



Effect of Domestic Violence on the Psychological Welfare of Adolescents in Ogun State: Toward a more Gender Encompassing Understanding

¹Adejobi, T. O., ²Odetola, O. M. and ³Ajani M. K.

¹Psychology Guidance and Counselling, Federal college of Education Abeokuta

²Social Development Institute, (Shasha) Iperu, Ogun State.

³National Teachers' Institute (NTI) Kaduna, Ibafo Study Centre, Ogun State

Corresponding email: tayeadejobi@gmail.com

Abstract

This research investigates the pervasive issue of domestic violence and its extensive impact on the psychological well-being and academic performance of adolescents in Ogun State, Nigeria. Domestic violence encompassing physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse, exerts a profound influence on the cognitive and emotional development of young individuals. The study reveals that exposure to domestic violence is strongly correlated with adverse outcomes such as heightened anxiety, depression, trauma-related symptoms, and reduced academic engagement, including absenteeism, poor concentration, and diminished class participation. Notably, the research highlights that while both male and female adolescents are affected, the manifestations of psychological distress and coping mechanisms can differ by gender. This accentuates the critical need for a gender-inclusive perspective in understanding and addressing the multifaceted impacts of domestic violence on youth. Beyond its immediate psychological and educational repercussions, domestic violence also exerts significant socio-economic and cultural effects, reinforcing patriarchal norms and systemic inequalities. The study argues that current legal frameworks in Nigeria are insufficient, necessitating comprehensive reforms to better protect victims and ensure accountability for perpetrators. It further advocates for a multidisciplinary strategy that includes early intervention programs, school-based and community support initiatives, public awareness campaigns, and economic empowerment interventions—particularly for vulnerable populations such as women. Collectively, these measures are essential for disrupting the cycle of abuse, mitigating long-term adverse outcomes, and promoting holistic societal well-being.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Adolescents, Psychological Well-being, Academic Performance, Gender-Inclusive

1. Introduction

Domestic violence remains a pervasive issue globally, with profound implications for the psychological well-being of adolescents. In Nigeria, the prevalence of domestic violence presents unique challenges, particularly concerning its impact on young individuals during their formative years. Understanding the nuanced effects of such violence on adolescents necessitates a gender-encompassing perspective, recognising that both male and female youths are affected, albeit in potentially different ways. Studies have highlighted the detrimental consequences of domestic violence on adolescents' mental health and academic performance. A study conducted revealed that exposure to domestic violence correlates with significant academic challenges among school-aged children and adolescents, including absenteeism, poor concentration, and diminished school engagement. The research further indicated that physical abuse

negatively impacts academic performance, class participation, behavioral patterns, and discipline (Williams, Oyundoyin & Adeyemi, 2024).

The psychological ramifications extend beyond academic settings. Adolescents who witness or experience domestic violence are at an increased risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms. A study examining the influence of witnessing domestic violence on adolescents' self-concept found a significant impact, with gender differences playing a notable role. The research revealed that both male and female adolescents' self-concepts are adversely affected, but the manifestations and coping mechanisms may differ between genders (Adeniyi, Anyama & Soriyan, 2023).

Gender differences in exposure to domestic violence have been a focal point in recent research. A study exploring these differences in Nigeria found no statistically significant disparity between male and female children's exposure to domestic violence. However, the study emphasised that the experiences and subsequent psychological effects might vary,

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underscoring the need for a gender-inclusive approach in addressing the issue (Asagba, RB & Oluwaseun N, & Ogueji, I. 2022).

Domestic violence remains a complex and multifaceted social issue that extends beyond isolated incidents of abuse. Research suggests that reducing domestic violence to discrete events reinforces perpetrators' narratives and obstructs effective interventions (Kelly et al., 2016). Instead, a broader perspective that considers systemic patterns of coercion and control is essential for legal and social responses.

The conceptualisation and classification of domestic violence have been the focus of recent criminological research, aiming to enhance legislative frameworks and preventive measures (Niyozova, 2022). Domestic violence encompasses physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse within familial or intimate relationships, requiring an integrative approach in both legal and social interventions (Sluhayenko, 2020). Expanding its legal definition enables more precise identification and prevention strategies, benefiting both victims and policymakers (Martseniuk et al., 2023).

