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**Findings:** From participants' responses, we observed that the Ikwerres have a patriarchal family culture that encourages domestic violence. It was also observed that the Christian religion advocates absolute submission of the woman to the man. Education was not seen to have much effect in curbing domestic violence.

**Conclusion:** Women's autonomy and personhood is eroded by culture and religion. Educating women alone will not help reduce domestic violence. Men also need to be educated. Culture that encourages domestic violence should be abolished. Religious leaders need to understand the negative effect of their teachings. Society needs to implement laws on domestic violence.

**Keywords:** culture, domestic violence, education, nigeria, religion.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the years domestic violence on women has become a public health issue (Gomes *et al*, 2015). Although domestic violence is a global issue, the

degree varies from country to country and from culture to culture with the developing countries being the most affected (Awusi *et al*, 2019; Sukeri & Normanizeza, 2017). In Nigeria, domestic violence, have steadily increased and there is an urgent need to address it (Amole *et al*, 2016; Oluremi, 2015).

Domestic violence against women has been defined as "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including, battering, sexual abuse of female and children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation, killing of spouse, and other traditional practices harmful to women" (Garcia-Mereno *et al*, 2006; Oluremi, 2015; WHO 2013; WHO, 2021). Study on domestic violence by WHO found that women who are abused by their intimate partners rather than by strangers have 50-70% gynaecological, and central nervous system related issues, among others (Campbell *et al*, 2002; Noughani & Mohtashami, 2011). The significance of such study brings to light how the violence that takes place in the least expected places are often not given enough attention. Society hardly takes note of these women who are most harmed when setting up a protective system.

Researchers have identified certain demographic factors like young marital age, low educational status, alcohol, drugs, gender of children, extended family, and women's financial dependence as responsible for domestic violence (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Gage and Thomas, 2017). Women who marry at a young age, women who do not have the required number of male children, women who are financially dependent on their husbands and who are not educated, as well as women from poor backgrounds have a high risk of suffering domestic violence (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016). On the other hand, educated

women, women who are financially dependent, have male children, and are of high socioeconomic status are less likely to suffer domestic violence, although not totally ruled out because in their bid to remain married, escape being stigmatized for being single, separated or divorced, these women endure all sort of violence in the family (Lasong *et al*, 2020; Oluremi, 2015). Some researchers have also observed in their findings that domestic violence affects women of all races, irrespective of economic and educational status (Arisi & Oromareghake, 2011; Noughami & Mohtashami, 2011). They observe that cultural practices not only fuel domestic violence, they also erode women's autonomy and personhood. Their findings show that education has no effect on domestic violence (Arisi & Oromareghake, 2011; Noughami & Mohtashami, 2011).

Studies also show how women's health is adversely affected, as well as those of their children, ranging from emotional to psychological trauma (Al-Tawil *et al*, 2012; Igbolekwu *et al*, 2021). Women suffer all sorts of abuse in their homes; rape, emotional and psychological abuse, physical violence and sometimes death, sexual violence, honour killing, dowry related abuse like in India (Andarge & Shiferaw, 2018; Chhabra, 2018; Igbolekwu *et al*, 2021; Oluremi, 2015). Although both genders suffer domestic violence, the vast majority are women (Bakara *et al*, 2010; Duran & Eraslam, 2019). In societies that are patriarchal in structure, most women are forced to hide the domestic violence they suffer in order to remain married and escape victimization from the family and the society because divorce, separation and being single is frowned upon in the family and in the society (Al-Tawil *et al*, 2012; Igbolekwu *et al*, 2021).

Naturally, no man is born with the traits of being violent to women but men acquire this attitude through socialization (Hayati *et al*, 2014). Generally, men's adherence to sexist, patriarchal, alcohol, religion, and culture of disrespect for women have contributed to domestic violence (Hayati *et al*, 2014). Some researchers have linked the fact that men are trained to exhibit masculinity in their homes, to exert authority, and be in control of their homes. This training of

masculinity to some extent is one of the reasons for domestic violence (Duran & Eraslam, 2019). Also, male domination in economic matters and in decision making in the family is one high factor that promotes domestic violence in the family. Masculinity predisposes men to the concept of man's perception of a set of characteristics he ought to have, an expectation of how a man should behave in a given culture and as it relates to a given situation (Hayati *et al*, 2014, Duran & Eraslam, 2019). Domestic violence does not only erode the autonomy of women, it also prevents them from achieving their God given potentials (Ferrari *et al*, 2016). Increase in domestic violence is greatly affecting the productivity of women (Benebo *et al*, 2014). A career woman who is constantly abused at home cannot be productive at her place of work because of exhaustion, fear, mental and emotional trauma. (Benebo *et al*, 2014).

