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## EFFECTS OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: EVIDENCES FROM PORT HARCOURT MUNICIPALITY, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA.

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### Abstract

One of the hall marks of sustainable development is ensuring equality and inclusivity including the elimination of gender-based violence in space. Although domestic violence against women has become entrenched and pervasive among world nations, its rate of occurrence in Port Harcourt is becoming disheartening and alarming with attendant implications on the overall growth of the area. The need to unravel the effects and factors of domestic violence against women informed the aim of the present study. The study adopted the mixed-method research approach with a cross-sectional survey research design. Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The sample size were 399 respondents and fifteen (15) key informants from The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), and selected professionals in the Built Environment. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics and results presented in charts and tables. Findings revealed the effects of domestic violence against women in the study to include depression, (49.1%), high mortality or death, (23.0%); panic attacks (2.3%); suicide, (2.1%); substance abuse (8.4%); phobia and post-traumatic stress disorder (8.4%); and anxiety and sleep disorder (6.8%). Some of the factors implicated for domestic violence against women are cultural, economic, religions, environmental and social in nature. There is need for increased public awareness on the dangers of domestic violence against women. Enforcement of laws and policies criminalising domestic violence, protect victims, support vulnerable victims and hold perpetrators of domestic violence accountable and supporting economic empowerment initiatives for women's economic independence, can help them become less vulnerable to domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, sustainable development; depression; inclusivity; victims; women empowerment,

## 1.0 Introduction

One of the characteristic features of urban growth is the increasing spate of domestic violence against women among world nations. Globally, it is estimated that one in three women has experienced physical or sexual assault in her life (WHO, 2013; Clifton, 2013). Although, the incidence of domestic violence against women are on the rise, they are unequally distributed in both time and space. According to a report by International Growth Centre, the number of reported cases of gender-based violence increased from 300 in March to more than 700 in April following the introduction of lockdowns at the end of March in Nigeria while for Croatia, rape cases increased by 228 percent during the first 5 months of 2020 in comparison to 2019, and the percentage of attempted rapes rose by 175 percent (Book *et al.*, 2020).

Violence against women refers to any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women). Domestic violence is a multifarious phenomenon that includes numerous forms of abuse and such abuse can be sexual, emotional, economic, and physical violence (Jackson, 2007). It is a global problem that is deeply entrenched and pervasive irrespective of economic, social, and cultural standing of the prey and predator (Mashiri, 2013).

Domestic violence against women is usually accompanied by dire socio-economic consequences. According to UN Women (2016), the cost of violence against women (public, private and social) amounts to US\$1.5 trillion equivalent to approximately 2% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). The World Bank 2018 report found that violence against women can cost up to 3.7 percent of GDP in some countries (Ouedraogo & Stenzel, 2021).

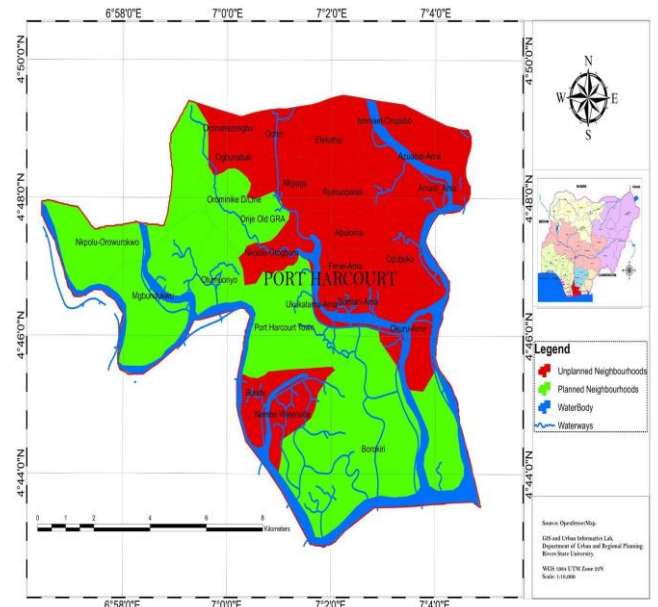
Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers state is home for oil and gas, all of which accounts for the rapid urbanisation of the area demographically and in spatial extent. The influx of firm and people into Port Harcourt has proceeded unabated with attendant increase in cases of domestic violence against women. Although, the rate of domestic violence against women is rife in the area, incidents of domestic violence are often not reported or documented and perpetrators not brought to book due to fear of the public and the protection of family members, (Mshelia, 2021).

