


Predictors of Domestic Violence Against Women: The Role of Employment Status and Social Support in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Domestic violence against women remains a pervasive human rights and public health concern in Nigeria, particularly within intimate relationships. This study examined the prevalence of domestic violence and investigated the predictive roles of employment status and social support networks among married women in Ondo State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised married women residing in Ondo metropolis, from which a purposive sample of 1,200 women aged 18 years and above, and married for at least two years, was selected. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument, the Domestic Violence Questionnaire (DVQ), which demonstrated satisfactory reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.78). Descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean) were used to determine prevalence, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was employed to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed a very high prevalence of domestic violence (overall mean = 3.63; 76.0%), with emotional violence emerging as the most predominant form (79.2%), followed by psychological, economic, physical, and sexual violence. Results further showed a significant negative relationship between social support networks and domestic violence ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that stronger social support reduces women's vulnerability to abuse. Similarly, employment status was significantly and negatively associated with domestic violence ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that employed women are less likely to experience abuse compared to their unemployed counterparts. The study concludes that employment and social support function as significant protective factors against domestic violence in Ondo State. It therefore recommends strengthening community-based support systems, promoting women's economic empowerment, and implementing gender-sensitive policies to effectively reduce domestic violence and enhance women's wellbeing.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence against women remains one of the most pervasive violations of human rights and a critical public health concern worldwide. According to the World Health Organization (2021), nearly one in three women globally has experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or non-partner in her lifetime. The United Nations (2022) further defines violence against women as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering, whether occurring in public or private life. These global reports emphasize that domestic violence is not merely a private or family issue but a structural problem deeply rooted in gender inequality and power imbalances.

In Nigeria, domestic violence continues to present significant social and developmental challenges. Data from the National Population Commission (2019) and subsequent analyses of the Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reveal that a substantial proportion of women have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence, particularly within intimate relationships. Recent studies (Okedare & Fawole, 2023; Olalude et al., 2024) indicate that intimate partner violence (IPV) remains highly prevalent in South West Nigeria, affecting both rural and urban populations. Despite legal frameworks such as the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act and increasing advocacy efforts, underreporting remains common due to stigma, fear of retaliation, economic dependency, and cultural expectations surrounding marriage and family stability (Sanni et al., 2025).

Domestic violence manifests in multiple interrelated forms, including physical assault, emotional and psychological abuse, sexual coercion, and economic deprivation. Recent evidence suggests that psychological and controlling behaviours are particularly widespread in urban areas, while physical violence remains more frequently reported in rural communities (Okedare & Fawole, 2023). Beyond immediate injuries, survivors

often experience long-term mental health consequences such as depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and diminished self-worth (Olayiwola-Adedola et al., 2024). The consequences extend beyond individual victims to affect children, families, and communities, reinforcing cycles of poverty, inequality, and social instability.

Emerging literature emphasizes that domestic violence must be understood within its broader socio-economic context. Employment status is increasingly recognized as a complex and multidimensional predictor of domestic violence. On one hand, women's employment and financial autonomy may enhance bargaining power, reduce economic dependency, and improve the capacity to exit abusive relationships (Ojo & Ibrahim, 2023). On the other hand, evidence from analyses of the 2018 NDHS suggests that in contexts where patriarchal norms are deeply entrenched, women's employment may disrupt traditional gender roles and provoke backlash or controlling behaviours from partners (Alawode, 2024; *Women's Work, Gender Roles & IPV in Nigeria*, 2017). This duality underscores the need to empirically examine whether employment functions as a protective or risk factor within specific socio-cultural environments such as Ondo State.

Similarly, social support networks play a crucial role in either mitigating or perpetuating domestic violence. Social support encompasses emotional, informational, financial, and institutional assistance provided by family members, friends, religious bodies, community organizations, and government agencies. Studies conducted in Nigeria demonstrate that women with stronger social networks are more likely to report abuse, seek counseling, and access protective services (Olayinka & Adetunji, 2023). Furthermore, norm-changing interventions such as the "Masculinity, Faith, and Peace" programme in Plateau State demonstrated significant reductions in IPV through faith-based community engagement (Oladimeji et al., 2023). However, in some communities, social networks may reinforce silence and reconciliation without accountability, particularly where domestic violence is culturally normalized (Adebayo & Bamidele, 2023). Thus, the strength and orientation of social support systems can significantly shape women's vulnerability or resilience.

