to phone, mail, TV, friends, and family members or sometimes demanding that they account for their action/ movements, always (Pence & Paymor, 2000; Wrightsman & Fulero, 2019).

Spousal assault is dangerous in marital relationship; it socially and psychologically affects couples and children. Wrightsman & Fulero (2019) maintain that spousal assault can make assaulted women develop learned helplessness, lowered self-esteem, and impaired functioning which includes inability to engage in playful behaviour. Spousal assaults can also make assaulted women lose confidence of invulnerability and safety in marital relationship. Assaulted women can become hyper vigilance – having been battered, they notice subtle things, things that others may not recognize as dangerous in marriage (Wrightsman & Fulero, 2019).

Since is known that spousal assault is dangerous in marital relationship, one is may ask whether it is possible to predetermine men that are capable of perpetrating the act on their wives or on their sexual partners? Certainly, spousal assaults emanate from complex disoriented intent and behaviour. Research reports claimed that through a process called risk assessment it is possible to predict the possibility that a person is potentially disposed, either socially or psychologically, towards committing assault on another person (McNeil, Borum, Douglas, Hart, Lyton, Sullivan & Hemphill, 2002).

'Risk Assessment' is a systematic clinical and psychosocial process of conceptualizing various dangers in order to make judgment about their possibility of being perpetrated or committed and the need for various preventive measures to be taken. Wrightsman and Fulero (2019) maintained that the main objective of risk assessment is to attempt to predict about future behaviour following a systematic observation of certain set of factors that are triggers or pointers of social misconduct tendencies in a subject and that are structured into a predictive scheme of measurement. Risk assessment is not necessarily conducted only in the laboratory. It only needs logical assessment of the behaviour in question through empirical or non-empirical processes of observing, recording and interpreting data that are descriptive of human behaviour.

Human behaviour can be predicted following three approaches. One of the approaches is called actuarial prediction. This is done using a standardized instrument to access behaviour and thereafter uses statistical formula to determine the potency of the antisocial behaviour in question in the assessed person. The second approach is clinical prediction. This involves drawing conclusion based on very controlled clinical test, experiment, experience and judgment. The third approach is anamnestic prediction. This involves using experiences as descriptors to predict assaulting tendencies in human beings. This can be a less controlled analysis or description of the common characteristics (traits) of persons who have acted out the antisocial behaviour in the past. Anamnestic prediction can also be based on the descriptions, given by a third-party, (a victim) of the characteristics of persons who had displayed the antisocial behaviour in question (Moris & Miller, 2020). The approach adapted in this study in anamnestic prediction.

Sociologists and Social Psychologist believe human beings have some traits that can be used to determine their intents and behaviour in certain situations (Giddens, 2001). Traits are useful in criminal and vocational profiling and predictions. A trait is an inherited or acquired characteristic that is considered consistent, persistent and stable in persons. In personality theory, Roediger, Capaldi, Paris, Polivy and Herman (2018), maintain that each individual's traits determine his or her behaviour in a

unique way. No doubt, past researchers have identified certain behavioural traits as common to individuals who are prone to committing assaults or engage in anti-social behaviour. For example, Douglas and Webster (1999) identified people often found displaying antisocial behaviour as young people, and as persons having a history of violence, a history of relationship instability or hostility; a history of employment instability, a drug or alcohol abuse history; a major mental disorder; they are often psychopathic. They tend to have history of early maladjustment in home or school setting, and a diagnosis of some other personality disorder. Other traits identified with persons prone to antisocial behaviours are: a tendency to be angry, hostile in interpersonal situations and impulsivity and unstable negative emotions (Monahan 1992; Mash & Wolve, 2017). An internet-based source, MentaHelp.net., cited by Adegbola (2019), opines that people who get angry over waiting in line at the store, frequently argue with coworkers, occasionally stay awake at night brooding over things that upset them during the day, people who find it difficult to forgive those who offended them and who frequently lose control of their emotions are prone to anger and are likely to engage in assaulting others.

