

# African Journal for the Psychological Study of Social Issues

Volume 7 Numbers 1 & 2, April and September, 2004 Edition.

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Journal of the African Society for THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF  
SOCIAL ISSUES <sup>c/o</sup> Dept of Psychology, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

## PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF WIFE ABUSE

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### ABSTRACT

The present study represents an attempt at contributing to literature by addressing an under researched topic of considerable health concern. The study investigated the psychological consequences of wife abuse in three high density residential areas in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Ibadan. Four hundred and eighty women who were visited at home by the researchers participated in the study. Participants' mean age was 35.4 years with a standard deviation of 6.27. Interviews were conducted for participants, using standard and widely used measures of depression, self-esteem and wife abuse. Results indicated that all the participants reported at least some forms of spousal abuse. However, women who reported severe abuse were significantly higher on the depression measure,  $t(2,478) = -10.22; P < .01$  than those who reported mild abuse. Results also showed that old abused women scored significantly lower on depression than young abused women,  $F(1,337) = P < .01$ . Likewise, high education abused women self-reported significantly higher on depression than low education abused women,  $t(2,337) = 5.44$ . On self-esteem, old abused women were significantly higher than their young abused counterparts,  $t(2,337) = P < .05$ . Educational status also had significant effect on self-esteem,  $t(2,337) = 7.10$ , with low education women scoring significantly higher on self-esteem than high education women. The implication of this is that wife abuse negatively impact on abused women's self-esteem and depression, and that the effect is more on young, highly educated women than young, less educated women. The need for concerted effort in campaigns and enlightenment programmes aimed at empowering women and making perpetrators of wife abuse realise why the act should be stopped was highlighted.

### INTRODUCTION

One of the most pervasive, yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world is violence against women and it has been recognised as a profound health problem sapping women's physical and emotional vitality and undermining their confidence (Heise, 1989). The most endemic form of violence against women is wife abuse, or more accurately, abuse of women by intimate male partners (Carillo, 1991). There is ample empirical evidence of severe and ongoing woman abuse in every culture of the world with the exception of a handful of small-scale societies where wife beating rarely occurs (Levison, 1989; Counts, Brown and Jacquelyn, 1992). While surveys documented that women also hit men on occasion, it is usually in self-defence. The vast majority of



injuries resulting from domestic violence are borne by women (Gelles and Cornell, 1990).

It is hard to make precise cross-cultural estimates of wife abuse but the data that do exist give cause for concern. According to Bradley (1988), sixty-seven percent of rural women and fifty-six percent of urban women in Napua New Guinea have been victims of wife abuse. A survey done in Chile indicates that eighty percent of women have suffered physical, emotional or sexual abuse by a male partner; sixty-three percent reported that they were currently being abused (Meltdo, 1989). A study using children as informants reported that fifty-seven percent of wives in san salvador wre beaten by their husbands (Canas, 1990). In a detailed family planning survey of seven hundred and thirty-three women in the Kissi district of Kenya, forty-two percent of participants reported that they were beaten regularly by their husbands (Raikes, 1990). Population-based studies in developed countries also present a gloomy picture of the situation. For example, three to four million American women are battered each year (Koop, 1989) and between twenty-one and thirty percent of American women will be beaten by a partner at least once in their lives (National Committee, 1989). In Norway, twenty-five percent of female gynecology patients have been physically abused by their mates (Schei and Bakketeig, 1989).

The National Planning Commission (2001) reported that wife abuse is still very rampant in Nigeria. According to the report, nineteen percent of household heads admitted that they had beaten their wives. The proportion was higher than thirty percent in seven of the thirty-six states of Nigeria, and as high as fifty percent in Rivers State. Rudeness and disobedience were the commonest reasons given by husbands for wife abuse.