Domestic violence is not limited only to women in the family; children are also affected by it, and this impacts negatively on them (Harper *et al*, 2018; Igbolekwu *et al*, 2021). Domestic violence affects children's education, their overall wellbeing and it also has long-term developmental consequences (Benebo *et al*, 2014, Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016, Andarge & Shiferaw, 2018). Indirect abuse occurs as a result of children witnessing inter-parental violence and hearing what their mothers go through in the hands of their fathers (Kocacik & Dogan, 2006). Some researchers observed that witnessing domestic violence in childhood often turns the child into a violent person from a victim to a perpetrator, thereby continuing the circle of domestic violence (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Benebo *et al*. 2014: Lloyd, 2018; Kocacik & Dogan, 2006). Given the enormous negative impact of domestic violence on women, and children, if domestic violence must be tackled effectively, it must be treated as an issue of public health crisis because it is the family that translates and collectively becomes the society. Domestic violence has a ripple effect which can permanently affect the family and society. Coincidentally some critical influencers of society like education, culture, and religion are key predisposing factors to domestic violence.

### 1.1 Education

Education is defined as a continuous process of learning where individuals or a people acquire knowledge by interacting with one another and by moving from place to place. Education is of two types, formal and informal education. In formal education, learning is done in schools with teachers and students, while informal education learning is done by interacting with people, and by travelling (Harper *et al*, 2018). Education is a great enabler of empowerment. It is an important tool necessary for bringing people and countries together, as well as improving lives and societies for the purposes of development (Jejeebhoy, 1996). Unfortunately, low income countries do not have the adequate resources and infrastructures needed for every citizen to attain educational status. Given the inherently patriarchal system in the world, especially in developing countries, male children are generally preferred over female children (Adjowanou & LeGrand, 2014; Alabi *et al*, 2014; Enaibe, 2012; Nsirim-Worlu, 2011). Thus, having deprived the female child of an education and giving her out in marriage at what is deemed an early age to be married, she is literally like one who is defenceless and has to fight off attacks (Nsirim-Worlu, 2011; Jegede & Odumosu, 2003; Sarah, 2016).

### 1.2 Culture

The culture of absolute respect for men has greatly increased domestic violence (Bakara *et al*, 2010; Princewill *et al*, 2019). The Ikwerre culture of the Rivers people of Nigeria, West Africa, advocates that women must be totally submissive to men and therefore succumb to their authority (Okemini & Adekola, 2012; Princewill *et al*, 2019). This submission is even more when the woman is married. The culture of bride price payment in Nigeria automatically transfers the rights of a woman to her husband; hence married women in the Ikwerre culture are seen as the property of their husbands.

The feeling of being someone's property without having rights to one's self affects the woman psychologically and emotionally (Bakere *et al*, 2010, Princewill *et al*, 2017). Ironically, older women who should change the narrative, given

what they have gone through in the past, help to enforce this patriarchal culture of absolute respect for men (Princewill *et al*, 2019). A woman who complains about domestic abuse from her husband is viewed as a difficult and disobedient woman who was not well trained by her mother. Therefore, in order to remain married, so as not to put her family to shame, a woman endures all sorts of domestic abuse, even if it leads to her death. The Ikwerre culture will prefer the death of a daughter in her husband's house rather than being divorced or separated. The Ikwerre marriage culture mirrors the situation with most other tribes in Nigeria. The situation is even worse in the northern part of the country where polygyny is still very much in vogue and the marriage of underage girls permissible (Bakara *et al*, 2010; Nsirim-Worlu, 2011). In most African cultures, women do not have the right to speak without the permission of their husbands (Aniaka, 2013; Kingah & Knigah, 2010). They are to be seen and not heard. Nigerian culture is characterised by patriarchy and well established discriminatory male centered culture (Princewill *et al*, 2017). The upbringing of boys and girls is very discriminatory to the disadvantages of the girl child; unequal gender power relationship which favours the boy in a patriarchal society exposes adolescent girls to forced early marriage and this impact negatively on the girls (Kingah & Kingah, 2010; Nsirim-Worlu, 2011). These young girls in marriage become vulnerable to domestic violence due to the huge age gap between them and their husbands.