According to Naku (2020), the Federation of Females Lawyers (FIDA) Rivers State chapter received 700 domestic violence complaints over two months. This is not far from the report of Medical Women's Association of Nigeria's 2015-2017 research in Port Harcourt which revealed that there were 621 incidents of violence against women, of which 208 were domestic violence (Eke, Agala & Adebisi, 2018). In 2015, the United Nations set up Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). While SDG Goal 5 specifically seeks to address gender inequality, eliminate discrimination and violence against women (Fukuda-Parr, 2016), goal 16 sought to promote peaceful, equitable, and just societies by tackling violence and guaranteeing access to justice (Gupta & Vegelin, 2016). Despite the United Nations General Assembly's attempts and the acceptance of all pertinent UN agreements by many countries, there has been limited progress in the battle against gender-based offences (Nnadi, 2012). Exposing the likely effects of increasing violence against women in the study area requires studious inquiry. The present study focuses on the effects

of domestic violence against women, with the view to increase public awareness on the issue and promote public intervention strategies aimed at curbing the problem.

## 2.0 Study Area

Geographically, Port Harcourt is situated approximately 66 km<sup>2</sup> from the Atlantic Ocean and lies between the Latitudes of 4°5'11" and 5°15'45" North of the equator and Longitudes of 6°22'25" and 8° 05'12" East of the Greenwich meridian (Ajie & Dienya, 2014). It is bounded on the North by Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, on the East by Oyigbo and Eleme Local Government Areas, on the West by Emohua Local Government Area, and on the South by Degema and Okirika Local Government Areas (See Figure 1).



**Fig 1: Map of Port Harcourt Municipality showing the planned and unplanned settlements.**

**Source: Rivers State University, Department of Urban and Regional Planning GIS Lab (2023)**

Oteri (2005), supports the fact that Port Harcourt is situated approximately 66 kilometres away from the Atlantic Ocean on stable ground in proximity to the Bonny River, as well as near the Dockyard and Amadi Creeks. The region displays three primary soil types and features: marine and fluvial marine sediments, mangrove swamp alluvial soils, and freshwater brown loamy and sandy loams (Nwaerema & Nwagbara, 2019). The dominant species in this zone are mangrove palms, accompanied by a few other hydrophytic species (Ede & Edokpa, 2015). The average temperature typically ranges between 25°C and 28°C. The city enjoys a consistent and sufficient amount of rainfall year-round, which is favourable for crop cultivation, while the relative humidity is approximately 78% (Ajie & Dienye, 2014). As a prominent industrial and commercial centre, Port Harcourt holds a significant position in Nigeria's economic landscape, often referred to as the economic hub of the nation (Akpabio, Ejedawe, Ebeniro & Uko, 2003).

## 3.0 Methods and materials

Both primary and secondary data were used for the study through the use of questionnaire, key informant interview and information from relevant agencies such as Federated Union of Female Layers. The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design. Port Harcourt is composed of 25 communities, 30% (9 communities)

were randomly selected for study. The selected communities have a total of 235,061 households using an average house hold of 6 persons per household (NPC, 2006). A sample size of 400 respondents was arrived at using Taro Yamane's formula. The questionnaires were distributed proportionally according to the number of households in each community as shown in table 1. Four officials of federated union of female layers (FIDA), and eleven registered Town Planners also served as key informants.

**Table 1: Population of Sampled Neighbourhoods**

| S/N | Neighbourhoods     | Population (1991) | Projected Population (2023) | No. of House hold (6) | No of Respondents |
|-----|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| 1   | Nkpolu-Orowuro kwo | 52,613            | 370,395                     | 61,732                | 105               |
| 2   | Orominke D/Line    | 21,377            | 150,494                     | 25,082                | 43                |
| 3   | Nkpolu Orogbum     | 3,423             | 24,097                      | 4,016                 | 7                 |
| 4   | Elekahia           | 15,302            | 107,726                     | 17,954                | 30                |
| 5   | Ogbunabali         | 15,014            | 105,698                     | 17,616                | 30                |
| 6   | Nkpogu             | 20,402            | 143,630                     | 23,938                | 41                |
| 7   | Abuloma            | 10,454            | 73,596                      | 12,266                | 20                |
| 8   | Mgbubdukwu         | 55,682            | 392,001                     | 65,333                | 111               |
| 9   | Ochiri             | 6,072             | 42,746                      | 7,124                 | 12                |
|     | <b>Total</b>       | <b>200,339</b>    | <b>1,410,383</b>            | <b>235,061</b>        | <b>399</b>        |

