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PERCEPTION OF WHAT ACTS CONSTITUTE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AMONG ADULT RESIDENTS OF ONITSHA METROPOLIS, ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the perception of the act that most constitutes violence against women among adult residents of Onitsha using a sample of 1,165 respondents that are 18 years and above. Data was collected using questionnaire and focus group discussion. Results indicate that 42.2% of the respondents regarded beating as the act that most constitute violence against women while 59.6% felt beating was the most prevalent in Onitsha. Males and females do not differ in their views about act that most constitute violence against women. Rape was found to also be a common form of violence against women. The study recommends the need for a reevaluation of the current public awareness campaigns in order to include all acts that constitute violence against women in line with United Nations definition so that people will not have erroneous beliefs about what acts actually constitute violence against women.

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INTRODUCTION

There have been diverse views about actions that constitute violence against women. Gelles and Harrop (1989) see it as acts carried out with the actual or perceived intention of causing physical pain or injury to a woman. Oyediran and Isiguzo-Abanihe (2005) outlined acts which constitute violence against women to include verbal and physical abuse, rape and sexual assault, early and forced marriages, incest and female genital cutting. Campbell (2002) listed such acts as physical assault, forced sex as well as other forms of physical violence, psychological coercion and degradation. In a study in Ghana, Ardayfio-Schandorf, (2005) found that respondents listed acts that constitute violence against women to include wife-beating, early and forced marriages, rape (both within and outside marriage), defilement, sexual harassment, psychological, economic and physical abuse. On her part, Kameri-Mbote (2001) is of the view that physical violation of a woman's body through acts like kicking, pushing, burning, punching, pulling hair, rape, verbal abuse, harassments and

deprivation of resource or denial of access to various facilities all constitute violence against women. The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that result in or is likely to results in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations General Assembly [UNGA], 1993). Based on the above, one can conclude that there is no universally agreed notion of what constitute violence against women. This lack of agreement about what constitute violence against women, undoubtedly contributes to inconsistencies in estimates of prevalence of violence against women (Mouzos and Makkai, 2004; Raphael, 2000; Bradley, et al., 2002). Studies however, have shown that violence against women occur in all geographic regions, countries, cultures, and economic classes (Ali and Gavino, 2008; Ardayfio-Schandorf, 2005; Blanchfield, et al., 2011; Carlson, et al., 2000; Coker and Richtel, 1998; Kameri-Mbote, 2001; Marcus, 1993; Saravanan, 2000). Scholars have reported that in many societies, physical abuse is often considered as an acceptable behaviour and where it is frowned at, women are often blamed for inciting men to engage in it (Ardayfio-

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Schandorf, 2005; Rani, Bonu and Diop-Sidibe, 2004; Odimegwu, 2001; Zimmerman, 2002; Foster, 2002; Finkler, 1997). In Nigeria, Oyediran and Abanihe-Isiguzo (2005), Fawole Aderonmu and Fawole, (2005), Odunjirin, (1993) and Ilika, Okonkwo and Adogu, (2002), reported that violence against women by male partners is widely condoned by many as a result of the belief that chastising a woman by whatever means is embedded in the culture. This then implies that it is regarded as a normal and socially acceptable practice since the culture encourages it. Traditional practices and beliefs regarding the subordination of women exacerbate the issue of violence against women (Ondicho, 2000). One of such practices is patriarchy. According to Antai and Antai (2009) the traditional Nigerian society is patriarchal which tends to tolerate violence against women in communities where women are assigned inferior roles, subordinates to the male head of their families, and effectively the properties of their husbands. Ahmad *et al.*, (2004) believe that women from patriarchal societies may themselves accept and adhere to patriarchal norms and values. In view of the above, they postulated that women who adhere to more patriarchal values are less likely to judge spousal physical abuse as domestic violence compared with those women who disagree with patriarchal social norms.