### 1.3 Religion

The Christian faith posits that in the eyes of God, men and women are equal (Bakara *et al*, 2010; Igbolekwu *et al*, 2021). This belief is derived from the Biblical injunctions that;

"All baptized in Christ, you have all clothed yourselves in Christ and there are no more distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, but all of you are one in Christ Jesus" Gal. 3:28.

"And you are all brothers and sisters" Matt. 23:8.

This belief of equality is further strengthened by the doctrine of faith as espoused in The Vatican II where it is pronounced that “Since all men possess a rational soul and are created in God's likeness, since they have the same nature and origin, have been redeemed by Christ and enjoy the same divine calling and destiny, the basic equality of all must receive increasingly greater recognition. True, all men are not alike from the point of view of varying physical power, biological make up, and the diversity of intellectual and moral resources. Nevertheless, with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth, it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honoured. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men” (Pope Paul VI, 1965).

These doctrinal positions are far from reality as the theme of the woman remains disputed in contemporary theological and social debate. The sacred writings of the two Abrahamic faiths (Christianity and Islam) have been interpreted in ways that support patriarchal social relations (Bakara et al, 2010; Onoh et al, 2013). There are two versions of the story of creation according to the Christian Holy Bible as captured at the beginning of the book of Genesis. According to the scriptures, in Genesis 1:27 “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female created he them”. This account of creation supports the equality of man and woman before God.

The second version of creation as reported in Genesis 2 surmise that Adam was made from 'the dust of the ground' when God breathed life into him and that Eve was created out of one of Adam's ribs to provide company and help for Adam. See Genesis 2:22, “And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man,”

Some Christians see these two versions of story to be contradictory, some people think that the story goes on to give more detail about the creation of humans seen as two individuals; Adam and Eve. Preachers rely on the second version to circumvent the equality of sexes and provide the foundation for discrimination and segregation against women.

Deeply etched within the Bible text are several other scriptural verses that seem to support and promote patriarchy and subjugation of women especially as wives. These verses are routinely recited at Christian teachings, catechism and accepted as church dogma (Nsirim-Worlu, 2011). They are frequently referenced at Christian worships and preaching especially during solemnization of marriages. A few of such examples will suffice (quotations are taken from the New International Version Bible);

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11 Verse 8-9 “For the man is not of the woman, but the woman for the man. Neither was the man created for the woman.”

Verse 13- 16 “But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.”

Ephesian 5 vs 22-24 <sup>22</sup>“Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. <sup>23</sup>For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Saviour. <sup>24</sup>Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”

Colossian 3 vs 18 “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.”

1 Peter 3 vs 1-6 “Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, <sup>2</sup>when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. <sup>3</sup>Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. <sup>4</sup>Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. <sup>5</sup>For this is the way the

holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, <sup>6</sup>like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear."

Some of the scriptural verses even admonish women to be silent in public places or in churches except they seek permission from their husbands. It is in fact not only seen as shameful for a woman to speak in public without the permission of her husband but as an insult to the man. See the following texts;

1st Timothy 2 11-15 <sup>11</sup>"A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. <sup>15</sup>But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety."

1 Corinthian 14 vs 34 & 35 <sup>34</sup>Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. <sup>35</sup>If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church."

It is apparent that these thoughts of female subjugation are mere opinions of Apostle Peter and Paul as there were no indications that they were under divine guidance when they made these declarations. It is noteworthy that apart from one citation credited to Peter, all others are from the letter of St Paul. While Peter had a wife, the Bible never says whether Paul was married or not. It is however believed that Paul is not married given he declared that he had the gift of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. It is amazing how Paul who supposedly was never married could have such resentment for women. All the books written by him clearly enforce women subjugation and discrimination. The apostles clearly said that women should submit completely to their

husbands in all things, including what and when to speak.

