



**IEEE HNICEM**

**ISCIII 2014**

Co-located with **ERDT Conference**

**7th International Conference on Humanoid, Nanotechnology,  
Information Technology, Communication and Control,  
Environment and Management**

joint with

**6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Computational Intelligence and  
Intelligent Informatics**

co-located with

**10<sup>th</sup> ERDT Conference**

November 12-16, 2014

Hotel Centro, Puerto Prinsesa, Palawan, Philippines

Technically supported by  
IEEE Philippines Section and  
IEEE CIS Philippines Chapter

Organized by Neuronemech

**Published by  
HNICEM**

**ISSN: 1908-6180**



**IEEE**

**Philippines Section**

# Attitudes, Perceptions and Intimate Partner Violence: A Study of the Nigerian Context

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**Abstract**— Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a major public health issue affecting many women around the world. It is a topic that has attracted a great deal of research over the years, but the dynamics of the issue in some parts of the world, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, is still very vague, necessitating more research in the region. This study uses a cross-sectional population-based survey to explore attitudes of women towards gender roles in a Sub-Saharan African country – Nigeria, as this is one of the factors that is likely to influence IPV occurrence. The results show that attitudes towards gender roles in Nigeria are more supportive of male dominance and women being subservient to their husband/partner, and also suggest that addressing such attitudes may be an important strand of action in tackling IPV issues in the country.

**Keywords** – Gender Roles; Violence; Attitudes; Women

## I. INTRODUCTION

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) has been known to affect a large number of women worldwide [1, 2], and to have adverse impact on health of women and children and on societal economic development [3-5]. Nonetheless, there is also ample evidence suggesting that the issue is amenable to prevention [1, 6]. But preventing IPV and its concomitant malaise demands clear understanding of the factors that predispose individuals to violence in the first place.

Despite great advances in knowledge regarding the likely risk factors of IPV and also the generation of appropriate prevention programmes in the developed regions of the world, countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, are still highly deficient in the development of such preventive interventions [7].

Besides, evidence emerging from Sub-Saharan Africa and other similar developing regions further suggest that

in situations where some services are available to ameliorate the suffering of abused victims, such services are rarely or poorly utilised due to the attitudes of the victims towards the services (e.g., lack of trust in service providers) as well as the inability or unwillingness of service providers to meet the needs of abused women [8-10].

Based on the foregoing issues and dearth of knowledge pertaining to IPV in Sub-Saharan Africa, this research explores some of the ramifications of IPV in Nigeria as a representative country in the region. The study documents the attitudes of women to gender role in the Nigerian society and explores signs that are likely to link those attitudes and the experience of IPV by women in the country. Embarking on the study is important as research, such as that in [11], has shown that attitudes towards the role of women and men in relationships are likely to influence abused women's help-seeking behaviours and the levels to which they distance themselves from violent situations.

Furthermore, this study affords the opportunity to understand whether attitudes of women towards gender-roles are inextricably linked to their experience of IPV in Nigeria, and as such it provides invaluable information that can support its prevention in the country.

Moreover, by exploring these attitudes in the Nigerian society, this study contributes additionally to the knowledge available on variations in attitudes towards gender roles between countries around the world.

As noted in [12], women's attitudes can have a bearing on: (1) their response to victimisation, (2) their likelihood of suffering long-term adverse psychological effects and (3) community and institutional responses to IPV. Therefore, the study of these attitudes can also afford an opportunity to understand the dynamics of other aspects of IPV in Nigeria.

## II. METHODS

### A. Study Design

This study uses data pertaining to 719 women interviewed as part of a cross-sectional population-based household survey carried out in Kwara State, Nigeria in 2012. The critical inclusion criterion for the interviewees was: women aged 18 years and above who were previously or currently involved in a cohabiting or non-cohabiting relationship. In the selection process, a multistage sampling procedure which reflected the rural and urban locations of the respondents was adopted. First, randomly selected Wards were identified; then Enumerated Areas of smaller clusters of people and thirdly households where there was only one eligible woman per household, were identified by a systematic random sampling method.

The selected study area – Kwara State – is one of the 36 member States constituting Nigeria. It is located in the middle-belt geo-political region and serves as a gateway between the northern and southern parts of the country. The socio-demographic profile of the State is diverse in ethnicity, socioeconomic and sociocultural practices, thereby making it a suitably representative site for a study on attitudes and IPV occurrence in Nigeria.

### B. Questionnaire and Data Collection

The cross-sectional study used a questionnaire consisting of eight primary sections with closed structured questions. Data on respondents' socio-demographic identity, general health status, including reproductive status, were obtained through voluntary engagement. Specific data on current and past involvement with sexual partners were included. Attitude towards gender roles, partners' controlling behaviour, experiences and consequences of violence in the relationship were central to the questions. The design of the questionnaire drew on the experience of recent work by the WHO Multi-Country Study on Domestic Violence Against Women [2] and the ICRW study on the cost of domestic violence [13].

Strict adherence to the standard ethical guidelines designed by the WHO for research on domestic violence against girls children and women [14] were upheld throughout the study. Approval for the study was sought and obtained from the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Kwara State.