Global perspectives on domestic violence reveal significant variations in legal responses and social attitudes. For instance, domestic violence in India is deeply entrenched in socio-cultural norms, necessitating comprehensive legislative measures that address shelter, financial maintenance, and victim rehabilitation (Raghav, 2019). In the United States, domestic violence transcends ethnic and socioeconomic boundaries, with an estimated 90% of survivors experiencing severe emotional distress and mental health challenges (Gonçalves et al., 2017). Similarly, secondary victimisation—where victims face blame and societal ostracisation—exacerbates their trauma, highlighting the need for more supportive legal and social structures (Juli et al., 2023).

Theoretical standpoint, feminist and intersectional approaches emphasise the structural and power dynamics that sustain domestic violence. An intersectional assemblage theory provides a nuanced understanding of oppression and power relations, which can inform more effective anti-violence policies and interventions (Farr, 2021). Furthermore, domestic violence must be recognised not only as a legal infraction but also as a severe public health crisis involving psychological threats, emotional abuse, and long-term trauma (Snyder et al., 2015).

2. Domestic Violence on the Cognitive and Psychological Development of Children

Domestic violence exerts a profound and lasting impact on children's cognitive and psychological development, shaping their mental health, social interactions, and academic performance. Exposure to domestic violence during childhood is associated with heightened psychological distress, increased

vulnerability to anxiety and depression, and impaired emotional regulation, necessitating urgent intervention strategies (Yosep et al., 2022).

Adolescents' interpretations of their experiences with domestic violence play a crucial role in shaping their mental health outcomes. Many victims internalise domestic violence as a normalised aspect of family life, which may lead to posttraumatic stress and distorted cognitive perceptions of relationships (Chester et al., 2018). In China, research indicates that self-evaluation acts as a mediating factor between domestic violence and adolescent depression, suggesting that interventions targeting self-perception could mitigate the psychological consequences of abuse (Fu et al., 2024). Furthermore, a clinical assessment of Polish adolescents found that those exposed to parental intimate partner violence demonstrated greater resilience, while those who experienced direct physical abuse reported higher anxiety and lower self-efficacy, highlighting the diverse psychological impacts of domestic violence (Rode et al., 2019).

Long-term exposure to domestic violence has been linked to maladaptive coping strategies and insecure attachment styles, both of which negatively affect psychological functioning in adulthood (Pang et al., 2019). Studies in Nigeria confirm a significant relationship between domestic violence and psychological distress among adolescents, with home caregivers exhibiting a higher prevalence of emotional trauma than their non-caregiving counterparts (Cynthia et al., 2018). Dysfunctional family relationships further exacerbate the likelihood of problem behaviors in both childhood and adolescence, reinforcing the need for professional psychological support and intervention (Neshev, 2023).

A broader analysis of domestic violence suggests that early-life exposure significantly predicts both victimisation and perpetration later in life, underscoring the importance of early prevention efforts (Costa et al., 2015). Internalising behaviors—such as anxiety, depression, and emotional withdrawal—are common among children exposed to domestic violence, with emotional intelligence serving as a mediator and positive parenting and family support acting as protective factors against long-term harm (Carter et al., 2020). Additionally, verbal abuse within the household has been identified as a critical yet often overlooked contributor to personality disorders in children, with parental unawareness exacerbating its detrimental effects (Meng, 2024).

3. Gender-Inclusive Approaches to Understanding Domestic Violence

Domestic and marital violence in Nigeria is a multifaceted issue shaped by ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic factors. Evidence from a study on three ethnic groups in Nigeria suggests that women's experiences of domestic violence vary across ethnic lines, indicating the necessity for targeted interventions

that consider cultural specificities (Nwabunike et al., 2017). The prevalence of domestic violence during pregnancy in Nigeria is alarmingly high, ranging between 2.3% and 44.6%, with husbands identified as the primary perpetrators, highlighting the urgent need for gender-sensitive policies and interventions (Orpin et al., 2020).