Even in African Traditional Religion, women are subordinate to men in both public and family life. Could Karl Marx be correct to say that society cannot be better when religion still exists (Karl Marx on Religion: How Religion Affects Social Inequality)? This statement appears to be true in today's world because the whole world appears to be patriarchal and deeply rooted in religion and religious books. Patriarchy is one of the serious problems of most societies where women are constantly subjugated and abused. We have in Nigeria, a society that protects rapists and battering of both women and the girl-child even with all the laws against these actions.

This article aims to highlight the role of education, culture, and religion on domestic violence on women in Nigeria.

#### *1.4 Effect of Domestic Violence on Women's Health*

It has been observed that women who have experienced domestic violence suffer from chronic health problems such as chronic back pain, memory loss, chronic pelvic pain, abdominal pain, irritable bowel syndrome, and gastrointestinal disorder (Chhabra, 2018; Garcia-Mereno et al, 2006, Onoh et al, 2013). Previous studies have shown that women who suffer or have suffered domestic violence are more likely to experience vagina infection, Vescovaginal fistula (VVF), urinary tract infection, as well as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS due to rape, sexual abuse, and child delivery when their pelvis are not fully developed (Benebo et al, 2018; Duran & Eraslam, 2019; Gattegno et al, 2016; Pun et al, 2018).

Maternal and child mortality and morbidity are also more experienced by women who suffer or have suffered domestic violence because of lack of adequate health care services (Adjewanou & LeGrand, 2014; Andarage & Shiferaw, 2018; Campbell et al, 2002). Several studies have linked domestic violence during pregnancy to low maternal weight, miscarriage, still birth, as well as low infant birth weight. Women who suffer

domestic violence are at a greater risk of suffering from adverse mental health issues such as depression, suicide attempts, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Chhabra, 2018; Dienye et al, 2014; Duran & Eraslam, 2019; Ferrari et al, 2016; Gomes et al, 2015; Souto et al, 2015).

Girls who are raped are forced to have their dreams and careers aborted due to unwanted pregnancy (Folayan et al, 2014). Such girls often suffer from depression, low self-esteem, lack access to adequate health care, as well as lose the opportunity to live a meaningful live and contribute their quota to the society (Adjah & Agbemafle, 2016; Al-Tawail, 2012; Duran & Eraslam, 2019; Folayan et al, 2014; Orisaremi & Alubo, 2012; Pun, 2018).

## II. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The study was certified by the Ethik Kommission Nordwest-und Zentralschweiz (EKNZ) of Basel and approved by the UI/UCH Ethics Committee of Nigeria.

## III. METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Study Site

The study site was Rivers State, Nigeria. This was where the data collection was done. Rivers State is home to Ikwerre people as well as Okirika, Kalabari, Ogoni, Etche, Bonny, Eleme, and Opopo tribes. Rivers State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria and has a population of about five million people (National Population Commission, 2010).

The Ikwerre people occupy four out of the 23 local government areas of Rivers State. These Local Government Areas are Port Harcourt Local Government Area (PHALGA), Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (OBALGA), Ikwerre Local Government Area (KELGA), and Emuoha Local Government Area (EMOLGA) (Imaa, 2004; Okemini & Adekola, 2012). In time past the Ikwerres were ancestral worshippers but this is gradually being replaced by Christianity and other religions, although there are still some traditional worshippers (Okemini & Adekola, 2012). Polygyny is still widely practiced in the Ikwerre culture. The pattern of living is a communitarian

type with patrilocal mode of residence. The Ikwerre people speak the Ikwerre language, English, and Pidgin English (*Pidgin English is an adapted version of the English Language*). The Ikwerres are also well educated.