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2023

## 4.0 Conceptual/Theoretical framework/Empirical Review

### 4.1 Concept of Domestic Violence against women.

Domestic violence is an abusive behaviour in an intimate relationship in which one person tries to gain power and control over the other in a dating or marriage relationship or in cohabitation, resulting in physical, psychological, or sexual harm to the people involved (Lundgren, 2015). In the words of Nwaomah (2019), it is also referred to as spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, or family violence. This is a pervasive issue in Nigerian culture. Town planning can help reduce domestic violence by providing safe and accessible public spaces, making social services easily accessible, and encouraging community involvement (Urban Institute 2016). Urban Planning can be used to facilitate easier access to social resources, such as shelters, counselling, and legal aid, which can be beneficial for those suffering from domestic abuse. Careful planning can have a positive impact on the lives of domestic violence survivors, and should be incorporated into the comprehensive approach to tackle the problem of domestic violence against women (Kambou, 2017).

### 4.2 Social Disorganisation Theory

Robert Park, Ernest Burgess, and Clifford Shaw's developed social disorganisation theory at the University of Chicago in the early 20th century. It highlights the impact of neighbourhood characteristics on crime rates (Bellair, 2017). It posits that

neighbourhoods or communities with certain structural and cultural characteristics are more likely to experience violence and higher crime rates. The factors responsible include poverty, ethnic diversity, low socioeconomic status and lack of social cohesion (Kubrin, 2009).

### 4.3 The Feminist theory

Feminist theory posits that patriarchy is the root cause of gender-based violence (Hadi, 2017). According to De Beavoir (2015), Oakley (2017), and Richardson (2015), biologically based gender distinctions are expressed in terms of masculinity, which is characterised by dominance, competitiveness, aggressiveness, sexual desire, and femininity. Femininity is characterised by submissiveness, dependence, cognitive dissonance, emotionality, and a combination of seductiveness and modesty. Vogelman (2016), argued that rape, battery, and other forms of abuse are unavoidable outcomes of gender disparities, even though they are not socially acceptable. It is believed that rape occurs when a man is unable to restrain his strong sexual urges and a woman is unable to express her refusal clearly enough.

### 4.4 Previous studies

Haviland and Kim (2017) examined the prevalence of domestic violence across different areas of the United States. The data for this study were sourced from the National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS). Domestic violence was more prevalent in the southern states than in the northern states. It is noteworthy that Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana had the highest rates of domestic violence, while Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine had the lowest rates.

Awan and Siddiqui (2016) studied domestic violence in United Kingdom and discovered that domestic violence is more prevalent in the Midlands and North of England than in the South. He then studied the geographic distribution of domestic violence in the United Kingdom using data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales. His research revealed that the Midlands and North of England had the highest rates of domestic violence, including regions like the West Midlands, Yorkshire, Humber, and North West England. The South of England, which includes Southeast England and Southwest England, has the lowest rate of domestic violence.

Ouedraogo and Stenzel (2021) examined the economic cost of several types of violence against women in Sub-Saharan Africa using a large set of 29 demographic surveys data extracted from the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) website. Their findings revealed that higher levels of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) are associated with lower economic development. While negative economic effect of violence against women is higher in countries without protective laws against domestic violence, natural resource-rich countries, where women are deprived of decision-making power and during economic downturns.

## 5.0 Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Effects of Domestic Violence against Women in Port Harcourt Municipality

Table 2 contains the effects of domestic violence as reported by the respondents. The modal response was depression, representing 49.1%, followed by high mortality or death, representing 23.0% of the distribution. Other effects of domestic violence against women include panic attacks (2.3%), and suicide, (2.1%), Substance abuse

(8.4%), Phobia and Post-traumatic stress disorder (8.4%) and Anxiety and Sleep disorder (6.8%).

Responses from key interview informants who are members FIDA and Town planners also corroborates the findings from our respondents. According to them the effects of domestic violence on women include: profound psychological and emotional problems such as depression, substance abuse, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and a decrease in self-esteem. Challenges can also arise in building trust and forming healthy relationships. Women who experience domestic violence often experience physical injuries, including bruises, broken bones, and internal damage. Furthermore, they may experience persistent pain, sexually transmitted infections, and other health issues due to abuse.