Unfortunately, many of these itemized traits may not be applicable in all society. Human characteristics vary geographically. It is on this assumption that this research was specifically designed to find out the peculiar traits or characteristics of men who are capable of assaulting their wives in Lagos State. Such characteristics were found out from married and cohabited victims of spousal assaults in the three selected Local Government Areas of Lagos State, Nigeria. 'Female Victims' as used in this study means married or cohabited women who had experienced one form of spousal assault or the other from their husbands or their cohabited partners.

Theoretical Framework

There are theories that explain human being's anti-social behaviour or criminal intent and behaviour in relation to biological, environmental and personality attributes. Miller and Lynam's (2020) meta-analysis of past studies on criminal behaviours and personality produces a background for the Personality Characteristics Theory. The theory posits that human's personality or attributes are indicators of their conduct, behavioural tendency or drift. Miller and Lynam's (2020) maintain that persons with misconduct or criminal tendencies are often hostile, self-centered, spiteful, jealous, and indifferent to others (low in agreeableness) and they tend to lack ambition, motivation and perseverance. They have difficulty controlling their impulses, and tend to hold traditional and unconventional values and beliefs. Using this theory as base, the researchers tested the assumption that men in Lagos State, Nigeria who are possibly wife-assaulters are likely to have the above stated attributes of anti-social behaviours. It is a theoretical assumption of this study that identifying men with such characteristics is a step towards identifying men that are likely to engage in spousal assaults.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in this study.

1. What do married and cohabited women expressed as attributes of men capable of engaging in spousal assaults?
2. Is there significant difference in what married and cohabited women expressed as attributes of men capable of engaging in spousal assaults?

Hypotheses

The following research hypothesis was raised and tested in the study.

H01 There is no significant difference in what married and cohabited women who had experienced spousal assaults expressed as attributes of men capable of spousal assaults?

Research Design

The study was a descriptive survey of the attributes of men who were likely to engage in spousal

assaults either on their married or on their cohabited partners in three selected Local Government Area of Lagos State. The population for the study comprised of every married or cohabited women living in Surulere, Kosofe and Alimoso Local Government Areas of Lagos State. From the population, purposive sampling technique was used to sample 245 respondents comprising married and cohabited women who had at one point or the other of their spousal relationship experienced spousal assaults either in the category of Simple assaults or aggravated assaults. Among the sample, 129 were married and 116 were cohabited women. Fraenkel and Wallen (2002) opined that in purposive sampling, researchers use their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the actual data needed either because the sample have direct first-hand experience of the phenomenon under study or because they have indirect second-hand expert knowledge of the phenomenon under study. In this case, the sampled respondents have direct first-hand experience of spousal assaults – having being assaulted in the past.

Also, the sampled respondents were accessed and assessed through the assistance of staffs of private and public Social Welfare institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations, in Lagos State; after appropriate permissions were sought and granted. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled Spousal Assault Risk Assessment Questionnaire (SARAQ). The questionnaire has two sections. The section ‘A’ elicited respondents’ biographic data which were used in stratifying them to either married or cohabited female victims. The Section B has 15 items each describing human traits. The items were sourced from the reviewed literature. Each item has 2 response options indicated as: Always Applicable (AA), and Not Applicable (NA). In answering the Research question, only the response option ‘AA’ was used. The two response options (Applicable = A and NA = Not Applicable) were however used in testing the raised hypothesis. Collected data were analyzed using percentages to provide answers to the two research questions. However, at the level of hypothesis testing, the data were analyzed using chi-square statistic. The decision rule was interpreted as following: $X^2 - \text{calculated} > 3.11 @ p. 0.05 = H_0 \text{ rejection}$ and $X^2 - \text{calculated} < 3.11 @ p. 0.05 = H_0 \text{ acceptance}$.

Results

Research Question 1: What do married and cohabited women expressed as attributes of men capable of engaging in spousal assaults?

