Prevalence Of Wife’s Rape Among Married Couples In Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: In this study a cross-sectional survey design was used to investigate the prevalence of wife’s rape among married couples in Imo State of Nigeria. Using the purposive sampling method, three hundred and thirty one (331) wives aged between 21 and 66 years from Imo State participated in the study. The Spouse Rape Inventory by Uwaoma, Udeagha & Madukwe (2011), was used to measure the incidence of wife’s rape. Frequency tables were used to describe the prevalence rate of wife’s rape, while ANOVA statistics was used to test the study’s hypotheses. The results indicated that there is an increasing prevalence rate of wife’s rape among couples, who are not educated and those whose marriage is less than eleven years old. Salary earning had no significant influence on a married woman’s experience of wife’s rape. Discussion highlighted the importance of counseling workshops aimed at improving women understanding of the negative influence of husband rape and encouraging them to report any incidence of such to appropriate authorities.

Key words: Prevalence, Wife’s Rape, Rape, Violence.

INTRODUCTION

Imo State is one of the five states that make up south-eastern Nigeria, predominantly made of the Ibos, a major tribe in Nigeria. A marital relationship is a binding contract upon the individuals involved (Madukwe, 2010). Marriage among the South-Eastern Nigerians is a union between two individuals (in recent times, two consenting adults) that enables intimate sexual and emotional relationship. It is socially, traditionally and oftentimes religiously recognized. Ordinarily, marriage is expected to be beneficial to both partners in areas like better physical and mental health, better sex lives and more economic resources. Nevertheless, when culture, gender and socioeconomic status are considered these benefits may change. For example, marriage between two poor people does not have any economic benefits and in most Igbo cultures men tend to benefit more, both in physical health and sexual satisfaction. A woman’s benefit in marriage mostly rests on the emotional climate of the marriage. Marriage is a highly valued institution in the South-eastern part of Nigeria. The onus of making a marriage successful within this area rests largely on women who sacrifice a lot to keep its sanctity, to avoid rebuke and dishonour, as well as the disgrace of divorce or expulsion from their marital homes. To maintain a successful marriage in this regard means, in effect, providing sex whenever their husbands demand it (Isiramen, 2003). This unconditional sexual provision entails spouse rape.

Rape among married couples is not about wanting sex or love or passion but about control. Rape is a very personal and intimate traumatic experience that leaves the victim helpless and most times with lasting feelings of self disgust, shame and guilt. Early definitions of spouse abuse referred only to the physical injury a husband perpetrated against his wife (Gelles 1974; Martin, 1976). Recent researches have broadened this definition to include sexual abuse, marital rape, emotional or psychological abuse, and coercion (Uwaoma, Udeagha & Madukwe, 2011). The United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women presently defines domestic violence as "any act of gender based violence that 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" (Fikree and Bhatti, 1999).

Though individual reactions to rape may differ, no one cherishes the violation experienced during the rape act. Rape can be broadly divided into two: stranger rape and marital rape. Stranger rape is a one-off act of sexual violence against a person which is always accompanied by physical violence and when it happens, there is no doubt as to what is happening. On the other hand, the circumstances surrounding marital rape are different from those obtainable in the above named type of rape. Marital rape cuts across physical and sexual violence to destroy trust which is the basic ingredient of a satisfactory marital relationship. It is a betrayal of the core essence of marriage. In marriage, apart from intimate knowledge of one another, the couple shares history, home and most times children. The act of marital rape shatters the unifying bonds of love, companionship and the fundamental trust on which the relationship is built. Marital rape is very destructive because it questions every understanding one has not only of the partner and the marriage, but of oneself. It introduces ferments and maintains the feelings of betrayal, humiliation, doubt and above all confusion in such marriages. Unlike stranger
rape, marital rape must be understood in the context of abusive relationship, that is, in the context of physical and emotional abuse. It is also notable that while stranger rape will always involve physical violence, marital rapes mostly involve coercion and only enough force to control the victim (known as 'force-only' rapes) and are recurrent.

**Theories of Wife's' Rape:**
Some theories like the social learning theory, social situational/stress and coping theory, general systems theory, resource theory, exchange/social control theory, and patriarchy have been propounded to explain partner abuse and neglect. However, in this research paper the authors dwelt on Social Learning theory, Resource theory of family violence and the Patriarchy theory as guides.

1. **Social learning theory:** Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) proposes that individuals who experienced violence are more likely to use violence in their homes than those who have experienced little or no violence. Children who either experience violence themselves or who witness violence between their parents are more likely to use violence when they grow up. This finding has been interpreted to support the idea that family violence is learned.