### C. Data Analysis

To study women's attitudes towards gender roles, this research explores their perceptions towards certain questions related to the role of men and women in relationships and in the society. In a similar fashion to the WHO Multi-Country Study, the key questions explored include whether women agree or disagree with the notion that:

- (1) A good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees;
- (2) It is important for a man to show his wife/partner who is the boss;
- (3) A woman should be able to choose her own friends even if her husband disapproves;
- (4) It is the wife's obligation to have sex with her husband even if she does not feel like it;
- (5) Investing in a male child's education is far more valuable than that of a female's;
- (6) If a man mistreats his wife, outside agencies should intervene.

To study the women's perceptions towards these questions (i.e., their attitudes towards gender roles), a statistical software package (IBM SPSS 20) is used to explore the data gathered. Descriptive statistics in the form of counts and percentages are applied and the results are then cross-tabulated against women's age groups, educational attainment and place of residence to gain a greater insight into the distribution of the various perceptions towards gender roles as studied in the research.

## III. RESULTS

### A. Attitudes towards gender-roles

The results on women's perceptions/attitudes towards gender-roles are presented in Table I. The results show that a large proportion of women in Nigeria, approximately 86%, endorsed the view that part of the attributes of a good wife is to obey her husband regardless of what her opinions might be. In terms of a man stamping his authority as the boss of the house, approximately 51% of women agreed to the notion that it is important for a man to show his wife/partner who the boss is, while 45% of women disagreed with this view. Regarding women's freedom of choosing their own friends (i.e., a woman should be able to choose her friends even if her husband/partner disapproves), a high proportion of women, approximately 72%, disagreed with such idea. Considering a wife's sexual obligation to

her partner, the results show that approximately 53% of women agreed to the view that a wife should be obliged to have sex with her husband even if she is averse to having sex at that particular time, while 43% of women expressed that a wife should not be tied to such obligation. Regarding the investment in the education of a male child as opposed to that of a female child, the majority of women (approximately 92%) expressed their

disagreement to this view. Nevertheless, 6% of women still endorsed the notion that male child's education is a better investment than that of a female's. In terms of external agencies intervening in the mistreatment of a wife by her husband, approximately 64% of women endorsed the involvement of outside agencies, while 33% of women disagreed with such a view.

TABLE I. OVERALL WOMEN'S PERCEPTION/ ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES IN RELATIONSHIPS

Question on attitude towards gender role	Agree		Disagree		Woman do not know	
	n	(%)	n	(%)	n	(%)
A good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees	621	86.4	85	11.8	13	1.8
It is important for a man to show his wife/partner who is the boss	365	50.8	326	45.3	28	3.9
A woman should be able to choose her own friends even if her husband/partner disapproves	182	25.3	520	72.3	17	2.4
It is the wife's obligation to have sex with her husband even if she does not feel like it	382	53.1	311	43.3	26	3.6
Investing in a male child's education is far more valuable than that of a female	43	6.0	662	92.1	14	1.9
If a man mistreats his wife, outside agencies should intervene	463	64.4	237	33.0	19	2.6

### B. Distribution of attitudes by demographics

Tables II–IV show the results of the cross-tabulation of the women's attitudes towards gender-roles and their demographic attributes. Overall, the results demonstrate that the distributions of the various attitudes towards gender roles are somewhat similar across place of

residence (whether urban or rural), educational attainment (whether the woman has higher, secondary, primary or no education at all), and age groups.

TABLE II. DISTRIBUTION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES BY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Demographic variable	Question on attitudes towards gender role					
	A good wife obeys her husband even if she disagrees			It is important for a man to show his wife/partner who is the boss		
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)
Place of residence						
Urban	83.9	13.7	2.4	49.1	46.4	4.6
Rural	89.0	9.8	1.2	52.6	44.2	3.2
Woman's educational attainment						
Tertiary/ Higher	85.9	11.1	3.0	46.1	50.5	3.4
Secondary	82.4	16.0	1.6	48.8	47.3	3.9
None or Primary	93.4	6.6	0.0	62.0	33.1	4.8
Woman's age group						
18 – 29	87.6	10.4	2.0	47.4	49.4	3.2
30 – 39	85.3	13.6	1.1	51.7	43.8	4.5
40 – 49	83.3	14.7	2.0	52.0	46.0	2.0
50 – 59	97.1	0.0	2.9	57.1	34.3	8.6
60 and above	90.0	5.0	5.0	60.0	30.0	10.0

TABLE III. DISTRIBUTION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES BY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Demographic variable	Question on attitudes towards gender role					
	A woman should be able to choose her own friends even if her husband/ partner disapproves			It is the wife's obligation to have sex with her husband even if she does not feel like it		
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)
Place of residence						
Urban	25.5	71.6	2.9	48.5	47.7	3.8
Rural	25.1	73.1	1.7	58.1	38.4	3.5
Woman's educational attainment						
Tertiary/ Higher	24.6	72.1	3.4	54.2	41.1	4.7
Secondary	30.1	68.4	1.6	48.0	48.0	3.9
None or Primary	19.3	78.9	1.8	59.0	39.8	1.2
Woman's age group						
18 - 29	22.5	74.3	3.2	53.0	41.8	5.2
30 - 39	27.2	70.2	2.6	49.8	46.8	3.4
40 - 49	29.3	70.0	0.7	56.7	41.3	2.0
50 - 59	5.7	91.4	2.9	51.4	48.6	0.0
60 and above	40.0	60.0	0.0	75.0	20.0	5.0