In a study conducted in Ibadan, Nigeria, Adebayo (2003) observed that some of the reasons for violence against women include disobedience to men, poverty, lack of trust, uncaring nature, power tussle, impatience and alcoholism. Ezeilo and Ohia (2006) after sampling 2000 respondents in South-eastern Nigeria found that different forms of violence used on women include flogging, beating, withholding of salary, need denial, suppression, sexual harassment, rape, widowhood practice, abusive speech, destruction of property, deprivation, threats, child abuse, maltreatment, intimidation and humiliation. The findings also showed that some of the reasons for violence ranged from, if she goes out without telling the husband, if she refuses to have sex with her husband, to if she burns the food. A number of studies have been done on violence against women and intimate partner violence in Nigeria. However, most of these studies focused on such issues as health implications of violence against women (Antai 2011, Ushie *et al.*, 2011), perception of violence against women by women (Adebayo, 2003; Antai and Antai, 2008; Antai and Antai, 2009; Ilika, 2005; Owoaje, and Olaolorun, 2006; Oyediran and Isiguzo-Abanihe, 2005), preventive strategies, (Menkiti, 2005), disclosure by women (Okenwa *et al.*, 2009) and causes and management of violence against women (Aimakhu *et al.*, 2004; Obi and Ozumba, 2007; Yusuf *et al.*, 2011). None of these studies has actually tried to find out what acts people really think constitute violence against women. The present study explores this angle because there is usually the erroneous belief that battering is the only form of violence against women. The study sought information from adult residents of Onitsha in Anambra state, Nigeria, on what acts they think should constitute violence against women. In order to obtain this information the following questions were asked:

- What act most constitute violence against women?
- What is the commonest of violence against women in Onitsha?

It is hoped that answers to these questions will provide Nigerian policy makers with some information that will enable

them to clearly delineate the key issues that should define what constitute violence against women.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study was carried out in Onitsha metropolis of Anambra State, Nigeria. For administrative purposes, Onitsha metropolis is subdivided into two local government areas: Onitsha North and Onitsha South. The sample used for the study was obtained from Onitsha North. According to the 2006 National Population Census the population for Onitsha North was 124,942. The target population for this study were adults aged 18 years and above who reside in Onitsha North.

The multi-stage sampling method that involves successive random sampling was employed in selecting streets, households and respondents used for the study. 10 streets were selected from Onitsha North and in each street 144 respondents were administered questionnaires to using availability and age criteria. All the respondents used for the study were willing to participate in the study. Four focus group discussion sessions were held as follows: Adult male, Adult female, young male and young female. The sessions were moderated by the first author and a research assistant. This provided the qualitative data that supported the quantitative data.

Instrument

A uniform set of questionnaires were administered to all the respondents. The other complementary instrument used in the study was focus group discussion guide. Of the 1,440 questionnaires distributed, 1,165 were returned giving a response rate of 81%. The first part of the questionnaire solicited personal descriptive information from the respondents while the second part sought information on the knowledge of what acts should constitute violence against women. These questions were open ended in nature. The sample showed that there were more females (56.7%) than males (43.3%). The mean age of the respondents was 36 years (S.D. 12.536). While the youngest respondent was 18 years, the oldest was 82 years. More than half of the respondents were married (55.4%) while a little more than a third (39.1%) were single. One-third (32.2%) of the respondents had up to sixteen years of schooling (Bachelors Degree and Higher Diploma) Also another one third (30.5%) had twelve years of schooling (Senior Secondary Certificate and its equivalents) Only a few respondents (2.7%) did not have any formal education.

Measures

Respondents were required to rank in order of severity, four acts that they considered that should constitute violence against women. Based on the ranking also, they were required to state the act that is the commonest in Onitsha. These acts are beating, denial of rights, maltreatment and sexual assaults.. Data collected was analysed using percentages. The relationship between the variables were determined using chi square test.

RESULTS

Respondents' views on the act that most constitutes violence against women and the commonest act of violence against in Onitsha

Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their understanding of what constitutes violence against women

Definition of violence against women	Frequency	Percent
Beating	491	42.2
Denial of the rights	119	10.2
Maltreatment	209	17.9
Sexual assaults	346	29.7
Total	1165	100.0

Respondents were asked to state the act which they think most constitutes violence against women. More than one-third (42.2%) of the respondents were of the view that beating a woman was the act that most constitutes violence against women. 346 (29.7%) felt that sexual assaults (rape, sexual harassment) constitute violence against women. Only 119 (10.2%) of the respondents felt that denying women their rights (such as dis-inheritance, early marriage, etc) were acts of violence against women.