2. **The resource theory of family violence:** This assumes that all social systems (including the family) rest to some degree on force or the threat of force. The more resources (social, personal, and economic) a person can command, the more force that individual can muster. However, according to Goode (1971), the more resources a person actually has, the less that person will actually use force in an open manner. Thus, a husband who wants to be the dominant person in the family, but has little education, a job low in prestige and income, and lacks interpersonal skills may choose to use violence to maintain the dominant position.

3. **The patriarchy theory:** Its’ central thesis is that economic and social processes operate directly and indirectly to support a patriarchal (male dominated) social order and family structure. The central theoretical argument is that patriarchy leads to the subordination and oppression of women and causes the historical pattern of systematic violence directed against wives (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Pagelow 1984; Yllo 1983, 1993). The patriarchy theory finds the source of family violence in society at large and how it is organized, as opposed to within individual families or communities.

**Empirical Review:**
For Africans, like most cultures, religion and traditions of the region seem to support female subjugation by their male partners. The three basic religions (Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion) have stated rules that support this notion. For example the Bible in Ephesians chapter five enjoins wives to be submissive to their husbands; a background on which evil or violent minded men stand to abuse their wives while docile women also stand on this same portion of the bible to accept and even expect such dehumanizing acts from their male partners. Under the Shariah, the position on spousal rape is not well spelt out. While the Qur'an urges submission by wives, the Hadith prohibits an intercourse of a man and his wife during menstruation. Still, marital rape is suffered in silence. Fear of beating and rape keeps many women from questioning their husbands’ sexual escapades. Submission frequently reaps a death sentence: many women contract AIDS as a result of coerced sex (Isiramen, 2003). Besides, this maltreatment is intensified and carried out without fear on the perpetrator’s part (Current legislation may penalize the woman or girl who has been raped rather than the perpetrator) especially in cultures (e.g. Ibo and Hausa) where a woman’s return to her maiden home is not favorably looked upon. Even the Christian marital vows made by partners serve as a source of bondage for female victims of marital rape – having vowed to love, cherish, honor and obey in everything including sex. The question remains, does having said I Do, give a partner an unlimited sexual right?

In spite of the different cultural background, the conditions in India are similar to those found in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Prevalence rates of wife abuse are high in Africa, though many government organizations have promised to promote the full and equal role of women in society. Domestic violence in Egypt remains a significant social problem (Refaat, et al., 2001). In the Meskanena Woreda region of Ethiopia, 45 percent of women were estimated to have been victimized by an intimate partner, and 10 percent had been victimized in the twelve months preceding the study (WHO, 2002). Odujinrin (1993) reports that wife beating has prevalence rate of 31.4 percent in Nigeria. In the Kisii District of Kenya, the prevalence of physical abuse within current relationships appears to be 42 percent (WHO, 2002). A twelve-month prevalence rate of wife abuse for Kigali, Rwanda, in 1990 was 21 percent (WHO, 2002). 40.4 percent of Uganda's women residing in the Lira and Masaka Districts reported being abused by a current husband or boyfriend (WHO, 2002). In addition, research has documented that domestic violence is pervasive in South Africa despite government efforts to reduce its prevalence (Kim and Mmatshilo, 2002).

In this study, young marriages refer to marriages that are less than 11 years old while old marriages refer to marriages that are 11 years and above. Also educated wives in this study refers to wives who are university graduates or have similar qualifications while wives with less qualifications though they may be employed are
considered as non-educated. Salary earning wives are those involved in organized labor, whose payment is dependent on a structured salary scheme.

Though Nigeria is among the few nations of the world where wife’s rape constitutes an exception to rape as an offence, the incidence of rape is becoming very rampant. This study focused on Ibo wives within Imo state of south eastern Nigeria, who are currently living with their husbands and are assumed to still have active sexual relationship with them. Husbands in this study refer to men that have been living together with their wives for at least a year with or without children. The general objective of this paper is to investigate the prevalence of wife’s rape among married couples of south-eastern Nigerians. Specifically, this paper sets out to:

Investigate the differences in the prevalence of wife’s rape among young and old marriages, examine the differences in the prevalence of wife’s rape among salary earning wives and non-salary earning wives, and investigate differences to the prevalence of wife’s rape among educated and non-educated wives.