The legal framework for addressing domestic violence in Nigeria remains inadequate, as domestic violence continues to be widespread across the country. Scholars argue that a national law prohibiting domestic violence and ensuring accountability for perpetrators is essential in Nigeria and across the African continent (Aina-Pelemo et al., 2023). The Nigerian Criminal and Penal Codes contain contradictions that inadvertently support domestic violence against women, necessitating urgent legal reforms to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims (Bature, 2020).

While domestic violence is often viewed as a gendered issue affecting women, emerging research reveals that men are also victims of psychological and physical violence, even in patriarchal societies such as Nigeria. A critical analysis of Nigerian video films underscores the portrayal of gender domination and the psychological violence men experience due to entrenched patriarchal ideologies, emphasising the need for a balanced discourse on domestic violence (Utoh-Ezeajugh et al., 2018). Similarly, the experiences of male victims of domestic violence remain largely ignored in Nigerian society, reinforcing the need for inclusive policies that address victimization beyond gender stereotypes (Ojilere et al., 2019).

Gender-based violence in Nigeria is deeply rooted in patriarchal structures, cultural traditions, and socio-economic inequalities. The persistence of gender-based violence, particularly among female youths in educational institutions across Sub-Saharan Africa, is strongly associated with factors such as residence, parental violence, substance abuse, marital status, and educational background (Beyene et al., 2019). Without severe legal consequences for perpetrators and a shift in cultural norms, gender-based violence will continue to thrive (Amupitan et al., 2024). Additionally, the lack of political will to implement effective laws against gender-based violence in Nigeria and Botswana further exacerbates the crisis (Grace, 2021).

4. Prevalence and Patterns of Domestic Violence in Ogun State

Recent research highlights the significant prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) against women in Ogun State, Nigeria. A study conducted in Abeokuta South Local Government Area revealed that approximately 73.2% of respondents experienced one or more forms of IPV, underscoring the widespread nature of this issue (Ahmed et al., 2024). Another study in Sagamu Local Government Area estimated

IPV prevalence at 16.0%, with higher susceptibility among women aged 25–39 years and those with only primary education (Amoran et al., 2017). These findings indicate that IPV is a critical concern that varies based on demographic and socio-economic factors.

4. Domestic Violence and Its Impact on Vulnerable Populations

The ramifications of domestic violence extend beyond women, affecting children and adolescents. Research in Abeokuta South, Ogun State, found that domestic violence negatively impacts students' academic performance, class participation, behavioral patterns, and discipline (Williams et al., 2024). Pregnant women are also disproportionately affected, with prevalence rates of domestic violence during pregnancy in Nigeria ranging between 2.3% and 44.6%, often perpetrated by intimate partners (Orpin et al., 2020). These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that address IPV and domestic violence across different population groups.

5. Socio-Economic and Cultural Dimensions of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence also has far-reaching socio-economic consequences. A study on women farmers in Ogun State found that domestic violence significantly hampers their ability to engage in livelihood activities, thereby exacerbating economic dependence and vulnerability (Ashimolowo, 2018). Furthermore, research in Ijebuland revealed that domestic abuse against Muslim women contributes to marital instability, highlighting the intersection between cultural norms and gender-based violence (Egbeolowo et al., 2020). Social media has also been identified as a contributing factor to marital instability and domestic violence in Ota, Ogun State, suggesting that technological and modern societal changes influence domestic abuse dynamics (Abdullahi et al., 2019).

6. Policy Implications and the Need for Comprehensive Interventions

Addressing IPV and domestic violence requires a multifaceted approach, including legal reforms, cultural re-orientation, and social support mechanisms. The lack of stringent legal frameworks in Nigeria has been cited as a major factor contributing to gender-based violence, necessitating a review of existing criminal and penal codes to provide stronger protection for victims (Bature, 2020). Moreover, enlightenment campaigns targeting men and boys are crucial for promoting gender equity and mitigating IPV, as evidenced by studies on sexual violence across Sub-Saharan Africa (Amoo et al., 2024).