Domestic violence also results to economic hardship for victims. Abusers may control finances, block access to resources, and ensure job stability. This financial dependence makes it difficult for women to leave their abusive relationships. Domestic violence also leads to social isolation. Abusers often cut women off from family and friends, intensifying feelings of helplessness and making it difficult to seek help.

Children exposed to domestic violence are emotionally, behaviourally, and relationally impacted. Without intervention and support, the violence cycle can continue. Domestic violence has a wide-reaching effect on society, increasing healthcare costs and reducing workforce productivity. This weakens families and communities, and damages their stability and welfare.

**Table 2: Effects of Domestic Violence against women**

| S/N | Effect of Domestic Violence               | F          | %            |
|-----|---|------------|--------------|
| 1.  | Depression                                | 188        | 49.1         |
| 2.  | High mortality/Death                      | 88         | 23.0         |
| 3.  | Substance abuse                           | 32         | 8.4          |
| 4.  | Phobia and Post-traumatic stress disorder | 32         | 8.4          |
| 5.  | Anxiety and Sleep disorder                | 26         | 6.8          |
| 6.  | Panic attack                              | 9          | 2.3          |
| 7.  | Suicide                                   | 8          | 2.1          |
|     | <b>Total</b>                              | <b>383</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Source: Researcher's Survey, 2023**

On some the factors that accounts for increased domestic violence against women in the study area, the following factors were identified: Cultural, economic, and environmental, religious and social factors, which accounts for 31.9%, 30.0%, and 20.4%, 11.2% and 6.3% of the distribution, respectively (See Table 3).

**Table 3: Factors that Accounts for Domestic Violence against women**

| S/N | Factors that Account for Domestic Violence | F   | %    |
|-----|--|-----|------|
| 1.  | Cultural factor                            | 122 | 31.9 |
| 2.  | Economic factor                            | 115 | 30.0 |
| 3.  | Environmental factor                       | 78  | 20.4 |

|    |                  |            |              |
|----|------------------|------------|--------------|
| 4  | Religious factor | 43         | 11.2         |
| 5. | Social Factors   | 24         | 6.3          |
|    | <b>Total</b>     | <b>383</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

**Source: Researcher's Survey, 2023**

The opinions of the key informants on the causes of domestic violence against women in the study area again corroborates the responses gotten from the respondents. According to the key informants, the following are the factors responsible for domestic violence in Port Harcourt municipality:

1. Power and Control Domestic violence is often caused by an abuser's need to dominate their partner or family. These can be physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
2. Learned behaviour can lead to domestic violence being passed down through generations. Those exposed to it in their family may be more likely to commit it themselves, as the behaviour can be deeply ingrained.
3. Social norms and gender inequality can fuel domestic violence. Traditional gender roles, which expect men to be dominant and women to be submissive, normalise abusive behaviour.
4. Mental health issues such as anger management, personality disorders, or trauma can lead to domestic violence. It is important to note that most people with mental health problems do not commit violence.
5. Economic stress, joblessness, poverty, and financial dependence can lead to relationship issues and increase the risk of domestic violence. Financial limitations may impede the victim's ability to leave.
6. Cultural or religious beliefs that condone or justify violence or prioritise family reputation can lead to domestic violence. These factors can make it difficult to seek help or to leave abusive relationships.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Violence against women in all its ramifications are inimical to societal growth and social justice. The quest for world leaders for accelerated economic growth must also be measured on the scale. These growths have been in terms of ensuring inclusiveness and equal access to the development outcome, more importantly the elimination of domestic violence against women.

The findings of this study indicates that domestic violence has a plethora of effects on the wellbeing of women - depression, high mortality, substance abuse, suicide. Deliberate effort is needed by all state holders especially governmental agencies responsible for women affairs to raise awareness discouraging the commission of domestic violence in all its forms through campaigns, workshops, and educational programmes. Encourage victims to report cases of domestic violence.

There is need for comprehensive enforcement of laws and policies to criminalise domestic violence, protect victims, support vulnerable victims and hold perpetrators of domestic violence accountable. Supporting economic empowerment initiatives for women, including access to job training programs, entrepreneurship support, and financial literacy programs can also reduce their vulnerability violence. Eliminating domestic violence against women for sure is the way to go if the world wants to achieve development inclusivity in line with Sustainable Development Goals number 5 and 16 that seeks to promote gender

equality, peace, and justice by building strong institutions, creating sustainable and secure communities, and ending violence against women.

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