

Original Article

Intimate Partner Violence and its Effects on Children in Haske Settlement of Jos, North Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Intimate partner violence has become a global threat to women's health and this can negatively impact on children's health and wellbeing. This study aims to explore the views of married couples about intimate-partner violence and its effects on children in Haske Settlement of Jos, North Central Nigeria. The study adopted exploratory qualitative research and the target population included married couples living within the Haske Settlement and data collection process employed focus group discussion methods with thematic analysis. The themes and the sub themes that emerged from the coding analysis were: i) occurrence of intimate partner violence; reflecting incessant violence among young married couples; ii) factors of misunderstanding and lack of patience among the couples; iii) effects of violence among the couples; reflecting default growth among the children and faulty character formation, deviant behavior and sustained alcoholism, poor performance at school, altered psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing and lifestyle of divorce and separation later in life; iv) possible solutions of prayers, mutual understanding, counselling and mingling with others with enhanced relationships were identified as cushioning intimate partner violence among the couples. The study highlighted that young married couples were more likely to experience intimate partner violence, and the factors of misunderstanding and lack of patience were usually responsible for causation and the effects on children reflected default growth and faulty character formation, poor performance at school, retarded psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing. Possible solutions of prayer, mutual understanding, counselling and enhanced relationships will cushion the effects of intimate partner violence.

Keywords: Children, Couples, Intimate, Partner, Psychosocial behavior, Violence

INTRODUCTION

Intimate-partner violence (IPV) has become a serious health concern in the 21st Century with its myriad of consequences upon the children and the society; it affects millions of people worldwide irrespective of age, economic status, educational background, religion or race. Intimate partner violence (IPV) takes place in various settings such as

socio-cultural, ethnic and religious settings and it has a widespread consequence of physical, emotional, spiritual, sexual, and psychological stalking. ¹ The terrain of intimate-partner violence majorly affects the women and this invariably affects the children with negative impacts of anxiety, depression, poor academic performances and other health consequences. ²

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A multi-factorial causation for intimate partner violence includes alcoholism, young age at marriage, multiple sexual partners, cohabitation, supportive culture of beating women, aggressiveness, delinquent behavior, poor parenting, marital instability among others.^{3, 4} The adverse outcomes that could result from intimate partner violence which can negatively impact the children includes increased risk of psychosocial, emotional, behavioral and school related problems and these can predispose them to display heightened distress, traumatic stress symptoms and depressed effects.^{5, 6, 7} These tends to breed functional instability, violent behavior, substance abuse and future relationship problems.^{8, 9}

Against this backdrop, this research looked at intimate partner violence and its effects on children in Haske Settlement of Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

Study Aim

The aim of this study was to explore how intimate-partner violence affects the wellbeing of children in Haske Settlement and to find ways to cushion the effects of the violence in a bid to provide a healthy environment to enhance the growth and development of the children.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Setting

The study population consisted of married couples within the age of twenty-five years and above. The sampling method adopted was a theoretical sampling frame of initial eight members which was built to saturation of sixteen members before data collection process was brought to an end as no new concepts emerged in data collection. The setting for this study was the Haske Settlement located in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, North Central Nigeria.

Study Design

An exploratory qualitative research design was adopted for this study in order to code the participant's voices in a bid to attach labels to the occurring phenomenon in the analytical sequence.

Inclusion Criteria

The couples must be living together within the same household.

The male counterpart must be up to twenty-five years of age and the female counterpart must be up to 18 years and above.

The couples must have lived together for up to two years to be included in this study.

Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool used for this study was a focus group discussion tool. Focus group discussion gives participants the room to discuss freely about the research scenario while the researcher codes their responses in a bid to attach labels to the phenomenon under discussion.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was used in the analytical sequence as it is deemed fit for qualitative research.¹⁰ Owing to the design of the study, thematic analysis was employed. There was sequential analysis with concurrent data collection process. Verbatim transcription was initially undertaken to see the emerging themes and codes; the coding was done to attach labels in the analytical sequence before discussion of the themes.

Ethical Consideration

The Paramount Leader of Haske Settlement (Ada Agwom Izere) was contacted for the study and he gave consent to the researchers to interact with his subjects. The researchers also obtained consent from the participants before the conduct of the study. Those that could read and write gave a written consent while those that could not read and write gave their verbal consent. No participant was coerced to participate in the study, and there was enough room for them to withdraw from the study if they so wished at any point without risk or harm. Anonymity and confidentiality was maintained in the conduct of this study.