### 3.2 Participants

To recruit participants, we had to first speak with the women community leaders in all the four local government areas so they could help contact study participants for our study. The reason for this was because the women in the community only listen to their women community leaders. The women community leaders mobilized for possible participation a total number of 90 women who were between the ages of 22 and 60 years, who spoke Ikwerre, Pidgin or English language, and were all Christians. The full names, addresses and phone numbers of the 90 women were supplied by the women community leaders who contacted them.

We reached out to all the 90 women either by phone call or visit to their houses or offices and explained the aims and details of the study to them. We assured them that their confidentiality will be maintained at all times during and after the study. We also made them realize that their participation was completely voluntary and that they were at liberty to withhold their consent if they were not willing to participate in the study or withdraw at any time in the course of the study without consequences.

Some declined to participate in the study for various reasons ranging from not being comfortable with the study to family bereavement. A few others declined with no reason. In a few instances where two or more women were married to the same man, only one volunteer was retained and the rest excluded to maintain confidentiality, allow for freedom to volunteer information, and avoid conflicts that may arise from matters incidental to volunteered information.

After eliminating those who declined and those excluded, we were left with 57 women who participated voluntarily in the study. They were grouped according to their educational status,

(educated, semi-educated or uneducated). The education referred to here is formal education. Educated group comprises of women who have attained education up to tertiary level. Semi-educated women are women who have attained education up to primary or secondary school, and the uneducated women are women who have never attended school.

Informed consent forms were given to the 57 women participants after once again explaining the purpose of the study and the essence of completing the informed consent form to them. They were allowed to go home with the informed consent form for a week so as to have enough time to study them and if possible, seek clarification from family members. Women who could not read said they had relatives who would read and explain the documents to them.

At the end of the one week, a meeting was held with the various participants at the date, venue, and time chosen by them. We went over the informed consent document with each participant to be reassured that they understood the document, the reason for the study, and to confirm that they were still willing to participate in the study. Signed or thumb printed informed consent documents were received from all participants. They also had a copy of the informed consent documents for their records. Afterwards, a time, venue, and date as they wanted were set for the interview/discussion.

### *3.3 Participants' characteristics*

Thirty-four women enrolled in the in-depth interviews (IDIs), 28 women enrolled in the six focus group discussions (FGDs), and five women agreed to enroll in both IDI and FGD. On the whole, data was provided from a total of 57 married women. The study's response rate was 63 percent. More than half of the participants ( $n = 27$ ) were educated and most of the participants ( $n = 38$ ) were in monogamous marriages.

### *3.4 Study Design*

Focal Group Discussions (FGD) and In-depth Interviews (IDI) which are types of qualitative

research tools were used. Women were allowed to choose which group they would want to join, whether FGD, IDI or both. Qualitative method was chosen because it enables participants to discuss in depth their experiences as it relates to the study.

Semi structured interview questions were made for both IDI and FGD but were a bit adjusted to fit either the IDI or the FGD. Semi structured questions were used to give room to participants to talk freely. Before the actual interviews/ discussions, pilot questions were developed to test the sensitivity and acceptability of the research questions to participants. After the pilot interviews, the interview questions were then restructured so that participants can be free to speak without holding back. Prompts were sometimes asked to encourage more responses from participants and to further understand participant's responses. Although the semi structured research questions were centered on women's autonomy and reproductive rights, salient responses on the role of education, culture, religion, and domestic violence were noted.

### *3.5 Data Collection*

Data was collected from December 2014 to March 2015. Twenty-three (23) IDIs and six (6) FGDs were conducted. The FGDs consisted of four to five women in each group. The FGDs included (1) educated women in polygynous and monogamous marriages, (2) uneducated/semi-educated women in monogamous and polygynous marriages, (3) uneducated/ semi-educated women in monogamous marriages, (4) uneducated women in polygynous marriages, (5) uneducated women in polygynous and monogamous marriages, and (6) educated women in monogamous marriages. IDIs and FGDs were conducted at venues, dates, and times chosen by participants to ensure privacy and confidentiality, and in the absence of family members. IDIs lasted for approximately 40–60 min, while FGDs lasted for approximately 55–90 min. All interviews and FGDs were audio-taped with prior permission from participants and extensive notes were taken. The FGDs helped us to capture collective views of the women and salient issues which we captured by

observing their facial expressions and body language that occurred during participants' interviews. The IDIs enabled us to understand in depth the experiences of each participant. With IDI, the participants were able to discuss issues that ordinarily they could not discuss during the FGDs. IDI also gave the women privacy and increased trust and confidentiality.