The health consequences of wife abuse are immense. In the United States, wife battery is the greatest single cause of injury to women, accounting for more injury than auto accidents, muggings and rape combined (Stark and Flitcraft, 1991). But perhaps of even more serious consequences is the psychological effect of wife abuse. Wife abuse has been found to be a risk factor for suicidal behaviour in women (Abbott, Johnson, Koziol-McLain and Lowenstein, 1995; Kaslow, Thompson, Meadows, Jacobs, Chance, Gibb, Bornstein, Hollins, Rashid and Phillips, 1998), depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress (Browne, 1993; Goodman, Koss, Fitzgerald, Russo and Keita, 1993) and low self-

esteem (Browne, 1993). In addition to the direct effects of wife abuse on the victims, it has been empirically documented that offsprings of abused or battered wives are at significantly greater risks of becoming abusive partners and parents in the future (Galles and Straus, 1995; Stark and Flitcraft, 1991).

Despite the burgeoning empirical literature on wife abuse on the global scene, little has been done on it in Nigeria and studies have not adequately addressed the psychological consequences of wife abuse. Given, also, that not all women who are victims of partner abuse become depressed or suffer low self-esteem, it is important to investigate certain socio-demographic variables in relation to the role they play in moderating the psychological consequences of wife abuse. Family setting, for instance, have been fingered as a factor that can affect the intensity and extent of wife abuse as well as determine the outcome of the practice (NPC, 2001). Polygamy, particularly when it is practised in non-traditional settings in the urban areas, tend to exacerbate the competition for resources within the family, which leads to tension and conflicts fuelled by perceptions of inequity in the favouring of certain co-wives over others and in the care and treatment of their respective children (NPC; 2001). Other factors found to be associated with wife abuse and its psychological outcome include wife's age and education (Fergusson, Horwood, Hershaw and Shannon, 1986).

The present study represents an attempt at contributing to literature by addressing an under researched topic of considerable health importance. We sought to explore whether severity of abuse will be associated with elevated risks of depression and low self-esteem and whether victims' socio-demographic variables such as age, education and family settling would play significant roles in the psychological consequences of wife abuse.

## METHOD

### PARTICIPANTS

Four hundred and eighty married women residing in Agbowo, Sango and Ojoo in Ibadan North-Local Government Area of Oyo State participated in the study. Participants were visited at home by the researchers during which questionnaire was administered to them. All participants were literate, that is, in term of ability to read and write English language. Mean age of participants was 35.4 years and a standard deviation of 6.27.



Three hundred and twelve of the participants (65%) were in *monogamous relationship* while 168(35%) were in polygamous relationship.

## INSTRUMENT

Socio-demographic characteristics of participants were assessed with items in the section A of the research questionnaire. Such variables include age, marital status, type of marriage and educational status. Abuse status (whether abused by spouse or not) was assessed with Index of Spouse Abuse (ISA) developed by Hudson and McIntosh (1981) to measure the severity or magnitude of physical and non-physical abuse that is being inflicted upon a woman by her spouse. The scale is scored along a five point dimension ranging from "Never" to "very frequently" with higher scores denoting higher magnitude of spousal abuse. Reliability coefficient of 0.90 have been reported for the scale by the authors. Coefficient alpha of .91 was obtained for the scale in this study.

Self-esteem was measured with the Index of self-esteem (Hudson, 1982). ISE is developed to measure the level of self-esteem. The 25-item inventory is designed as the self-evaluative components of self-concept which is the sum total of the self-perceived and the other-perceived views of the self held by a person. The scale is scored along a five-point Likert format with options ranging from "Rarely" to "Most or all of the time". Higher scores above the norm of 32.04 for Nigerian females (Onighaiye, 1996) indicate low self-esteem. The lower an individual's score is below the norm, the higher her self-esteem. Considerable evidence supports the scale's psychometric adequacy, with coefficient alpha of 0.93, and a 2 - hour test-retest coefficient of 0.92 (Hudson, 1982), discriminant validity with Ego Identity scale (Tan, Kendis, Fine & Porac, 1977) coefficient of - 0.42. in this study, coefficients of .89 and .87 for alpha and split-half reliability respectively were obtained for the scale.