Ondo State, located in South West Nigeria, presents a critical setting for examining these dynamics. The state reflects diverse socio-economic conditions, varying employment patterns among women, and deeply embedded cultural norms influencing gender relations. While regional studies have documented high prevalence rates of IPV in South West Nigeria, limited empirical research has specifically investigated how employment status and social support networks predict domestic violence within Ondo State.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the prevalence of domestic violence against women and determine whether employment status and social support networks significantly predict domestic violence in Ondo State, Nigeria. By focusing on these predictors, the study aims to generate context-specific evidence that can inform targeted interventions, empowerment strategies, and policy reforms designed to reduce domestic violence and strengthen protective systems for women.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The home is expected to be a place of safety, dignity, and mutual respect. However, evidence suggests that for many women in Ondo State, the home remains a site of physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. Despite national and international commitments to gender equality and the protection of women's rights, domestic violence persists at concerning levels across Nigeria (WHO, 2021; NPC, 2019).

Recent studies in South West Nigeria report high lifetime prevalence rates of intimate partner violence, cutting across educational and socio-economic categories (Okedare & Fawole, 2023; Olalude et al., 2024). These findings indicate that domestic violence is not confined to low-income or uneducated populations but affects women across social strata. Yet, while broad prevalence data exist, there is insufficient localized evidence focusing specifically on Ondo State and examining the predictive roles of employment status and social support networks.

Employment status presents a paradox. Although employment can enhance women's financial independence and reduce dependency, emerging evidence suggests that it may also increase vulnerability in contexts where male partners perceive women's economic empowerment as a threat to traditional authority (Alawode, 2024). Conversely, unemployment and financial dependency may trap women in abusive relationships due to limited alternatives (Ojo & Ibrahim, 2023). The inconsistent findings in existing literature highlight a gap that requires context-specific empirical verification.

Similarly, social support networks are often assumed to provide protection and resilience against domestic violence. However, in some communities within South West Nigeria, social networks may lack adequate resources, accessibility, or supportive orientation (Adebayo & Bamidele, 2023). In certain instances, families and community members may prioritize marital preservation over women's safety, thereby discouraging reporting or separation. The extent to which social support networks significantly influence domestic violence in Ondo State remains unclear.

The consequences of domestic violence extend beyond immediate physical injuries. Survivors frequently experience psychological trauma, economic instability, and social isolation. Children exposed to domestic violence face increased risks of emotional distress, poor academic performance, and future perpetration or victimization (Lanchimba, Díaz-Sánchez, & Velasco, 2023). At the societal level, domestic violence contributes to increased healthcare costs, reduced productivity, and weakened social cohesion.

Given these realities, there is a pressing need to empirically examine the prevalence of domestic violence and determine whether employment status and social support networks significantly predict domestic violence against women in Ondo State. Addressing this gap will provide evidence-based insights necessary for designing culturally sensitive, economically informed, and community-driven interventions aimed at reducing domestic violence and promoting women's wellbeing in the state.

1.2. Purpose of the Study

This study examined socio-economic factors as correlates of domestic violence against women in Southwest, Nigeria. Specifically, this study:

- a. Determined the prevalence domestic violence against women in Southwest, Nigeria;
- b. Determined the relationship between social support networks and domestic violence against women;
- c. Determined how employment status contributed to domestic violence against women in South West Nigeria.

1.3. Research Question:

How prevalent is domestic violence against women in South West Nigeria?