RESULTS

From the findings, the themes and the sub themes that emerged from the coding analysis were: i) occurrence of Intimate partner violence reflecting incessant violence among young married couples; ii) factors of misunderstanding and lack of patience

among the couples; iii) effects of violence among the couples reflecting default growth among the children and faulty character formation, deviant behavior and sustained alcoholism, poor performance at school, altered psychological, physical and spiritual wellbeing cum lifestyle of divorce and separation later in life; iv) possible solutions of prayers, mutual understanding, counselling and mingling with others and enhanced relationships within the settlement were identified as cushioning intimate partner violence among the couples.

i) Occurrence of intimate partner violence

One of the major themes that emerged in exploring intimate partner violence among married couples in Haske Settlement was displayed, occurrence of violence among young married couples and incessant quarrelling and fighting among the couples in which most of the participants echoed with their voices.

a) Display of occurrence of violence among young married couples

The younger couples are most likely to display intimate partner violence because of inexperience, newness to family life and trying to study themselves in a bid to adapt to one another's behavioral tenets – on these assertions, some of the participants echoed thus.

It is the young couples that experience more of it because they just started living together and they are trying to study one another in order to understand themselves so they often disagree over so many issues (Participant 3)

It affects more of the younger couples because the old couples have stayed together for long and they understand themselves, so they do not disagree so much over their matters like the younger couples (Participant 2)

b) Incessant quarrelling and fighting among the couples

Incessant quarreling and fighting were also reported among the participants in the occurrence of intimate partner violence which can threaten their togetherness in marriage life and this is not healthy for the development of the family.

It is more common among the young couples because they are new to marriage life and they quarrel over little issues that can be resolved easily (Participant 1)

I will say, it definitely affects young couple as they disagree and often fight to resolve issues, even when you talk to them, they seem not to understand quickly, so it is their problem... (Participant 4)

ii) Factors of intimate partner violence among married couples

On factors triggering intimate partner violence among the couples, misunderstanding and lack of patience were so conspicuous among the issues reported by participants causing intimate partner violence in our societies.

a) Misunderstanding among the married couples

Misunderstanding can occur among married couples in trying to address some issues concerning the marriage and their livelihood; In a bid to resolve issues, misunderstanding could ensue; hence, they are from different backgrounds. On this assertion, the participants reflected that it could cause intimate partner violence.

The woman has her own problems and the man also has his own problems; when the man comes back late and the woman ask why he did not provide the food, they will have an argument, hmmm all these can cause fight between husband and wife and they will have crisis (Participant 4)

It happens when the woman or the man is at fault and they cannot apologize to themselves, they will have misunderstanding... You know now, men always have pride; also, some women are very stubborn, no matter what happens, they will wait for their husbands to come and apologize and if he doesn't, they will end up not having peace (Participant 6)

b) Lack of patience among the couples

Lack of patience among the couples could also be another triggering factor to intimate partner violence, and to this preposition, some participants vehemently affirmed that it might generate problem among the couples. To buttress this affirmation, a participant echoed thus:

Patience is the key...hmmm, if they don't have

patience with one another as married couple, they will always be fighting at home and their house will be on fire (Participant 5)

iii) Effects of intimate partner violence on the children

Within the phenomenon of impacts of intimate partner violence on children and their wellbeing, the sub-themes that emerged were: default growth and faulty character formation among the children; poor performance at school; retarded psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing; and the lifestyle of separation and divorce later in life.

a) Default growth and faulty character formation.

Default growth and faulty character formation were seen as negative impacts of intimate partner violence on children's developmental strides; hence the scenario of the environment of intimate partner violence does not favor appropriate growth and development for the children and their character formation tends to be affected by the behavior of their parents. Some of them could have deviant behaviors getting into substance abuse and alcoholism. To this assertion, some of the participants affirmed thus;

...we had a neighbor who used to beat his wife until we went to separate them, this use to happen every day. I can say it is a bad experience and they have children who were always watching, that is how the children learnt and now that they are grown up, and one of the boys is married, I heard he also beats his wife... (Participant 7)

Some of these children take to drinking alcohol and those that drink and booze becomes touts in the society, disturbing people here and there, some even take to fighting and it has become part of them - you see... (Participant 8)

...this thing is not a good thing at all, it happened in my own house, it is not easy, my own son has even taken to substance abuse and he hardly stays at home, he only comes to carry something and goes. It really pains me to see my child in this way. We have talked to him but he has refused to change, hmmm... (Participant 9)

b) Poor performance at school

The academic performance of the school children from intimate partner violence home can be grossly affected; hence, their parents may not take adequate responsibilities to taking care of them. In this way, many of them maybe absent from school, perform poorly in their academics and some may even dropout of school. To this, some of the participants echoed thus;

The children from such homes are usually affected in their school, sometimes, their fathers may not agree to pay their school fees and their mothers may also not care about their school and some of them will be failing their examinations (Participant 9)

...it affects their school too; some of them will even spend their school fees on other things and tell their parents stories and before you know it, they will drop out of school. The children become unreliable; it is a big problem in this place...ooo (Participant 5)

c) Retarded psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing.