Depression was assessed with Beck Depression Inventory (Beck et al; 1965). The BDI is among the longest-established self-rating scales for depressive illness. In its original form it tested for 21 items and was intended to provide a quantitative assessment of the intensity of depression. More recently, a shorter form of BDI has been developed, consisting of 13 items from the original 21. The new version of BDI was used in this study. Each of the items on BDI (Sadness, Pessimism, sense of failure,

dissatisfaction, guilt, self-dislike, self-harm, social withdrawal, indecisiveness, self-image change, work difficulty, and anorexia) is rated on a scale of 0 to 3, thus the total score range of 0-4 indicates "none or minimal depression", 5-7 indicates "mild depression", 8-15 indicates moderate depression" while 16 + indicates severe depression.

PROCEDURE

Data for the study was collected by the researchers over a three-week period. Participants were visited at home during which they were told about the study and their consent to participate in the study was sought. Those who consented to participating were personally interviewed by the researchers, using a structured questionnaire. Some of the participants could not complete the questionnaire immediately, so return visits had to be arranged with such people. Of the 650 questionnaires administered, 563 were returned but 480 were found usable for the study.

RESULTS

Results indicated that all participants reported at least some form of abuse, so rather than dichotomizing participants into abused/non-abused, the "mildly abused/severely abused" dichotomy was adopted. To test the hypothesis that severely abused women would self-report higher on depression but lower on self-esteem than mildly abused women. The result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Independent t-test showing the mean differences in self-esteem and depression among severely-abused and mildly-abused women.

Outcome Variables	Predictor variable	N	X	Sd	df	t	P
Self-esteem	Mildly-abused women	135	29.58	4.43	478	-12.01	<.01
	Severely-abused women	345	41.03	6.21			
Depression	Mildly-abused women	135	11.32	6.58	478	-10.22	<.01
	Severely-abused women	345	17.90	8.44			

- The higher the score, the lower the self-esteem of the individual.



- The higher the score, the higher the depressive symptoms of the individual

As hypothesized, severely-abused women self-reported significantly higher on depression than mildly-abused women,  $t(2,478) = -10.22; P < .01$ . As could be seen from table 1, the mean score of the mildly-abused group was 11.32 on depression, compared to the mean score of 17.90 for the severely-abused group. On self-esteem, results also indicated that mildly-abused women self-reported significantly higher ( $x=29.58$ ) than severely-abused women ( $x=41.03$ ), showing that severity of abuse significantly influenced women's self-esteem,  $t(2,478) = -12.01, P < .01$ .

Influence of certain socio-demographic factors, namely: age, educational status and marriage setting would account for significant variations in the level of depression and self-esteem reported by severely-abused women, two separate 2x2x2 ANOVA were performed. Results of the ANOVA is presented in table 2.

Table 2: 2x2x2 ANOVA showing main and interaction effects of age, educational status and marriage setting on depression levels among severely-abused women.

Variable	SS	df	Ms	F	P
Age (A)	283.98	1	283.98	8.47	<.01
Educational status (B)	196.26	1	196.26	5.44	<.05
Marriage setting (C)	93.51	1	93.51	2.86	N.S
A x B	315.97	1	315.97	11.05	<.01
A x C	159.53	1	159.53	4.05	<.05
B x C	79.67	1	79.67	2.59	N.S
A x B x C	66.09	1	66.09	2.11	N.S
Error	6032.53	337	33.61		
Total	7128.88	344	35.11		

Table 2 showed that age significantly influenced self-reported depression among severely-abused women,  $F(1,337)=8.47; P < .01$ . There was also significant effect of educational status on self-reported depression,  $F(1,337) = 5.44,$

$P < .05$  while marriage setting exerted no significant effect,  $F(1,337) = 2.86$ ;  $P$  n.s. The results of the post hoc showed that old women had a lower mean score ( $x = 13.51$ ) than young women ( $x = 18.38$ ) on depression. Respondents with high educational status however had higher mean score ( $x = 19.80$ ) on depression than those with low educational status ( $x = 12.15$ ). These meant that old women who were severely abused were not as depressed as young women who were abused. Also, severely-abused high educational status women were more depressed than their low educational status counterparts.