### 3.6 Data Analysis

Audio tapes of all interviews and group discussions were carefully listened to. Afterwards, the audio tapes were then transcribed. Notes which were taken were thoroughly read through and observations of body language and facial expressions were expanded and added to the transcribed audio tapes. Audio taped Interviews in Pidgin English were first translated to English language before transcribing. In the findings and quotations from women, pseudonyms were given to IDI participants while participants in FGD were described based on their age, education, status and type of marriage. All IDI and FGD transcripts were thoroughly read several times. Open axial coding technique was used with the help of MAXQDA Version II (Verbi GMBH, Berlin Germany). Coding relating to the role of education, culture, religion, and domestic violence were sorted and categorized. All codes were reviewed and discussed at length until saturation was reached when new issues did not emerge. This process of coding resulted in two main themes: 1. Domestic violence in the home, and factors that promote domestic violence.

## IV. RESULTS

### 4.1 Domestic Violence

As we already stated, domestic violence could be of different forms, ranging from emotional to psychological. Nearly all participants have experienced domestic violence in one form or the other. An educated woman explained that the emotional trauma she experiences is worse than physical abuse. She explained that the emotional abuse she experiences in marriage gives her palpitation and severe headache:

My husband married another wife because he said he didn't pay my bride price; his mother

paid my bride price for him, and so he does not recognize me as his wife, even though I have children for him. My children and I have been relegated to the background. I am now solely responsible for myself and my children. I am suffering a lot of health challenges because of this treatment I get every time in my husband's house. He constantly reminds me that he did not pay my bride price and so does not feel responsible for my children and I. My heart feels like it is tearing and I always have headache (Nirvana, 35-year-old uneducated woman, polygynous marriage during IDI)

Another woman in FGD 5 showed us her distorted left ear and mouth with missing teeth due to constant battering from her husband.

Look at my ear, see my mouth, I have lost nearly all my teeth due to the beating I get from my husband. He also beats my children the same way. Oftentimes, my children, especially my sons sleep outside the house to avoid their father. If I go back to my people, they will tell me to go and be a good wife to my husband (40 year old uneducated woman in polygamous marriage, FGD 5).

### 4.2 Effect of Education on Domestic Violence

Responses from women suggested that education plays a very important role in curbing domestic violence, although it does not eliminate it completely. Some educated women said that they prefer to remain married than report their husband's domestic violence on them. For them, in order to be respected by the family and the society, they will prefer to endure domestic violence than break up with their husbands.

My husband told me not to work so that I can adequately take care of our children since he is hardly in the house. That is why I am a full-time housewife despite my education. This has made me completely dependent on him for my well being and that of our children. So, I have to do all that he requires me to do since I depend on him financially. Disobeying him will spell doom for my

children and me (Victoria, a 37-year-old educated woman in monogamous marriage during FGD 1)

*Another educated woman said*

My husband and I are both educated but he listens to his family a lot. To prove to them that he is in control he does things he should not do. I am also a very strong-willed person, so he will not dare lift his finger at me. He wanted me to keep having children even at the detriment of my health after two children; I refused and went for family planning. From then on, he started marrying more wives. Now he has three wives and we just live as strangers in the house (Monica, a 50-year-old educated woman in polygamous marriage)

#### *4.3 Effect of Culture on Domestic Violence*

All the women responded that the Ikwerre patriarchal society and culture is largely responsible for domestic violence. The culture allows beating of the wife if she is stubborn and does not respect her husband. Participants said that the Ikwerre culture of absolute respect for men is detrimental to the women. They responded that another culture of the Ikwerre people of preferring and treating the male child specially also promotes domestic violence.

“I got married to my husband because my father said there was no need to send girls to school. My father said, women once married are no longer relevant to their families but to their husband’s family. So I got married at a young age, not knowing what I wanted, and I regret every bit of it” (Oprah, a 28-year-old semi-educated woman in polygynous marriage, during IDI).