Hypothesis:
1: There will be no statistically significant prevalence of wife’s rape among married women in Imo state of Nigeria.
2: There will be no significant difference in the prevalence rate of wife’s rape between educated and non-educated wives
3: There will be no significant difference in the prevalence rate of wife’s rape between salary earning wives and non salary earning wives
4: There will be no significant difference in the prevalence rate of wife’s rape between young marriages and old marriages

Method:
Participants:
350 participants were purposively selected from the rural and urban areas of Imo state. The adoption of the purposive non-probability sampling technique was to enable the researchers have a reasonable representation of married women still having active sexual relationship with their spouses (husbands). The age range of the participants was between 21 – 66years with a mean age of 39.06 (SD= 8.286).

Instruments:
The spouse Rape Inventory was used for data collection. It is a 22-item likert type scale which generates information on the sexual abuse of wives by their spouses as grouped into, physical abuse, verbal abuse and emotional abuse. The instrument was developed and factorially validated in Nigeria (Uwaoma, Udeagha &Madukwe, 2011) with a factor loading range between 0.48 and 0.98., internal stability of 0.84 using Spearman-Brown Coefficient alpha, and domain of validity estimated at 0.92.

Procedure:
Ethical approval was obtained from the ethical committee of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Imo State University, Owerri, and oral informed consent was elicited from participants after a brief interview (2mins) was conducted to ascertain the eligibility of the candidates and at the same time debrief them on the purposes of the research. The inventory was administered to participants after informed consent was obtained. Data was collected by researchers and the scale was administered on a face-to-face basis over a period of 3months. Though a written test, assistance was given to the not-so-literate participants by administering the test orally to them. All eligible wives within the localities where the study was conducted were included in the study.

Design:
A cross sectional survey study was employed.

Data Analysis:
The collected data were described with the frequency and percentages tables and analyzed employing the Univariate analysis of Variance of the SPSS II version 15

Result:
From the frequency table, only 27.8% of the total sample reported any level of sexual abuse while 72.2% reported no form of sexual abuse reflecting low prevalence rate of wife rape among married couples in Imo state, Nigeria. Specifically, among those who reported experiencing sexual abuse, 21.2% reported mild abuse, 5.7% reported moderate abuse while 0.9% reported experiencing severe spouse abuse.
Table 1: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Participants Scores on the SRI Scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SRI Scores</th>
<th>Levels of sexual abuse</th>
<th>Frequency(N)</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-43</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-65</td>
<td>mild</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-87</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-110</td>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>331</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*N= 331.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Wife’s Rape Across Educational Level, Salary Earning and Marital Years’ Factors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors/Level of wife rape</th>
<th>Uneducated</th>
<th>Educated</th>
<th>Salaried</th>
<th>No-salary</th>
<th>Young marriage (1-10yrs)</th>
<th>Old marriage (11yrs-above)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22-43 none (%)</td>
<td>5 (26.32)</td>
<td>234(75)</td>
<td>173(55)</td>
<td>66(44.1)</td>
<td>106(51.15)</td>
<td>131(73.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44-65 mild (%)</td>
<td>7(36.84)</td>
<td>63(20.19)</td>
<td>42(18.34)</td>
<td>28(17.34)</td>
<td>30(14.47)</td>
<td>40(22.35)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66-87 moderate (%)</td>
<td>6(31.58)</td>
<td>13(4.17)</td>
<td>13(5.68)</td>
<td>65.88</td>
<td>12(7.89)</td>
<td>7(3.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88-110 severe (%)</td>
<td>1(5.26)</td>
<td>2(0.64)</td>
<td>1(0.44)</td>
<td>2(1.96)</td>
<td>2(1.32)</td>
<td>1(0.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>19(100)</td>
<td>312(100)</td>
<td>102(100)</td>
<td>229(100)</td>
<td>152(100)</td>
<td>179(100)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above result indicates a higher incidence of wife’s rape among the uneducated wives with 36.84% reporting mild abuse and 31.57% reporting moderate abuse compared to the educated wives where only 20.19% reported mild abuse and 4.17% reported moderate abuse.

The table further reveals that in the category of salary earning and none salary earning wives, there is a slight difference in the degree of wives’ rape reported with 27.45% and 5.88% of none salary earning wives reporting mild and moderate abuse respectively, while the salary earning wives reported 18.34% and 5.68% for mild and moderate abuse respectively.

Finally, significant percentage differences was evident in the following results; 30 (19.74%) out of the 152 wives in young marriages reported mild abuse while 12 (7.89%) reported moderate abuse. On the other hand, 40 (22.35%) out of the 179 wives in old marriages reported mild abuse while 7(3.91%) reported moderate abuse. In comparison, women who are in the second decade of their marriage appear to be experiencing less sexual abuse than those in recent marriage.