The tendency to be affected psychologically, physically, and emotionally is very high with children who hails from the homes where intimate partner violence occurs. To this end, participants reported that the children can be affected grossly, and it can lead to broken homes later in life.

...it affects the children psychologically, physically, and spiritually because the troubles in the home affects the children and lead them to other problems. The child carries on what he has seen from his parents to adulthood and marriage, that is why we have many broken homes today... (Participant 3)

...hmmmm, how will the children not be affected? When their parents are always having problems and fighting; eeeeh, psychologically, academically, spiritually and emotionally, it affects them all round, hmmm....it is only God that can help those children. ooo. (Participant 10)

d) Lifestyle of separation and divorce later in life

These children can grow up with what they have learnt from their parents which can impact negatively on their behavior. Some of them may not see anything wrong with separation and divorce,

hence their marriages are usually affected and the lifestyle of separation and divorce would become prominent in their relationships. Some participants buttress this assertion by echoing thus;

Hmmmm... some children, it makes them to be violent because they think that is how the world is, because of the violence they passed through while growing up... Because their parents fought and divorced, they will like to do the same thing and this lifestyle is not good (Participant 10)

The children become irresponsible, like my neighbor's son, he continued beating his wife, until he throws her away, one day soldiers came to carry him away and beat him very well before he became cool. They tie him and throw him into the compound... (Participant 8)

iv) Possible solutions to curb intimate partner violence and the effects.

On possible solutions to curb intimate-partner violence among the couples and avert the effects on the children, the sub-themes that emerged were - mutual understanding, prayers, counselling and mingling with others and enhanced relationships.

a) Mutual understanding among the couples

Mutual understanding among the couples will go a long way to promote harmonious existence and this will help to curb the incidences of intimate partner violence which will result in better livelihood among the couples; in this way, children will live in a better environment to learn good morals. Some participants echoed thus.

...hmmm, the solution may not come immediately, but what I can say is that husband and wife should learn to understand one another; with this kind of understanding, they will be able to reduce the violence... (Participant 11)

...One way to prevent this issue is dialogue among husband and wife with proper guidance, mutual understanding; this will help them to understand one another and prevents violence among them... (Participant 7)

b) Prayers among the couples

Prayer is seen as a strong component of cushioning intimate partner violence among young couples. As

they pray to God to help them understand their differences, they will be able to blend in their characters and also pray for their upcoming children to learn to live together with other people of different backgrounds. Some of the participants reflected on this.

The father and the mother should learn to be patient in prayers and bring their case to God and not to be quarrelling every day because children can learn from this as they are growing up. Prayer above all is the only way to solve this matter (Participant 4)

...hmmmm, prayer can do a lot of things. ooo... when they pray to God to accept one another and they see themselves as one, they will not fight and quarrel and spoil their children... (Participant 11)

c) Counselling, mingling with others and enhanced relationships

Proper marital counseling, mingling with other people of good character traits with experiences and enhanced relationships will help young married couples to overcome intimate partner violence; in this way, children will benefit a lot to lead good lives, and this will help them in adulthood and cushion the negative effects of intimate partner violence; most of the participants agreed to this assertion.

...it only takes the grace of God; you can encourage them to mingle freely with others to improve their lives so that this violence we are talking about will stop... hmmm, when you see people are not quarreling and fighting, you will learn from them... (Participant 11)

Call them and talk to them, encourage them to discuss their problems and relate with other people so that they know that they are not the only people having problems so that things will work for them. (Participant 12).