Another participant said that the Ikwerre culture demands that women must not deny their husbands sex because it is one of the marital obligations of a wife to the husband. For this reason, rape is not recognized in marriage and it is not seen as a crime, “For me not to give in to my husband’s sexual demands means that I want to die that day, because he will beat me thoroughly for refusing him sex. Not only that, there will be no feeding money for my children and I. So rather than not having food to feed myself and my

children, I will submit myself to him.” (38 years old, uneducated woman, monogamous marriage, FGD 4)

#### *4.4 Effect of Religion on Domestic Violence*

Participants responded that the Christian religion to which they belong helped to enforce domestic violence by their teachings. All the participants said that during church weddings and sometimes even at normal church services, preachers tell wives to be submissive to their husbands in all things because the husband is the head of the home. They also say that they are told in church that a woman is not supposed to speak without the husband’s permission. The preachers often tell them that divorce is not allowed and so they should pray for God to change their abusive husbands. Participants said that some wives have died trying to be good wives by tolerating all forms of abuse from their husbands.

### **V. STUDY LIMITATION**

Our sample size was small and may not have been adequate for generalizable knowledge. But given that we spoke to women who are from different local government areas that are not close to each other and participants were interviewed differently, yet responses were similar suggesting that even with larger sample size, the findings would not have been much different. Another limitation could be because we conducted our study with only married women. But then, our goal was to study women who are married, and so we feel we have captured the purpose of the study. Finally, maybe because this article emanated from a larger study which was on the reproductive autonomy of the Ikwerre women, it is possible that participants did not speak in detail on the role of education, culture and religion on domestic violence.

### **VI. DISCUSSION**

Although the data collection for this study was done in 2015, nothing seems to have changed over the years. Rather, there is an upsurge of domestic violence in Nigeria. Cases of domestic violence are reported daily in both the electronic and print

media. Cover page of The Guardian of 22nd February, 2020 reported an increase in domestic violence, as well as spousal killing. It also reported that women are now taking laws into their hands by killing intimate partners who abuse them. Also, The Vanguard newspaper of 2nd September, 2021 reported that there is a steady increase in domestic violence. It stated that Lagos State alone recorded a total number of 10,007 reported cases of domestic violence from May, 2019 to 26th August, 2021. Usher et al (2020) observed an increase in domestic violence during the Covid 19 global lockdown.

This article aims to highlight the role of education, culture, and religion on domestic violence on women in Nigeria. The findings of this research will add to existing literature reviews on domestic violence. Violence against women violates women's fundamental rights and freedom. Factors associated with domestic violence such as education, culture and religion were observed in our study. We observe that domestic violence was not really reported as they occur. In the Ikwerre culture, according to responses of participants, it was realised that women suffer both emotional and physical abuse as well as rape which is normal in Ikwerre marital setting. It was also observed that although education helps to curb domestic violence, it does not totally prevent domestic violence in the family. The show of male masculinity, culture, poverty, lack of education, and religion promote domestic violence. The exposure of women to domestic violence has adverse health effects and prevents women from reaching their full potential. Responses from the study participants', show that the culture of absolute respect for men in the Ikwerre society erodes married women's autonomy and personhood.

### 6.1 Culture

It is usually misconstrued that natural scientific and technological advancements have taken place in isolation or without synergy from the humanities. Most developing countries continue to hold on to their cultural beliefs of the female subjugation, and this could be both the causes and consequences of the poor interrogation of the

inherent and implied concepts of humanity and personhood in relation to their needs of freedom and equality or lack of it, in inherited practices within the current changed world of reality, priority, and existence. Beyond the economic, political, developmental, and masculine power play, tightly holding to outmoded and arguably disadvantageous culture, notions, and practices, from the viewpoints of ethics, much of the described practices both within and without, but especially within marriage settings constitute outright sub-humanization, dehumanization, de-personalization of the female sex. These are some of the bases for marital subjugation rather than conjugation, which could have no ethical justification because of the truth, propriety, and natural justice that they oppose. This raises the issue of education.