7. Psychological Effects of Domestic Violence on Adolescents

Domestic violence has profound and lasting psychological effects on adolescents, influencing their mental health, behavioral patterns, and social interactions. The impact is often multifaceted,

manifesting in heightened levels of anxiety, depression, trauma, and maladaptive behavioral responses that may persist into adulthood (Williams et al., 2024).

8. Impact on Mental Health: Anxiety, Depression, and Trauma

Exposure to domestic violence during childhood and adolescence is strongly correlated with adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Williams et al. (2024) found that physical abuse within the home negatively affects school-aged children's academic performance, class participation, and behavioural stability in Abeokuta South, Ogun State. Similarly, Udeze, Nwanneka, and Cynthia (2018) reported a significant relationship between domestic violence and the psychological well-being of adolescent caregivers in Onitsha, Nigeria. Adolescents exposed to family violence during childhood may develop trauma-related symptoms that hinder their ability to form healthy interpersonal relationships in adulthood (Adenuga, 2019).

9. Behavioral Consequences: Aggression, Social Withdrawal, and Risk-Taking

Adolescents who experience domestic violence often exhibit a spectrum of behavioural consequences, ranging from aggression to social withdrawal and increased risk-taking behaviours. Studies have shown that violence exposure in South African adolescents leads to aggressive tendencies and emotional dysregulation (Sui et al., 2018). Similarly, domestic violence in Borno State, Nigeria, has been linked to self-harm tendencies, suicidal ideation, and heightened emotional distress, including downheartedness, trauma, and melancholy (Umar et al., 2020). These findings align with the broader literature indicating that adolescents exposed to domestic violence may engage in delinquent behaviors such as bullying, physical fights, and substance abuse (Owoaje et al., 2010).

10. Gender-Specific Psychological Responses to Domestic Violence

The psychological impact of domestic violence on adolescents may vary based on gender. Female adolescents, in particular, experience higher rates of emotional and psychological distress due to sexual and gender-based violence. In a study conducted in Alimosho, Lagos State, Morufu et al. (2023) found that sexual and gender-based violence significantly impairs the psychosocial development of in-school adolescent girls, affecting their self-esteem and social interactions. On the other hand, male adolescents may respond to domestic violence with increased aggression and externalizing behaviors, as evidenced in peer-violence studies among secondary school students in South-West Nigeria (Owoaje et al., 2010).

11. Gender and Domestic Violence: A More Inclusive Perspective

11.1 Moving Beyond a Victim-Centric Approach: Understanding Boys' and Girls' Experiences

Gender-based domestic violence in Nigeria is often framed through a victim-centric lens, primarily focusing on the experiences of women and girls. However, emerging research underscores the need for a more inclusive perspective that acknowledges the victimisation of both male and female adolescents within domestic settings. Studies indicate that factors such as poverty, lack of education, and restricted access to healthcare contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria, disproportionately affecting female youths in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria and Ethiopia (Beyene et al., 2019). However, recent discourse highlights that men and boys, though less frequently acknowledged, are also victims of domestic violence, even within patriarchal societies (Ojilere et al., 2019). Addressing gender-based domestic violence requires a holistic approach that considers the vulnerabilities and experiences of all affected individuals, regardless of gender identity.

11.2 Perceptions of Domestic Violence among Male and Female Adolescents

Adolescents' perceptions of domestic violence are shaped by cultural, social, and familial influences, often reinforcing gendered notions of victimhood and perpetration. Research assessing domestic violence in Ogun State, Nigeria, reveals that women face significant barriers to autonomy, limiting their full participation in livelihood activities (Ashimolowo, 2018). However, a broader analysis of domestic violence across Nigeria suggests that both boys and girls encounter various forms of abuse, albeit with different manifestations. A systematic review of gender-based violence in educational institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa highlights the role of parental violence, substance abuse, and socio-economic status in shaping adolescents' exposure to domestic violence (Beyene et al., 2019). Moreover, ethnic variations in domestic violence experiences necessitate culturally tailored interventions to address these complexities effectively (Nwabunike et al., 2017).