1.4. Hypotheses

- a. There is no significant relationship between social support networks and domestic violence against women.
- b. There is no significant relationship between employment status and domestic violence against women.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised all married women living in Ondo metropolis, Ondo State, Nigeria, representing diverse socio-economic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. The population reflected variation in age, income, occupation, family size, and availability of social support systems. From this population, a sample of 1,200 married women was purposively selected based on specific inclusion criteria: participants had to be at least 18 years old, have been married for a minimum of two years, and be willing to take part in the study. Selecting women married for at least two years ensured that respondents had adequate exposure to marital experiences and dynamics, including issues related to domestic violence. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed instrument titled the Domestic Violence Questionnaire (DVQ), which was divided into two sections. Section A collected demographic information such as age, educational attainment, employment status, income level, and length of marriage. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1).

The DVQ's validity was established through face and content validation procedures, while its reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency. The instrument was pilot-tested on 20 married women who were not included in the main study sample, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78, indicating a high level of consistency suitable for the research. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher with the support of four trained research assistants. Collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Research questions 1 to 3 were addressed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, whereas the study hypotheses were tested using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation at a 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Prevalence of Domestic Violence Against Women

To determine the prevalence of domestic violence against women in Southwest Nigeria (low, moderate, or very high), scores of items on physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, and economic violence were subjected to statistical analysis involving frequency count, percentage, and mean rating. The low prevalence was determined by scores below the mean cut-off point ($x < 2.50$ i.e. $x = 1.00-2.49$), the moderate prevalence was

determined by the mean cut-off point ($x = 2.50-3.49$), while the very high prevalence was determined by scores above the mean cut-off point ($x \geq 3.50$ i.e. $x = 3.50-4.00$). The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis of the Prevalence of Domestic Violence against Women (N = 1,200)

| Domestic Violence | F (%) | Mean Score | Remark |
|------------------------|-------------|------------|-----------|
| Physical Violence | 900 (75.0%) | 3.60 | Very High |
| Emotional Violence | 950 (79.2%) | 3.75 | Very High |
| Psychological Violence | 920 (76.7%) | 3.65 | Very High |
| Sexual Violence | 880 (73.3%) | 3.55 | Very High |
| Economic Violence | 910 (75.8%) | 3.62 | Very High |
| Average | 912 (76.0%) | 3.63 | Very High |

Table 1 shows that the prevalence of domestic violence against women is very high, with an overall average of 912 respondents (76.0%) and a mean score of 3.63. Emotional violence recorded the highest prevalence, affecting 950 women (79.2%) with a mean of 3.75, indicating widespread experiences of insults, humiliation, and neglect in relationships. Psychological violence followed closely, reported by 920 women (76.7%) with a mean of 3.65, reflecting frequent threats, fear, and mental stress. Economic violence affected 910 women (75.8%) with a mean of 3.62, highlighting control over finances and restrictions on women’s economic independence. Physical violence was experienced by 900 women (75.0%) with a mean of 3.60, while sexual violence affected 880 women (73.3%) with a mean of 3.55. These results indicate that there is prevalence of domestic violence against women and emotional violence is predominant form. This is further explained by figure iii below.