### 6.2 Education

The issue of culture raises the issue of education. This study also suggests that schooling has not necessarily achieved its aims of education in the context of its goals of humanization in the twenty-first century, at least, as far as the conception and engagement of the female sex is concerned in the said situation in which, like as reported from many other cultures of the developing world, the investigated unethical practices are considered 'cultural'. Since education is the societal instrument of purifying, enlarging, and enriching inherited worldviews, values, and practices so that advancement is transferred to the coming generation. Educational practices that radically fail in these very fundamental areas of human self-conception can hardly be said to be fulfilling its promises or to be ethical as such. This is more so when the state has signed agreements and treaties based on such understandings without efforts to communicate them to trusting, dependent succeeding generations. We are describing an aspect of sexism which is evidently not less traumatic than racism or colourism! The lens of bioethics through which we seek to interrogate such sub-humanising, subjugating and dehumanizing practices, itself is a product of centuries of insights garnered from several fields of disciplines. Developing countries can benefit from

the Belmont principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice by adopting and adapting purified insights and engaging them in the curricula and management of their educational enterprise.

### 6.3 On prevalence

It is not surprising that whatever is supported by culture has undue myopic advantages to almost a half of the world population, and will be sustained and widespread. Literature beyond the scope of this work confirms the widespread and even global nature of this human malfunction. Also implied are its grave economic costs to states resulting from its well documented resultant physical (such as bruises, abrasions, contusions, lacerations to various body parts and organs), biological (such as hormonal irregularities), psychological, educational, economic, ideological, and spiritual (at least as a sense of grounding and belonging in being, in the universe) traumata. Like mechanical trauma, this less conspicuous devastation by relative stealth appears to us to be deserving of Public Health attention, because its cause is widespread and spreads through defective conception-emotion-volition transfers to those around especially the vulnerable ones in the contexts of impunity or even apparent gain or applause. Appropriate personhood, human rights, intrapersonal, and family education at all levels, in a formal and not by passive hap-hazard forms need to be encouraged. Current family counselling like sex or sexuality-counselling will be more effective and efficient in the context of previous education. Genotype counselling is widespread but emotional profiles with their predispositions ought to be identified and widespread for purposes of treatment and prevention of complications. Mental health aspects of Public Health efforts need reinforcement especially concerning this grave issue which tends to actualize in settings of relative acratia, low emotional currency, intelligence, and skills. We dare say that the increasing technological interphases and increasing instability and stress in the world suggest a genuine need for clinical sociology, caring for groups and couples-in community/society, beyond policy advocacy.

### 6.4 Religion

From the study and participants' responses, we note that religion has proved to be detrimental to women. It is amazing how Apostle Paul says in 1Timothy 2, 11-15 that the woman was the one deceived and became a sinner and not the man. He went further to say that the woman will be saved through childbearing which is even not a guarantee, because according to him, the woman will only be saved if she continues in faith and holiness with propriety. Rather than preach equality before God, preachers dwell on the teachings of Apostle Paul, Peter and other male writers in the Bible to subjugate women and promote women subordination. Religious leaders prefer to twist the Bible to soothe the male gender. Unfortunately, even the female religious leaders who should change the narrative also help to preach and enforce female subjugation and subordination.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Cultures and practices which promote domestic violence and female subordination should either be abolished or modified to accommodate both genders. Religious leaders should preach love and equality for every human being instead of preaching what will give men the right to abuse women. Abused women often live in fear, shame, resentment, anger, timidity, and isolated from family and friends because they want to hide the situation they are in, so as to protect their abusers. At some point, the abused begin to make excuses for the abuser, while hoping and praying that the abuser would change.

It is clear that not much has changed on the effect of domestic violence on women since researchers started working in this area till date. Enacting laws and Bills to fight against domestic violence will be a fight in futility if there is no serious change of mind set on how men and the society view women and how women perceive themselves. Respect for both genders must be taught from the homes and schools. Until domestic violence is treated as a public health concern, social menace and the increase in mental

health cases in the society, (especially in developing countries) will continue.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Nigerian governments and policy makers should ensure that existing laws which protect women from domestic violence are not only enacted but implemented and enforced.

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### Conflict of interest

The author report there are no competing interests to declare.

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