Responses from the FGD also tended to support the findings above. When asked to state the act that most constitute violence against women, the adult male group were almost unanimous that beating was the act. One of them puts it this way:

...Beating of women is the act because sometimes when a man beats his wife or girlfriend he can wound her in the process of beating and then she will go to the hospital (Male, 50 years, Driver).

Some female participants in the adult female group had rather different opinions about the act that most constitutes violence against women. One of them summarized it as follows:

The act that most constitute violence against women is looking down on women by men. Men do not allow women to contribute to decision-making in the family. The woman will then feel worthless and will not have any say in the husbands family and the society as a whole(Female, 55 years, Trader).

The above view is more psychologically inclined than the physical act mentioned by the men. In the young male group, a participant had this very interesting view:

...the act that most constitute violence against women is beating a woman when the situation does not call for it (Male, 27 years, Student).

This response portrays therefore that there are some situations that beating a woman will not constitute violence against women. The study went further to find out from the respondents which of these acts of violence they think is most prevalent in Onitsha (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their views on act of violence against women that is most prevalent in Onitsha

Prevalent acts violence against women	Frequency	Percent
Beating	695	59.6
Denial of rights	189	16.2
Maltreatment	129	11.1
Sexual assaults	152	13.1
Total	1165	100

A cursory look at Table 2 shows that majority of the respondents (59.6%) also believe that beating of women is the most prevalent acts of violence against women in Onitsha.

Denial of rights also appears to be prevalent with an appreciable number of respondents (16.2%) agreeing to it. The qualitative data however appear somewhat contrary to the above. In the adult female group although all the participants agreed that beating is common however the women felt that sexual assault is the commonest in Onitsha. One of the participants summarized it thus:

Raping of women is the most common form of violence against women in this Onitsha. Every day you must hear how a girl was raped on the TV. Other forms are beating a woman, taking a woman's salary, not giving her freedom and denying of sex by a husband (Female, 49 years, trader). A young male participant supported the above. According to him, Rape is very prevalent here in Onitsha. I think it is the commonest for now. Wife beating is also another form of violence which is very common too (Male, 25 years, Welder).

Driving this point home, a young female participant noted that, Rape is the most dominant form of violence against women in Onitsha. Some men rape even their girl friends..... An incident occurred when a man raped his girl friend who usually bring food to him.....until she fainted (Female, 23 years, Receptionist). Judging by these responses, it does appear as if sexual assault was regarded by many of the respondents as a very prevalent form of violence against women in Onitsha.

Relationship between some demographic variables and views on the commonest form of violence against women in Onitsha

The study sought to find out if there is a relationship between respondent's views about the commonest form of violence against women and some demographic variables like age, sex of respondents, marital status and level of education (see Table 3). The results show that out of the four demographic variables considered, two of them were found to be statistically significantly related to respondents views on the commonest act of violence against women in Onitsha.

More (62.3%) married respondents believe that beating is the commonest form of violence against women. Whereas more, younger (86.8%), female (55.3%), single (59.2%) and respondents with less than 13 years of schooling (54.6%) believe that sexual assault is the commonest form of violence against women in Onitsha metropolis. Respondent's gender appears not to have effect on their views about the commonest form of violence against women in Onitsha.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the perception of what act most constitutes violence against women and the most prevalent form among adult residents in Onitsha, Anambra State, Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that respondents had differing views about the act that most constitute violence against women. For instance, 42.2% felt that beating a woman was the act that most constitutes violence against women. It was also revealed that 59.7% believe that beating is the most prevalent form of violence against women. These findings are in agreement with that of Antai and Antai (2009) who in their study in Niger Delta, Nigeria indicated that wife beating was very common and even widely accepted under several circumstances by the women. The reason why respondents in the present study regarded wife beating as the commonest

Table 3. Association between socio-demographic characteristics and respondents indication of commonest form of violence against women