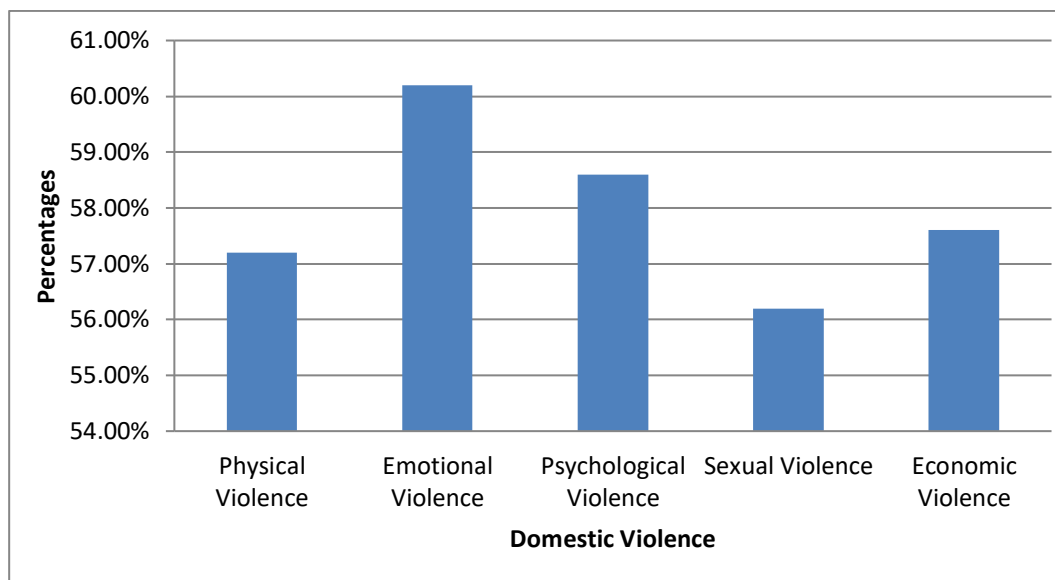


Figure 1. Bar Chart Showing the Prevalence of Domestic Violence Against Women

3.1.2. Relationship Between Social Support Networks and Domestic Violence Against Women

To test this hypothesis, scores on social support networks and domestic violence against women were collated and subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in Table 8.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Showing the Significant Relationship Between Social Support Networks And Domestic Violence Against Women

| Group | N | Mean | SD | df | r-cal | p |
|-------------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Social Support Networks | 1200 | 2.92 | 0.42 | 1198 | -0.45 | 0.001 |
| Domestic Violence | 1200 | 2.90 | 0.50 | | | |

$p < 0.05$ (Significant)

Table 8 revealed that social support networks are significantly and negatively associated with domestic violence ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 1,200$, $df = 1,198$). The mean score for social support networks was 2.92 with a standard deviation of 0.42, while domestic violence had a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.50. These findings indicate that women with stronger social support networks such as assistance from family, community, or religious groups are less likely to experience domestic violence. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected,

confirming that social support networks are a significant socio-economic factor influencing domestic violence against women.

3.1.3. Relationship Between Employment Status and Domestic Violence Against Women.

To test this hypothesis, scores on employment status and domestic violence against women were collated and subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The result is presented in Table .9

Table 9. Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Employment Status and Domestic Violence Against Women

| Group | N | Mean | SD | df | r-cal | p |
|-------------------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|
| Employment Status | 1200 | 2.92 | 0.43 | 1198 | -0.40 | 0.001 |
| Domestic Violence | 1200 | 2.90 | 0.50 | | | |

p<0.05 (Significant)

Table 9 revealed that employment status is significantly and negatively associated with domestic violence ($r = -0.40$, $p < 0.001$, $N = 1,200$, $df = 1,198$). The mean score for employment status was 2.92 with a standard deviation of 0.43, while domestic violence had a mean of 2.90 and a standard deviation of 0.50. These findings indicate that women who are employed are less likely to experience domestic violence compared to those who are unemployed, suggesting that employment provides some protection against abuse. Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected, confirming that employment status is a significant socio-economic factor influencing domestic violence against women.

3.2. Discussion

The study found that domestic violence against women is highly prevalent in Southwest, Nigeria with all forms being widespread and emotional abuse being the most common. This aligns with findings by Abrahams, Oladapo, and Okafor (2020), who also reported high rates of intimate partner violence in Nigeria, particularly emotional and psychological abuse. Emotional abuse may be more common because it is subtle, often hidden, and socially tolerated, unlike physical violence, a point supported by Ojo and Ibrahim (2023^a) in Southwest Nigeria. The high prevalence can be linked to deeply rooted patriarchal norms, cultural acceptance of male dominance, and societal pressures that allow controlling behaviors, in line with Oriola, Owoseni, and Olatunbosun (2022). Factors like economic dependence, lack of access to resources, and low social support make women even more vulnerable, consistent with Akinloye, Adebayo, and Akintoye (2024) and Omonigbe and David (2023). Although education and employment may help reduce the risk of violence (Obiagu, 2023), they may not be enough in communities where cultural expectations and social stigma are strong. These findings highlight the urgent need for interventions that tackle emotional abuse, improve women’s access to economic and social support, challenge harmful cultural norms, and strengthen legal protections to reduce the impact of domestic violence on women’s lives.