TABLE IV. DISTRIBUTION OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES BY DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Demographic variable	Question on attitudes towards gender role					
	Investing in a male child's education is far more valuable than that of a female			If a man mistreats his wife, outside agencies should intervene		
	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Do not know (%)
Place of residence						
Urban	5.1	93.3	1.6	61.7	35.1	3.2
Rural	6.9	90.8	2.3	67.3	30.6	2.0
Woman's educational attainment						
Tertiary/ Higher	5.1	92.9	2.0	66.0	31.3	2.7
Secondary	6.2	92.2	1.6	59.0	38.7	2.3
None or Primary	7.2	90.4	2.4	69.9	27.1	3.0
Woman's age group						
18 - 29	4.0	94.4	1.6	59.0	38.6	2.4
30 - 39	6.4	91.3	2.3	67.5	29.4	3.0
40 - 49	6.0	93.3	0.7	65.3	32.0	2.7
50 - 59	8.6	88.6	2.9	71.4	25.7	2.9
60 and above	20.0	70.0	10.0	70.0	30.0	0.0

Nonetheless, results pertaining to the notion of a wife's compulsory obedience to her husband show that women with just primary or no educational attainment are more likely to endorse the notion (approximately 93% of women in this category agreed to the view). In

terms of the notion of how important it is for a man to show his wife/partner who the boss in the house is, the results show that the older the woman is the more likely she is to agreeing to such a view. Regarding the view on a woman having the liberty to choose her own friends

even if her husband/partner disapproves, the results indicate that women with just primary or no education and those within the age group of 50–59 years are less likely to support such a notion (approximately 79% of women with just primary or no education and 91% of those within the age group of 50–59 years disagreed with the view). As regards a wife being obliged to have sex with her husband even if she does not feel like it, the results show that women in the rural areas are more likely to endorse such a view (approximately 58% of rural women agreed to the notion as compared with 49% of urban dwellers). Besides, as compared with other age groups, women who are 60 years and older are also more likely to agree to a wife's unconditional obligation to have sex with her husband (75% agreed) and endorse the notion that investing in a male child's education is far more valuable than that of a female's (20% agreed to the view).

#### IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The major objective of this study is the exploration of Nigerian women's attitudes towards the roles of women and men in relationships, as it is widely known that such attitudes can be used as indicators of general societal views on gender roles and intimate partner violence.

The results suggest that women's attitudes towards gender roles in Nigeria are more supportive of male dominance and women being subservient to their husband/partner. This widespread acceptance might be partly responsible for the high IPV burden and poor service utilisation by abused women as indicated by studies conducted in the country [8, 15]. Besides, results from other parts of the world with equally high IPV prevalence have shown similar patterns of women's attitudes towards gender roles [16-18]. Moreover, as highlighted by research, such acceptance of gender inequality is a highly probable factor inhibiting women from seeking protection through available formal services [7, 11, 12].

Generally, the results pertaining to cross-tabulation of women's attitudes towards gender roles by demographic variables show that there is a somewhat uniform pattern to the distribution of attitudes, making it important to implement broad-based prevention programmes (e.g., public information and awareness campaigns) in changing the widespread gender-biased norms that may be exposing women to IPV. As research has shown that this variety of programmes often has a greater coverage and goes a longer way in influencing attitudes to promote gender equality [1, 6, 19, 20].

Moreover, since results indicate that women with primary or no educational attainment are more likely to endorse their compulsory obedience to their husbands and restrict their rights in choosing their own friends are a further testament to the need for interventions aimed at influencing or addressing individuals' attitudes and social norms that place women at a great disadvantage in the society and predispose them to abuse.

Besides, the results show that rural women are more likely to endorse the view that a wife should be obliged to have sex with her husband even if she is averse to having sex at a particular instance. This points to the fact that many women in rural Nigeria may not have a say in relation to their own sexual health (i.e., lack sexual autonomy), and as such are at a greater risk of sexually transmitted infections (e.g., HIV/AIDS).

In [11] it was noted that Asian women show low agreement with outside intervention as a response to a man mistreating his wife, and that this is likely to have adverse implications for reporting abuse incidents and also utilisation of formal services to address intimate partner violence issues. Contrary to this finding, the results of our study show a greater agreement amongst women to outside intervention when a man mistreats his wife (64% agreed to the view). Nonetheless, the fact that approximately one third of women in Nigeria are still opposed to the notion that outside agencies should intervene if a man mistreats his wife is a cause for alarm.

On a final note, our study shows that Nigeria is in a dire need of interventions that will help influence attitudes towards gender roles, as this can assist in addressing part of the IPV issues in the country and in contributing significantly to the health and wellbeing of women and children, as well as to the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (such as HIV/AIDS) that are currently endemic in the country.

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