Table 3: ANOVA Summary of the Influence of Salary, Marital Years and Education on the Prevalence of Spouse Abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salaried</td>
<td>.354</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.354</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MaritalYrs</td>
<td>1301.512</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1301.512</td>
<td>6.054*</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EduLevel</td>
<td>2575.284</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2575.284</td>
<td>11.979*</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MaritalYrs * EduLevel</td>
<td>1604.215</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1604.215</td>
<td>7.462*</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried * MaritalYrs</td>
<td>435.988</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>435.988</td>
<td>2.028</td>
<td>.155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried * EduLevel</td>
<td>8.627</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.627</td>
<td>.040</td>
<td>.841</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salaried * MaritalYrs * EduLevel</td>
<td>358.763</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>358.763</td>
<td>1.669</td>
<td>.197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error</td>
<td>69441.704</td>
<td>323</td>
<td>214.990</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>557347.000</td>
<td>331</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrected Total</td>
<td>77785.668</td>
<td>330</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * =p<.05

This result shows a significant difference F(1, 330)= 6.054, p<.05, in the prevalence of wife rape between young and old marriages, this finding supports the first hypothesis and consistent with past research findings that the older the marriage the lesser the incidence of wife rape. Past research has found higher incidence of wife’s rape among newly married couples.

However, result F (1, 330)= .002, p>.05, was inconclusive for hypothesis two, showing no significant difference in the prevalence of wife’s rape between salary earning and none salary earning wives in the state.

Findings also show a significant difference F (1, 330)= 11.979, p<.05, in the prevalence of wife rape between educated and none educated wives in south-eastern Nigeria, a finding that supports the third hypothesis and suggests that the higher the level of education a woman acquires the lesser the degree of wife rape likely to occur in the marriage.

There was also a significant interaction between marital years and education in the prevalence of spouse abuse. This result F (1, 330)= 7.46, p<.05, indicates that educated women who have been married for eleven years or more are less likely to experience wife’s rape in their marital relationships. Further levels of computation F (1,330)= 2.028,p>.05, revealed no significant interaction between salary earning and marital years and F (1,330)= .040,p>.05, between salary earning and level of education; also there was no significant
relationship $F(1,330)=1.669, p>.05$, between salary earning, marital years and level of education at the third level of interaction. These interaction results further reflected the fact salary has no relationship whatsoever with the incidence of wife rape among south-eastern Nigeria wives.

**Discussion:**

Generally, the low level of wife’s rape reported in this study could be attributed to the shame attached to such experiences by women in this part of Nigeria. Results of the study revealed that there are no appreciable reported cases of wife’s rape as indicated by the percentage of reported cases of wife’s rape. Thus, the first hypothesis stating that there will be no significant prevalence rate of wife’s rape among married women in Imo state was accepted. According to the result of the study, 239 (72.2%) of the participants reported no form of spousal rape while only 92(27.8%) indicated being raped by their spouse. Even among those who reported being rapped, only 70(21.2%) reported mild wife’s rape; 19(5.7%) reported moderate wife’s rape and 3(0.9%) reported severe wife’s rape. The low level of the reported cases of wife’s rape by the participants may not be unconnected to their traditionally and religiously conditioned mind sets about the sexual relationship between a man and the wife. For instance, Igbo people have a tradition of total submission of a wife to the husband, as well as accepting the husband’s advances irrespective of the way and method such advances are made. As predominantly Christians, they seem to be greatly influenced by the biblical injunction that a woman should be submissive to the husband at all times. The opinion here is that because of this level of conditioning they may not be willing to evaluate most wives’ rape in the true meaning of rape. They consider such cases as normal and may regard reporting such as drawing unnecessary attention to their private lives which might be negatively rewarded by the social norms concerning the culturally and religiously induced appropriate relationship between a man and the wife. The findings here obviously run contrary to what could be obtained in most European countries. Irrespective of religious indoctrinations about the nature of sexual relationship between a man and the wife, culturally their orientation is quite different from that of Africans. The culture of individualism accords an average European woman a lot of liberty even in marriage. The idea of being totally submissive to one’s husband is not culturally conditioned. Even from their social interactions and observations, a woman has absolute right to say no to sexual advances by the husband of which any attempt towards forceful sex will result to both social and legal litigations.