Table 1: Mean rating of attributes of men capable of engaging in spousal assaults

Attributes	Marital Status					
	Married (n=129)			Cohabited (n=116)		
	n	x	ratings	n	x	ratings
1. Being hostile	28	0.21	13 th	19	0.16	16 th
2. Being self-centered	16	0.12	16 th	24	0.20	15 th
3. Being spiteful and jealous	58	0.44	5 th	61	0.52	2 nd
4. Low in agreeableness	47	0.36	8 th	55	0.47	4 th
5. Traditional and unconventional	65	0.50	3 rd	58	0.50	3 rd
6. Conventional about beliefs	49	0.37	7 th	48	0.41	6 th
7. Having perfectionist mentality	57	0.44	6 th	61	0.52	2 nd
8. Difficulty in waiting	32	0.24	11 th	38	0.32	9 th
9. Frequently arguing with people	14	0.10	17 th	11	0.9	17 th
10. Brooding over things	58	0.45	5 th	44	0.37	7 th
11. Being difficult in forgiving others	67	0.52	1 st	52	0.44	5 th

12. Threatening people with death	24	0.18	4 th	36	0.31	11 th
13. Being moody and detached	49	0.37	7 th	36	0.31	11 th
14. Being emotionally less stable	66	0.51	2 nd	77	0.66	1 st
15. Being expedient: disregards rules	30	0.23	12 th	41	0.35	8 th
16. Easily frustrated and overwrought	20	0.15	15 th	37	0.32	10 th
17. Being suspicious: hard to fool	61	0.47	4 th	55	0.47	4 th
18. Being restless	12	0.9	8 th	28	0.24	13 th
19. Being optimistic	46	0.35	9 th	30	0.25	12 th
20. Being outgoing and social	33	0.2	10 th	26	0.22	14 th

Data on Table 1 above indicates that married women in the selected local government areas rated the attitude of not forgiving others as the main characteristic of men capable of spousal assault. They rated the attitude of displaying emotional instability as second and rated attitude of frequently arguing with people as the least common attitude of men capable of committing spousal assaults. On the other hand, cohabited women rated the attitudes of displaying emotional instability and being spiteful and jealous as the first and second characteristics of men capable of committing spousal assaults, respectively. Also rated second by the sampled cohabited women is the attitude of displaying perfectionist mentally. Just like married women, cohabited women also rated the attitude of frequently arguing with people around as the least characteristic of men capable of committing spousal assault.

Hypothesis Testing

H01 There is no significant difference in what married and cohabited women identified as attributes of men capable of spousal assaults.

Table 2: t-test analysis of difference in married and cohabited women’s descriptions of traits of men capable of spousal assaults

Traits: such men are:	N	t	S.D	Df	t.cal	t.tab	H0 Decision	
Hostile	<i>Married victims</i>	28	0.21	1.14	5	0.45	2.02	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	19	0.16	1.03				
Self-centered	<i>Married victims</i>	16	0.12	1.14	38	0.37	2.04	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	24	0.20	1.21				
Spiteful and Jealous	<i>Married victims</i>	58	0.44	1.37	117	1.26	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	61	0.52	1.42				
Low in Agreeableness	<i>Married victims</i>	45	0.36	1.81	98	1.42	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	55	0.47	1.53				
Difficult Controlling their impulses	<i>Married victims</i>	65	0.50	1.14	121	1.55	2.98	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	58	0.53	1.53				
Traditional and conventional	<i>Married victims</i>	49	0.37	1.12	95	0.86	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	48	0.41	1.13				
Perfectionist	<i>Married victims</i>	57	0.44	1.20	116	1.33	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	61	0.52	1.14				
Impatience	<i>Married victims</i>	32	0.24	1.11	68	1.47	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	38	0.32	1.14				
Argue with	<i>Married victims</i>	14	0.10	1.03				

people around					23	0.46	2.06	<i>Not Sig.</i>
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	11	0.09	1.01				
Brood over past conflict	<i>Married victims</i>	58	0.45	1.72				
	<i>Cohabited victims</i>	44	0.37	1.61	100	1.31	2.00	<i>Not Sig.</i>

Based on the data on Table 2, hypothesis 1 is accepted because none of the calculated values for each of the attributes of men capable of spousal assaults is higher than the tabulated values. Specifically, results of the analysis on the table indicate that there was no significant difference in what married and cohabited women identified as attributes of men capable of spousal assaults. This implies that the samples did not have different opinions on what could be the attributes of such men. The two categories of sampled women believed that the men, either in marriage or in cohabitation, can be hostile, self-centered, spiteful, jealous, impatient and difficult.