11.3 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience: Gendered Differences

The coping mechanisms adopted by male and female adolescents in response to domestic violence often differ due to societal expectations and gender norms. Studies indicate that while female victims of domestic abuse are more likely to seek social support and external intervention, male victims often resort to internalized coping strategies, such as emotional suppression or engagement in risk-taking behaviors (Ojilere et al., 2019). In Ijebuland, Ogun State, domestic violence against Ijebu Muslim women has been linked to marital instability, emphasizing the need for targeted intervention strategies to promote sustainability in affected households (Egbeolowo, 2020). Furthermore, research exploring the impact of social media and marital instability on domestic violence in Ogun State suggests that digital platforms

may exacerbate conflict, further complicating coping mechanisms among adolescents and young adults (Abdullahi et al., 2019). Addressing these gendered differences in resilience requires multi-faceted interventions that promote mental health awareness, empowerment programs, and legal frameworks that protect both male and female victims of domestic violence.

11.4 Educational and Social Implications of Domestic Violence on Adolescents

11.4.1 Impact on Academic Performance and School Attendance

Domestic violence has a profound negative impact on the academic performance and school engagement of adolescents. Studies have highlighted how exposure to domestic violence results in reduced concentration, poor attendance, and diminished academic achievements among school-aged children in Ogun State, Nigeria (Williams et al., 2024). Similarly, research conducted in Itesiwaju Local Government Area, Oyo State, reveals that domestic violence significantly affects the academic performance of senior secondary school girls, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions (Okafor, 2020). In Borno State, domestic violence leads to severe psychological consequences such as suicidal ideation and emotional trauma, which further hinder adolescents' ability to focus on their studies (Umar et al., 2020).

11.4.2 Peer Relationships and Social Integration Challenges

Exposure to family violence during childhood not only affects academic performance but also disrupts social relationships in adolescence and adulthood. Adenuga (2019) examines the perceived psychological implications of family violence, noting that young adults who experienced violence during childhood often struggle with forming healthy relationships, exhibiting victimhood thinking and a distorted sense of self. Gender discrimination further exacerbates these challenges, as research from Odogbolu Local Government Area indicates that girls facing discrimination experience social isolation, which negatively affects their educational progression and peer interactions (Adegbesan et al., 2024). Additionally, wife-battering in Anambra State has been linked to aggressive behavioral tendencies in children, contributing to difficulties in peer socialization and emotional regulation (Edith et al., 2020).

11.4.3 Long-Term Consequences on Future Relationships and Career Aspirations

The long-term effects of domestic violence extend beyond childhood and adolescence, influencing future relationships and career aspirations. Higher education plays a crucial role in mitigating these effects, as findings suggest that women with advanced degrees violence and achieve economic independence (Ajede, 2023). However, without intervention, domestic violence survivors often struggle with emotional instability and limited career prospects. In Kwara

State, research highlights the need for effective strategies such as guidance and counseling units, community sensitization, and family support systems to address the consequences of domestic violence and promote adolescents' educational and career aspirations (Abulaziz et al., 2022). Furthermore, the rise of social media as a contributing factor to marital instability in Ota, Ogun State, suggests the need for digital literacy programs to help adolescents navigate online influences on family dynamics (Abdullahi et al., 2019).

11.5 Policy and Intervention Strategies for a Gender-Encompassing Approach in Economic Development among Women

11.5.1 Existing Legal and Social Support Structures in Ogun State

Women in Ikenne Local Government Area play a crucial role in economic development, particularly in agriculture and small-scale enterprises. However, systemic constraints such as illiteracy, limited financial access, and socio-cultural barriers hinder their full participation (Audu et al., 2021). Despite the presence of legal frameworks aimed at enhancing women's economic empowerment, enforcement remains a challenge, particularly in rural areas. Policies such as the National Gender Policy and state-level interventions are designed to support women's economic participation, yet gaps persist in their implementation (Fayomi-Awodele et al., 2023). Strengthening legal protections and increasing women's awareness of their rights are crucial for fostering a more inclusive economic environment.