...tell parents to be good examples to their children, they should not do bad things in the presence of their children. They should not try to quarrel and fight in the presence of their children; they should relate well and teach their children to relate well too (Participant 10)

DISCUSSION

The study explored intimate partner violence among

married couples and its effects on children. From the findings of this study, intimate partner violence occurs most frequently with young married couples; this might be attributed to the fact that they are new to marital relationships. The study corroborates the projection that young marital couples are more likely to experience intimate partner violence correlating with age at marriage.³ Further to this, incessant fighting among the couples was reported within the confines of intimate partner violence corroborating the assertions of a study that noted physical violence of hitting, restraining and assault with a weapon in a fight connotes violence among the couples.¹¹

On factors of causation of intimate partner violence among the couples, misunderstanding, and lack of patience were the major indicators. Misunderstanding accrued to individual differences ruminating around the issues of intimate partner violence may be associated with insults, intimidation, threats of harm, or controlling or dominating behavior among the couples.² In a similar vein, aggression towards one another, marital conflict with fighting and tension was projected as factors of causation.⁴ Growing up with intimate partner violence parents and having outside sexual partners were posited as factors of causation.³ The contrary views of the above authors may be due to different settings where the studies were conducted as well as cultural variations within the research scenarios.

Lack of patience culminated prominently among the findings of this study triggering intimate partner violence among married couples. This is contrary to the view that posited physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviors as core factors triggering intimate partner violence in the Canadian context.¹² This variation might also be due to regional and cultural behavioral terrains in the study settings. It was further reported that constant criticisms, name calling, embarrassment, mocking and humiliation are frequent causations of intimate partner violence.¹³

The study also found that, default growth and faulty character formation with deviant behavioral traits, substance abuse and alcoholism featured prominently among the effects of intimate partner

violence on the children. Children who had witnessed and/or victims of intimate partner violence had the greater risk of becoming violent in their future relationships with behavioral and social problems.⁹ In a similar vein, it was noted that children who had witnessed intimate partner violence were at risk of developing behavioral problems with high risk sexual behavior, alcoholism and substance abuse.¹⁴ Further to this, it was projected that children who had witnessed intimate partner violence would be at higher risk for developing health problems, alcoholism, drug abuse and deviant sexual behavior along with dysfunctions and aggressive behavior in their developmental stages.^{15,16}

Poor academic performance and dropping out of school were reported to be among the effects of intimate partner violence on the children. Children exposed to intimate partner violence are generally more likely to perform poorly in their academic work and frequently drop out of school.^{8,14} It was also reported that poor academic performance with reduced self-esteem were also noted among the children who had been exposed to intimate partner violence.¹⁷ It was further posited that children who hail from the homes of violent intimate partner parents will frequently have disruption in their schooling activities and adverse outcomes in the educational endeavors.¹⁸

In curbing the incidence of intimate partner violence among the couples, the findings project prayers, mutual understanding and counseling, mingling with others and enhanced relationships as possible solutions. Prayer is viewed as a channel of communicating one's problem to Supreme Being as it gives a sense of relief and hope; it creates an atmosphere of forgiveness, love, healing and compassion. Prayer was viewed as an intervention of choice that can cushion the effects of violence among the couples.¹⁹ To this end, practitioners with this belief system looked at prayers as an appropriate intervention for victims of violence with positive outcomes.

Mutual understanding and counseling remain as key components in resolving intimate partner violence among married couples. Understanding the socio-

cultural terrain of the couples is very crucial in resolving conflicts among them. Efficient interventions are based on understanding the situation of the violence and exploring possible solutions that can curb IPV among the couples.²⁰ It was submitted that practitioners should understand the violent experience and provide educational counseling services that could affect the personalities of the couple and avert the incidence of intimate partner violence.²¹ Specific guidelines were earmarked in the counseling of victims of intimate partner violence and these include: provision of information on the shelter needs, meeting the immediate physical and medical needs of the victims and providing the couples, the available options for each of the problems they may encounter.²²

Mingling with others and enhanced relationships among the married couples can reduce the incidences of intimate partner violence. It was indicated that healthy respectful relationships among couples which can positively impact on family dynamics and provides emotionally supportive environment is very crucial in resolving intimate partner violence.²³ This environment can provide a strong foundation for the upcoming children and help them to adapt to positive interactions based on trust and respect for each other. It was reported that improved communication, trust, mutual respect and enhanced conflict management skills with other programs of empowerment helps in resolving conflicts among married couples.²⁴

CONCLUSION

The study highlighted that young married couples are more likely to experience intimate partner violence with incessant occurrence of fighting among the couples and the factors of misunderstanding and lack of patience are usually responsible for causation and the effects of IPV on children reflected default growth and faulty character formation, poor performance at school, retarded psychological, physical and emotional wellbeing cum separation and divorce later in life. Possible solutions of prayers, mutual understanding, counselling and mingling with others and enhanced relationships will cushion the effects of intimate

partner violence among the couples.

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Declaration

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this study

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