In the interaction effects, age and educational status were found to significantly jointly influence depression among severely-abused women,  $F(1,337) = 11.05$ ,  $P < .01$ . Age and marriage setting also significantly influenced self-reported depression among severely-abused women,  $F(1,337) = 4.05$ ,  $P < .05$ . The interaction effect of educational status and marriage setting on depression was however not significant,  $F(1,337) = 2.59$ ,  $P$  n.s. To determine the direction of the significant interaction effects, post hoc mean comparison test, using the least significant difference (LSD) method was carried out. Results indicated that in the interaction effects of age and educational status, the old/low education group had the least mean score on depression ( $x = 10.52$ ). Compared to the old/high education group ( $x = 11.11$ ), young/low education group ( $x = 13.05$ ) and young/high education group ( $x = 18.39$ ). In the age and marriage setting interactions, the old/monogamous group had the least mean score on depression ( $x = 11.85$ ) compared to the old/polygamous ( $x = 13.73$ ), young/monogamous ( $x = 14.66$ ) and young/polygamous ( $x = 18.81$ ) groups. These interactions are depicted in figures 1 and 2.



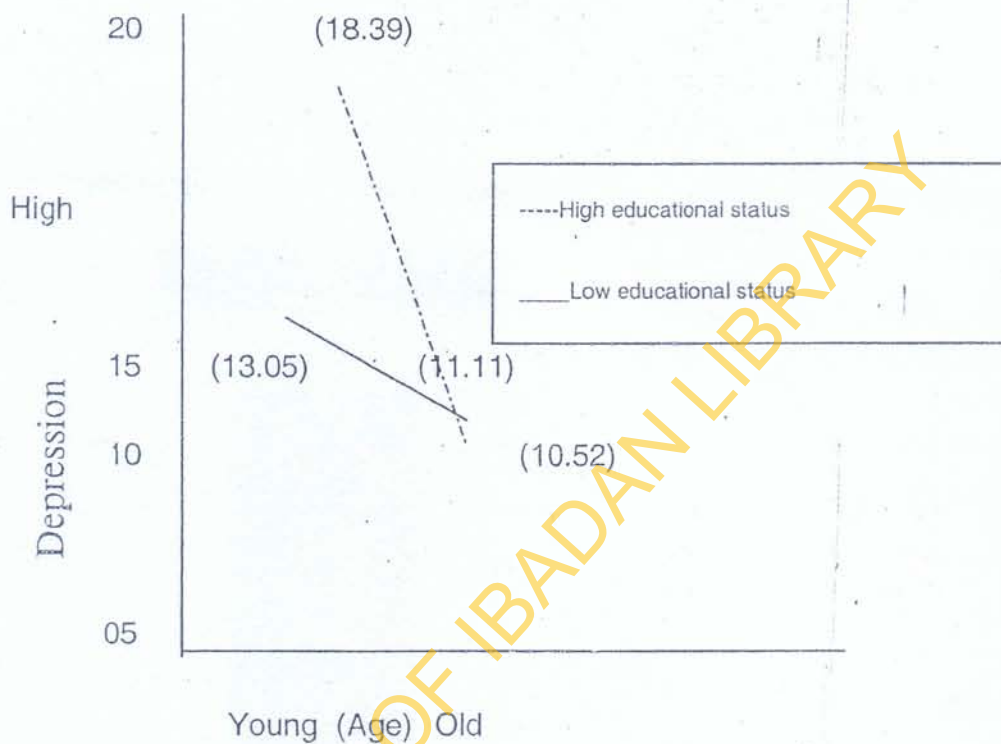


Fig. 1: Two-way interaction of Age x Education on Depression

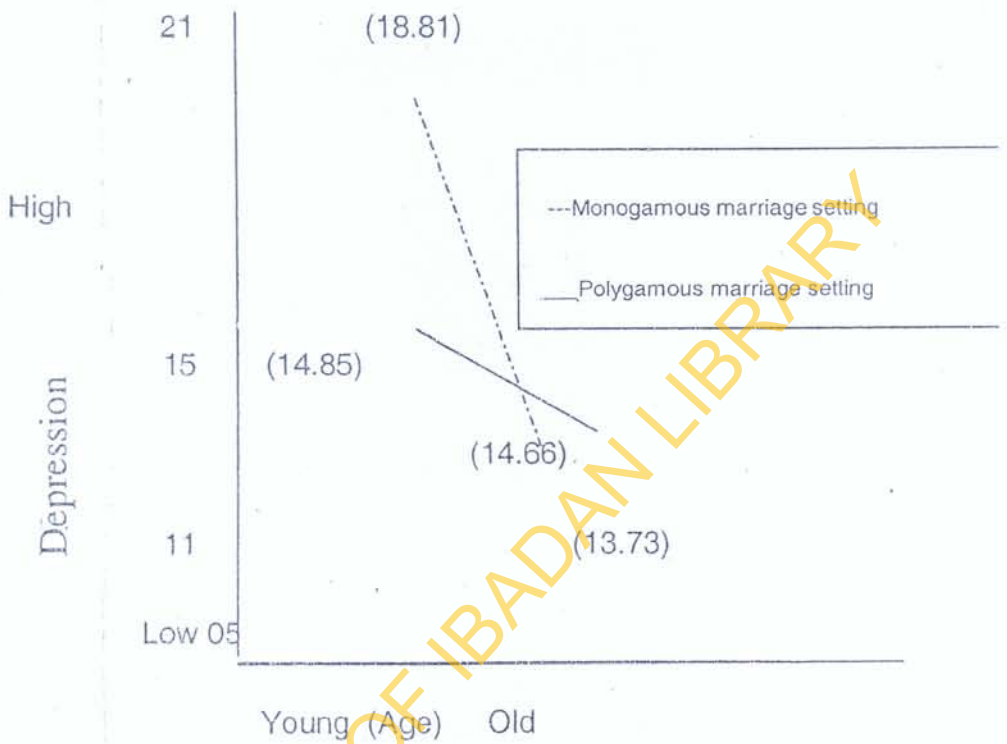


Fig. 2: Two-way interaction of age and marriage setting on depression.

Finally, results showed that the three-way interaction effects were not significant,  $F(1,337)=2.11$ ;  $P$  n.s. With regards to self-reported self-esteem vis-à-vis age, educational status and marriage setting among severely-abused women, the results of the  $2 \times 2 \times 2$  ANOVA conducted showed that there were significant effects of age on self-esteem among severely-abused women,  $F(1,344) = 5.33$ ;  $P < .05$  