11.5.2 Role of Schools, Religious Institutions, and Community-Based Organizations

Education and community engagement are critical in addressing gender disparities in economic opportunities. Schools play a pivotal role in equipping women with skills for entrepreneurship and financial literacy, thereby increasing their capacity for economic independence (Adegbesan et al., 2024). Additionally, religious institutions and community-based organizations serve as platforms for advocacy and support, helping to challenge deep-rooted gender norms that limit women's economic participation (Oyediji et al., 2020). Collaborative efforts between the government, educational institutions, and civil society organizations can bridge the existing knowledge gap and promote gender-sensitive economic policies.

11.5.3 Gender-Sensitive Counseling and Mental Health Interventions

Economic empowerment programs must incorporate gender-sensitive counseling and mental health interventions to address the psychological and emotional barriers that women face in their economic pursuits. Many rural women experience stress and discrimination that impact their productivity and economic decision-making (Oyedepo, 2019). Providing mental health support alongside economic empowerment programs can improve women's

confidence and resilience, ultimately enhancing their economic participation. Additionally, integrating financial and business counseling services tailored to women's needs can support sustainable entrepreneurship and economic self-sufficiency (Kayode et al., 2024).

12. Conclusion

Domestic violence in Ogun State, Nigeria, as demonstrated by the diverse research presented, is a pervasive and multifaceted issue with profound consequences on the psychological, academic, and social development of adolescents. Exposure to domestic violence not only impairs mental health—manifesting as anxiety, depression, and trauma—but also undermines academic performance, social integration, and future relationship prospects. Moreover, both male and female adolescents experience these detrimental effects, albeit in gender-specific ways, underscoring the necessity for a holistic, gender-inclusive approach in research and intervention. The persistence of domestic violence, reinforced by patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and inadequate legal frameworks, exacerbates the risk of long-term maladaptive behaviors and emotional instability, calling for early prevention efforts and comprehensive social support systems.

Equally critical is the need to address domestic violence from an economic and policy standpoint, particularly in relation to women's empowerment in Ogun State. Despite their crucial role in economic development, rural women face systemic constraints such as illiteracy, limited access to finance, and cultural barriers that hinder their full participation in livelihood activities. Strengthening legal protections, enhancing educational and community-based support, and integrating gender-sensitive counseling and mental health interventions are vital steps toward breaking the cycle of abuse and fostering sustainable economic independence. Collectively, these findings highlight that an integrated, multidisciplinary strategy—encompassing legal reform, cultural reorientation, and targeted empowerment programs—is essential for mitigating the pervasive impacts of domestic violence and promoting long-term societal well-being.

13. Recommendations

The study amongst others recommends the following;

1. Reform and expand domestic violence laws to comprehensively cover physical, psychological, emotional, and sexual abuse. Legal reforms should ensure stringent accountability for perpetrators and protect all victims, regardless of gender.
2. Develop school-based and community prevention initiatives that identify signs of domestic violence early. These programs should focus on early detection and timely support for children and adolescents exposed to violence, thereby mitigating long-term psychological and behavioral consequences.
3. Design intervention strategies that acknowledge and address the unique experiences of both male and female victims. Tailoring support services to account for different coping mechanisms and psychological responses can lead to more effective outcomes.
4. Expand access to psychological counseling and trauma-informed care for adolescents affected by domestic violence. Targeted mental health services can help alleviate anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms while fostering resilience.
5. Establish academic support programs in schools to counteract the negative impact of domestic violence on attendance, concentration, and overall academic performance. These initiatives should include remedial classes, mentorship programs, and teacher training to recognize and assist affected students.
6. Launch public awareness campaigns and community engagement programs that challenge entrenched patriarchal norms and cultural practices which perpetuate domestic violence. Involving community and religious leaders can help reshape social attitudes and reduce stigma.
7. Integrate economic empowerment programs—such as microfinance, vocational training, and financial literacy workshops—targeted at vulnerable populations, particularly women. Economic independence can reduce vulnerability and contribute to breaking the cycle of domestic violence.

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