Discussion of Findings

Incidence of spousal assault is an aberration in the mutual consent upon which marital relationship is established. In marital relationship, it is traditional that adults reach agreement to marry or cohabit and complementarily express affection, understanding, sexual and financial interactions towards each other in a view to establish and develop a family. However, friction may set in and one partner in the relationship may result to battering the other partner- it is these situations that often accumulate to become spousal assault. Around the world, spousal assault is not a misdemeanor; rather it is classified as a felony- an act punishable by imprisonment or by death (Giddens, 2001). Spousal assault is typified to include all forms of simple battery, simple assault, aggravated assault, and stalking, criminal damage to family property, unlawful restraint or criminal trespass on marital partner (Swanson, Chamelin & Territo, 2003).

Identifying persons capable of subjecting their partners to these arrays of assaults has been a major concern in the fields of Family Security and Criminal Investigation (Swanson, Chamelin & Territo, 2003). This study however provides insight into understanding this phenomenon and particularly, into understanding the behavioural components of men that are capable of the act. For example, this study established the fact that men that are capable of assaulting their wives or cohabited partners are not necessarily those that frequently argue with people around or that easily steer conflict outside their immediate home. Invariably, they may be public gentlemen and at the same time be home tyrants or bully. Specifically, the sampled married and cohabited women for this study established the fact that men that are capable of spousal assault can definitely be emotionally unstable and calm in the public realm but be a monster at home. However, they are people that could easily get upset, find it difficult to control their impulses and in most cases are often spiteful and jealous.

Though researches and reports from couple therapists support the belief that conflict is evitable in a marriage or in any long-time relationship (Davidson & Neale, 2019) but spousal assault is too much a conflict in marital relationship. Persons capable of assaulting their spouses may have personality disorder. No doubt, capability for spousal assault is a manifestation of behavioural disorder in human being (Wrightsmen & Fulero, 2019). As revealed in the findings of this study, men that are capable of spousal assault are said to be suspicious and hard to fool people. Driven by their perfectionist’s mentality, they are likely to always expect their spouses to follow their strictly specified routine rules; and in most cases, such men tend to set their marital rules and expectations on the traditional and unconventional values and beliefs that may be prevalent in their traditional societies. Failure on the part of their partners to stay on such rules may trigger their anger. Unfortunately, such rules may not be shared by their spouse or be in line with the growing feministic ideology around the world. These

contractions in ideology can steer serious conflict that could result in spousal assault.

Men that are capable of spousal abuse fit into the category of people that (Davidson & Neale, 2019) referred to as having Paranoid Personality Disorder. Davidson & Neale confirm the description given by the sampled respondents in this study that such men often suspect their partners as trying to outsmart them in marital relationship. Being paranoid, spouse abusers can display personality of being overly sensitive, quick to take offence, argumentative and tense. Unfortunately, the possibility of being outgoing and social are not common attributes of men who can engage in spousal abuse. As indicated in the findings of this study, sampled married and cohabited women rated spousal abusers very low on these qualities. In fact, they were described as men that appreciate loneliness and are often detached and moody. These can make it difficult for them to socialize and learn the wrongs in their perceptions of marital relationship.

Conclusion

Based on the descriptions given by women who had been assaulted by their spouses, men that are capable of spousal assaults do have traits that show them to be emotional unstable, jealous, unforgiving and as persons that hold unconventional traditional beliefs about marriage and life responsibilities. Certainly, identifying such traits can help a lot in marital guidance and counseling.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended:

Married and persons of marital age should be conscious of traits such as emotional instability, anger, traditional and unconventionally held values and beliefs and being spiteful and jealous in their marital or sexual partners.

Stakeholders in marital affairs should adopt findings of this study in their provisions of marital guidance and counseling.

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