with young women having a higher means score ( $x = 35.83$ ) compared to old women ( $x = 29.11$ ). This showed that older women reported a significantly higher level of self esteem than young women since high score on the self-esteem measure indicate low self-esteem. Severely abused women with high educational status reported a significantly lower level of self-esteem ( $x = 41.32$ ) than severely-abused women with low education ( $x = 26.38$ ) confirming the significant effect of



educational status on self-esteem among severely-abused women,

$F(1,344) = 7.10; P < .01$ . The effect of marriage setting was not significant,  $F(1,344) = 2.14; p.n.s$ .

Table 3: 2x2x2 ANOVA showing main and interaction effect of age, educational status and marriage setting on self-esteem among severely-abused women.

Variable	SS	Df	Ms	F	P
Age (A)	191.01	1	191.01	5.33	<.05
Educational status (B)	205.14	1	205.14	7.10	<.01
Marriage setting (C)	65.96	1	65.96	2.14	N.S
A x B	168.44	1	168.44	4.85	<.05
A x C	96.43	1	96.43	2.68	N.S
B x C	81.88	1	81.88	2.02	N.S
A x B x C	65.10	1	65.10	1.49	N.S
Error	5981.60	337	28.15		
Total	6394.71	344	30.26		

Results showed that there was a significant interaction effects of age and educational status on self-esteem among severely-abused women,  $F(1,337)=4.85, P < .05$ . The interaction effects of age/marriage setting,  $F(1,337)=2.68; P n.s$ . and that of education/marriage setting,  $F(1,337)=2.02; P n.s$ . were not significant. Results of the post-hoc analysis conducted to determine the direction of the significant interaction effect showed that the old/high education group were highest on self-esteem ( $x=25.19$ ) compared to the young/high education group ( $x=29.85$ ), the old/low education group ( $x=35.40$ ) and the young/low education group ( $x=34.00$ ). The interaction effect of age and education on self-esteem is depicted in figure 3.