Variables	Views on perceived commonest forms of violence against women				P<
	Beating	Denial of rights	Maltreatment	Sexual Assaults	
Age					
Younger respondents	429 (61.7)	148 (78.3)	100 (77.5)	132 (86.8)	.001
Older respondents	266 (38.3)	41 (21.7)	29 (22.5)	20 (13.2)	
Sex					
Male	290 (41.7)	87 (46.0)	59 (45.7)	68 (44.7)	.634
Female	405 (58.3)	102 (54.0)	70 (54.3)	84 (55.3)	
Marital Status					
Married	433 (62.3)	90 (47.6)	65 (50.4)	57 (37.5)	
Single	225 (32.4)	82 (43.4)	58 (45.0)	90 (59.2)	.001
Ever Married	37 (5.3)	17 (9.0)	6 (4.7)	5 (3.3)	
Level of Education					
Low Education	104 (15.0)	36 (19.0)	22 (17.1)	24 (15.8)	
Medium Education	313 (45.0)	85 (45.0)	62 (48.1)	83 (54.6)	.215
High Education	278 (40.0)	68 (36.0)	45 (34.9)	45 (29.6)	

Note. Younger respondents refer to those 18–40 years, while older respondents refer to those 41 years and above. Ever married respondents refer to those who are divorced, separated and widowed. Low education refers to those that had less than seven years of schooling, medium education refer to those that had less than 13 years of schooling, high education refers to those that had 15 years of schooling or more.

form of violence against women may be based on the fact that it is one of the most “open” form of violence in that the woman receiving the beating may shout and scream for people to hear and come to her rescue. In some cases the beating may also leave bruises and in extreme cases hospitalization that may now get the attention of other people. Nonetheless, it is good to know that many residents of Onitsha regard beating as a form of violence against women because studies by Odimegwu (2001) among the Tiv-speaking people of Middle-belt Nigeria and another by Foster (2002) among the Luhya community in western Kenya seem to suggest that people in the area of study regard wife beating as a sign of love! Other studies have found that many cultures supports the idea that a husband should beat the wife if she misbehaves (Odujinrin, 1993; Okemgbo *et al.*, 2002; Ilika *et al.*, 2002). In the present study, one young male participant said “the act that most constitute violence against women is beating a woman *when the situation does not call for that*” In other words there are circumstances when the situation may call for the abuse. It may be important to investigate such situations where abuse is necessary.

However, the definition of violence against women by the United Nations General Assembly (1993) suggests that beating is only one out of many acts that could be regarded as violence against women. Since the result of the present study seem to suggest that many residents of Onitsha consider beating as the act that most constitute violence against women and the most prevalent in the metropolis, the implications are numerous. The first being that there is need for re-evaluation of public enlightenment programmes on what actually constitute violence against women since physical violence is only a part of it. Krantz and Moreno (2005) are of the view that psychological, mental, or emotional violence are even worse forms of violence against women. These according to them include; preventing a woman from seeing family and friends, ongoing belittlement or humiliation, economic restrictions, violence or threats against cherished objects and other forms of controlling behaviours. They however agree that this form of violence is usually more difficult to define across cultures and countries. This may then be the reason why many of the respondents do not think that denial of rights and maltreatment are forms of violence against women. Findings from the study

and especially supported by qualitative data seem to suggest that sexual assault is very prevalent in Onitsha. In the present study, more younger (86.8%), female (55.3%), single (59.2%) and respondents with not more than 13 years of schooling (54.6%) believe that sexual assault is the commonest form of violence against women. These findings may not be unconnected with recent reports about rise in rape cases in the state as reported by many Nigerian newspapers (Obe, 2012a; Obe 2012b; Onu, 2012; Sani, 2012). This calls for serious intervention of security agencies and others involved in safe guarding the lives of citizens in Onitsha metropolis. The findings from this study have some research and policy implications. For instance, there is need to explore further the precipitating factors of violence against women in Onitsha metropolis. The findings will help policy makers in tackling the problem of violence against women. Similarly, there may be need to organize workshops for various agencies of government that are charged with maintaining law and order. This will provide them with adequate information on what really constitute violence against women and how to handle and manage offenders and victims. A major limitation of the present study is that it was conducted in only one state and one city in Nigeria thereby making generalization difficult. However it is important to know what acts people actually regard as violence against women as the information obtained will form a major basis for making policy on eradication of violence against women in Nigeria.

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