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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND RELIGIOUS VARIATIONS AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN IMO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract:
Domestic violence among married women is a significant public health concern. However, despite global efforts to combat the menace, it remains pervasive in many communities in Nigeria. This study investigates domestic violence and religious variations among married women in imo state. The descriptive cross-sectional analytical design was applied. A total of 400 women were recruited for the study. The participants

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were recruited using a multistage sampling procedure, while a semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages to address the research questions, while hypotheses were tested at $p<0.05$ using Chi-square. Findings show that domestic abuse was prevalent across both groups, with 42.2% of Christian women and 47.4% of non-Christian women reporting having experienced domestic violence. This analysis suggests that while there are slight differences in the reported prevalence between Christian and non-Christian women, domestic violence remains a significant concern among married women in the district, regardless of their religious affiliation. The study recommends that local government bodies and educational institutions implement community-based educational initiatives targeting young married women aged 15-24. This programme should focus on raising awareness about domestic violence and women's rights, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and resources to seek help and support.

Keywords: domestic violence, religious variations, married women, Imo state

1. Introduction

Domestic violence, especially intimate partner abuse, is a significant public health concern (Nakie *et al.,* 2025). Domestic violence is a global health issue that impacts health policies and initiatives, as well as women's health, reproductive outcomes, and family well-being. It violates human rights, hinders gender equality, and requires a multifaceted approach. Religious variations deeply influence how married women experience, report, and manage domestic violence. Although major faith doctrines prohibit abuse, misinterpretations and weak institutional responses often trap victims in violent unions. While clergy serve as vital first responders and cultural guides in faith communities, how their specific religious beliefs shape their interventions remains largely unexamined (Ellison *et al.,* 1999; WHO, 2026).

Domestic violence (DV), also referred to as intimate partner violence or domestic abuse, is a type of family violence among married women, which can include acts of physical violence, sexual violence, emotional or psychological abuse, and patterns of monitoring, isolation, and control known as coercive control (Pepper *et al.,* 2023). DV is a major and widespread social, economic, and public health problem across all regions of the world (WHO, 2010; 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), significant disparities in intimate partner relationships across religions have been reported (Nakie *et al.,* 2025). Religious differences, including norms about intimate relationships, are part of the complex juxtaposition of individual, relationship, community, and societal factors that shape experiences of DV for victim/survivors, perpetrators, and responders (Pepper *et al.,* 2023). Clergy play an important role both as potential responders for those within faith-based communities and as shapers of cultural contexts within which intimate relationships are situated.

Religion as a predictor of domestic violence among married women is a severe crisis in Nigeria; thus, over 69% of women were reported to have faced physical, sexual, or emotional abuse **(**Ugwu & Atima, 2022; Sambo *et al.,* 2023; Onaseso, 2025). It was also reported that between August 2022 and July 2023, the Lagos State Government received 5,624 reports of sexual and gender-based violence (Lagos DSVA, 2026). This followed a prior tracking period (September 2021 to July 2022) when the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Agency (DSVA) logged over 4,800 cases, half of which involved women reporting abuse after more than a decade of marriage. Broader societal discussions regarding domestic violence in Nigeria frequently intersect with cultural, ethnic, and religious dimensions (Lagos DSVA, 2026). Cultural and religious beliefs heavily shape social norms. Misinterpreted religious texts are often weaponized to justify abuse, trapping survivors in dangerous homes (Women's Rights and Health Project (WRAHP), 2023).

Religious variations as a predictor of domestic violence among married women in Nigeria may be evident; thus, as Nigeria is one of the most religious countries, married men may leverage it to justify abuse or to discourage female survivors from leaving abusive relationships. For instance, Christian teachings on male headship, "Ephesians 5:23", are frequently misinterpreted to suggest that wives must endure difficult, and even abusive, husbands. Similarly, Surah An-Nisa 4:34 in Islam is used to justify male control, and sometimes abuse, over women. While many religious leaders reject these interpretations, these understandings are still widespread among perpetrators and community members. The mentioned scenarios have prompted the researchers to investigate religious variations as a predictor of domestic violence among married women in Owerri in Imo State, Nigeria.

Religion as a predictor of domestic violence among married women can discourage and perpetuate attitudes and behaviours that maintain domestic abuse in many families. While religion can foster respect and dignity in marriage, its misuse by many in the faith community can silence women and can prolong suffering. Women who experience domestic violence would have more physical symptoms of poor health and more days out of work than women who have not been abused. Domestic violence has also been associated with mental health problems, including depression, anxiety, phobias, posttraumatic stress disorder, suicide, and alcohol and drug abuse.