Focusing on the result of the second hypothesis of this study concerning the contribution of level of education on the vulnerability to spouse rape, the F statistics at $F(1, 330)= 11.979, p<.05$ showed that the second hypothesis was rejected. According to the statistical analysis, 234 (75%) of the educated participants did not report incidence of wife’s rape as against 5 (26.32%) of the non-educated participants. Also more number of uneducated participants in the study reported incidence of wife’s rape than the educated participants in this study. The results therefore emphasize the relevance of education in enhancing wives’ respect by their husbands as well as the disposition to be assertive and total liberation from some culturally conditioned beliefs and mindsets which are detrimental to enhancing the dignity of women in Africa. The rate at which African women will suffer in silence in the hands of their husbands will be greatly reduced by improving their level of formal education. Such level of liberation and assertiveness is directly connected with the high rate of scores recorded in this study. Women are willing to speak out or even seek legal redress in respect to spouse rape owing to their level of enlightenment. Obviously, such level of education must have enhanced their financial independence which would assist them even if the marriage breaks up as a result of wife’s rape. It could be possible that spouses of these educated wives are also literate and well exposed and as such accord them their due respect and sexual freedom. Such educated husbands exercise their sexual passion in a mature and decent manner since proper education goes with a demonstrable sense of responsibility, empathy, self control and touch of decency.

The result of insignificant difference found among salary earners and non-salary earning participants show that money has no influence on the prevalence of wife’s rape among women in Imo state of Nigeria. Though the difference in prevalence among the group was not significant, the table of percentage reveals a higher occurrence of wife’s rape among the non-salary earning wives as against the salary earning wives. This finding does not agree with a generally held notion that a wife’s financial independence could induce some feelings of freedom from the command and control tendencies of most Igbo husbands as well as could, predispose some wives toward culturally interpreted disrespectful behaviors. This further proves that the efforts to properly position the woman or wife in Igbo societies where the male is dominant is yet to yield expected results. In some Igbo communities, the wife is still considered as the ‘husband’s property’. This socio-cultural phenomenon is worsened when the woman/wife has no financial contribution in the family, a factor that explains the percentage difference in prevalence rate found among non-salary earning wives.

Finally, the number of years in marriage as a factor that could influence the rate at which wives could report incidence of spouse rape was significant which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The result indicated that the number of years a marriage has lasted plays a role in the likelihood of wife’s rape occurring. Comparatively, the results of the study show that those participants whose marriages are older appear to be experiencing less incidence of spouse rape than those whose marriages are younger. It may also be an evidence
to prove that the older a woman’s marriage is, the more the woman develops courage and liberty to question some obnoxious traditional practices and mind set about a woman’s position in her marriage. Also, for the older marriages, adjustments have been made, and greater understanding and maturity established. Also empty nest issues leading to greater appreciation of each other, physiological and muscular break downs, health challenges and reduction in physical attractiveness which highly correlates with sexual activities interact to favor the older marriage partners. From the trend of the results gathered in this study and the literature reviewed, there are evidences of spouse rape. However, the problem of lack of report and publicity (evidenced in this study) of its occurrence may be linked to cultural/traditional beliefs concerning marriage as well as the influence of Christianity. Even other religious groups like Muslims, may not condone a woman or wife from their group participating in a study like this let alone reporting incidence of husband’s rape. Such a woman may be sanctioned, if not killed.

Implications of the Study:

From the results in this study, it is obvious that wife’s rape is prevalent in this part of Nigeria though enshrouded in cultural norms that elicits continued silence among married women despite heightened level of education and increased exposure of Igbo women as a result of civilization and modern developments. This study therefore has implications for Marital and Family Counselors, Women Leaders, women affairs section of our governments, Educationists, Law makers, Religious leaders as well as non-governmental organizations involved in women affairs. These implications can be itemized as follows;

1. A grassroots enlightenment program that involves relevant bodies as mentioned above must be established, to teach Igbo wives about the negative influence of sexual abuse by their husbands.
2. These wives must be encouraged to speak out and report any incidence of abuse in their marriages to appropriate authorities. Counseling and other behavior changing strategies must be employed to help women change their attitude, perception and beliefs concerning marital rape and other marital injustices leveled on wives by their husbands.
3. It is also important to note that these women would be encouraged to report future cases of abuse; laws in this area implemented and convicted husbands punished.
4. Government and Non-governmental organizations should also develop strategies that will help eliminate societal and cultural standards that help to maintain gender inequalities and reduce women's ability to speak out against, or report abuse, challenge or reject ideas about violence.

Limitations of the Study:

The major limitation faced by the researchers in this study was that due to the heightened sense of shame with which wives in our culture perceive wife’s rape only a few agreed to respond to the questionnaire and even fewer reported having experienced such in their marriage. However, motivational counseling and relaxation techniques were used to calm them and get them to participate in the study.

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