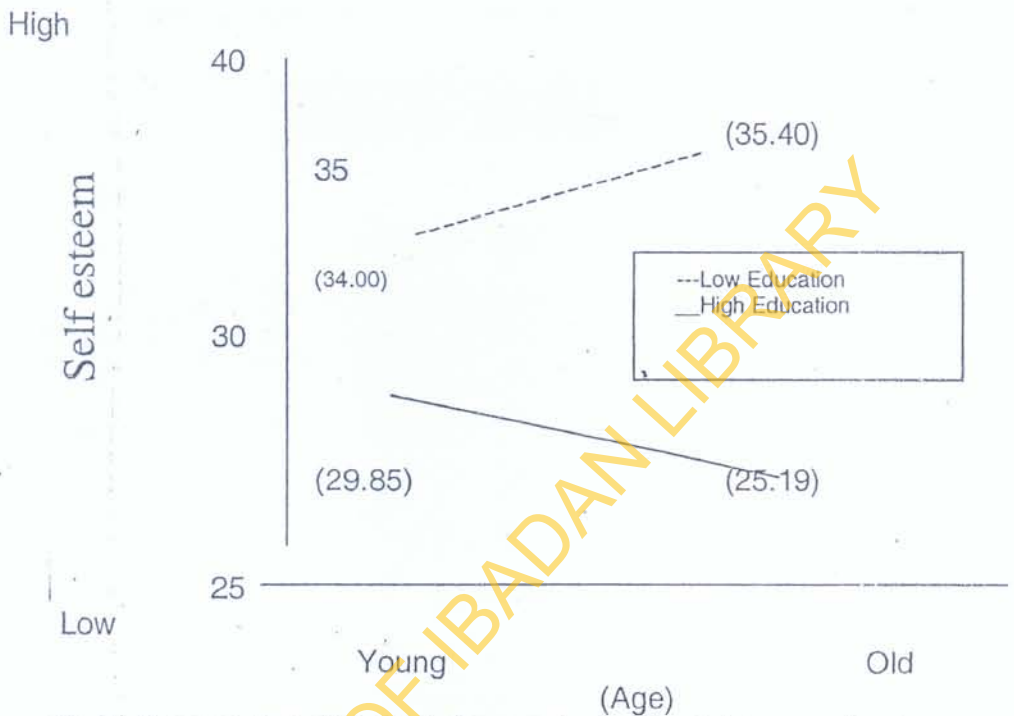


Fig. 3: Two-way interaction effect of age and educational status on self-esteem.

As shown in Figure 3, self-esteem tend to increase steadily with age among the high educational status women while self-esteem tend to decrease slightly with age among the low educational status.

### DISCUSSION

The present study has thrown more light on the issue of wife abuse as a highly prevalent issue of grave consequences in Nigeria. The study found that all respondents reported one form of abuse or the other, a finding that is more startling than those of Bradley (1988), Moltedo (1989), Canas (1990), and Raikes (1990). These researchers had reported high prevalence of wife abuse across many cultures. The National Planning Commission



(2001) even reported that as many as 50% of husbands in certain parts of Nigeria admitted beating their wives, not to mention the other forms of abuse. Results of the present study has confirmed what researchers had earlier reported and that the problem appears to be on the increase. A possible reason for this high rates of wife abuse could be the fact that many forms of abuse are not perceived as such (both by perpetrator and victim) in this part of the world (NPC, 2001). Also, the worsening socio-economic situation in Nigeria could easily have heightened individual's level of frustration, thereby making aggressive behaviour such as wife abuse more likely to occur.

The study also found that severely-abused women, compared to their mildly-abused counterparts, were more depressed and were lower in self-esteem, a finding which corroborates those of Abbott et al. (1995); Brown (1993); Goodman et al; (1993) and Kaslow et al; (1998) that wife abuse is a risk factor for depression, low self-esteem suicidal behaviour, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Age and education of abused women were found to be significantly related to depression and self-esteem, findings that support Fergusson et al's (1986) and NPC (2001) position that age and education can significantly moderate the psychological impact of wife abuse.

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