The finding of the study showed that social support networks significantly reduce domestic violence. This can be attributed to the fact that women who have access to supportive family members, friends, and community groups are more empowered to seek help, share their experiences, and access resources that protect them from abuse. Such networks also provide emotional reassurance, reduce isolation, and encourage victims to take action against perpetrators. This finding is consistent with Olayinka and Adetunji (2023), who reported that women embedded in strong social networks in Southwest Nigeria experienced lower levels of domestic violence due to the protective role of these connections. Similarly, Okedare and Fawole (2023) found that perceived social support among young married and cohabiting women in urban slums of Ibadan was associated with reduced vulnerability to intimate partner violence. In consonance with these findings, Ojo and Ibrahim (2023) highlighted that women with robust social support are more likely to report abuse and access interventions, which decreases both the prevalence and severity of domestic violence. The implication of this finding is that strengthening social support systems through community programs and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in reducing domestic violence and empowering women to protect themselves.

The finding of the study showed that employment status significantly reduces domestic violence. This can be attributed to the fact that women who are gainfully employed tend to have financial independence, which empowers them to make decisions, resist coercion, and avoid complete reliance on their partners. Employment provides not only economic resources but also social exposure and self-confidence, which can reduce vulnerability to abuse. This finding is consistent with Omonigbe and David (2023), who reported that wives in Nigerian military homes with stable employment experienced lower levels of intimate partner violence due to reduced financial dependence on their spouses. Similarly, Obiagu (2023) found that women’s participation in income-generating activities in Nigeria is associated with a decreased likelihood of domestic violence, as economic empowerment strengthens their bargaining power within relationships. In consonance with these studies, Olayinka and Adetunji (2023) highlighted that employed women are better positioned to seek help and

access resources that protect them from abuse. The implication of this finding is that policies and programs that promote women's employment and economic empowerment can be effective strategies for reducing domestic violence, fostering independence, and enhancing overall well-being.

3.3. Recommendations

First, social support networks at family, community, and institutional levels should be strengthened. Counselling centres, women's support groups, and accessible reporting channels should be expanded to provide emotional, legal, and practical assistance. Religious and community leaders should promote zero tolerance for all forms of domestic violence and encourage victims to seek help without fear of stigma. Second, women's economic empowerment programmes should be expanded using gender-sensitive approaches that address household power dynamics. Employment and entrepreneurship initiatives should include financial literacy, conflict resolution training, and awareness programmes for men to reduce potential backlash and ensure employment serves as a protective factor. Third, public awareness and policy enforcement should be reinforced, particularly regarding emotional violence. Education campaigns should clearly define emotional abuse and its consequences. Law enforcement and social welfare agencies should be trained to respond effectively, while stronger implementation of existing laws and better inter-agency collaboration should be ensured to protect victims and reduce domestic violence.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that domestic violence against women remains prevalent, with emotional violence emerging as the most predominant form of abuse. This indicates that non-physical forms of violence such as verbal insults, humiliation, intimidation, manipulation, and controlling behaviours are widespread and often normalized within intimate relationships, despite their severe psychological and emotional consequences. The study further established a significant relationship between social support networks and domestic violence, suggesting that the presence, strength, and quality of support systems play a crucial role in either reducing or reinforcing women's vulnerability to abuse. In addition, a significant relationship was found between employment status and domestic violence, highlighting the complex role of economic participation in shaping household power dynamics. While employment may enhance women's autonomy and bargaining power, it may also generate conflict in contexts where traditional gender norms remain deeply entrenched. Overall, the study concludes that domestic violence is influenced by interconnected social and economic factors, underscoring the need for multidimensional interventions.

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The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/ or publication of this article.

Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/ or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

AI were used only to improve readability and language under strict human oversight; no content, ideas, analyses, or conclusions were generated by AI.

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