Despite the magnitude of the health problems associated with domestic violence, little is known about religion as a predictor of domestic violence among married women in Imo State. Owerri, Nigeria, it is against this backdrop that this study explored religion as a predictor of domestic violence among these demographics.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design to investigate religious variations as a predictor of domestic violence among married women in the Owerri Senatorial Zone of Imo State. Owerri Senatorial Zone is located in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. The Owerri Senatorial Zone covers the local government areas of Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ezinihitte Mbaise, Ikeduru, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West. The inhabitants are engaged in agriculture, business and civil service jobs. Their official language is English, local language is Igbo, with minor differences in dialect. Christianity is the predominant religion; however, there are traditional worshippers. Owerri senatorial zone has a rich cultural heritage manifested in dressing, music, dance, festivals, arts and crafts and traditional hospitality of the people. This area is considered appropriate for the study because of incessant reports of domestic cases against women. The researcher is prompted to ascertain the forms and incidence among women in the area.

2.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study comprised the projected population of all married women in the Owerri Senatorial Zone of Imo State (Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

2.3 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample size for the study was 400 married women in the Owerri Senatorial Zone. The Taro Yamane method for sample size was used to determine the sample size for the study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to arrive at the sample size. Stage one involved the use of simple random sampling by balloting without replacement to select four LGAs out of the nine existing LGAs in the zone. Stage two involved the use of disproportionate sampling to select two autonomous communities from each LGA, giving rise to (10) communities. Stage three involved the use of convenience sampling to select forty (40) married women from each autonomous community to arrive at 400, which is the sample size for the study.

2.4 Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire entitled: Prevalence of Domestic Violence against Married Women Questionnaire (PDVAMWQ). The questionnaire consisted of three sections, A, B and C. Section A contained 5 items on demographic variables of the respondents. Sections B and C contained 27 items on the period of violence and prevalence forms of domestic violence, respectively. The instrument was constructed based on 'Yes' or 'No' for each of the items.

2.3 Validation of the Instrument

The face validity of the instrument was assessed by two experts from the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education and an expert in Measurement and Evaluation from the Science Education Department of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Their main task was to critically examine the instruments and to ascertain that the instruments cover the objectives of the study. They checked for the appropriateness of each item in terms of the language used as well as the suitability of the questionnaire items for inclusion in the instrument and made corrections as they deemed fit. Their constructive criticisms and suggestions were used to produce the final version of the instrument that was used for the data collection for this study.

2.4 Method of Data Collection

A letter of introduction duly signed by the Head, Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki were given to the Town-Union presidents, heads of the family, as well as chairpersons of women's meetings in the area under study. This was done to enable the researcher to administer the questionnaire to the participants. Administration and collection of the questionnaire were done on the spot to avoid loss of data. This procedure yields a high return rate.

2.5 Method of Data Analysis

The completed copies of the retrieved questionnaire were sorted and analyzed using frequencies and percentages, and Chi-square. Frequencies and percentages were used to answer all the research questions. The chi-square statistic was used to test all the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance at the appropriate degrees of freedom.

3. Results

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age		
15-24	83	21.5
25-34	80	20.7
35-44	134	34.7
45 and above	89	23.1
Educational Status		
Non-Formal	36	9.3
Primary	21	5.4
Secondary	58	15.0
Tertiary	271	70.2
Gender of Children		
Only Males	71	18.4
Only Females	50	13.0
Mixed	265	68.7
Economic Status		

Low	203	52.6
Middle	156	40.4
High	27	7.0
Religion		
Christian	348	90.2
Non-Christian	38	9.8
Total	**386**	**100**

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The respondents' ages are distributed across four groups, with the largest proportion (34.7%) aged 35-44 years. Those aged 15-24 years make up 21.5%, while 20.7% fall within the 25-34 age range. Respondents aged 45 years and above account for 23.1%. A significant majority of respondents (70.2%) have attained tertiary education, indicating a highly educated sample. Meanwhile, 15.0% have completed secondary education, 5.4% have a primary education, and 9.3% have no formal education. Regarding the gender of children, 68.7% of respondents have both male and female children, while 18.4% have only male children, and 13.0% have only female children. Over half of the respondents (52.6%) fall within the low economic status category, while 40.4% are in the middle economic bracket, and only 7.0% are in the high economic bracket, suggesting that most respondents face financial constraints. A vast majority of respondents (90.2%) identify as Christians, with the remaining 9.8% affiliated with other religions.

Table 2: Religious Factors Associated with Domestic Violence among Married Women in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

S/N	Items	Christian (n =348)		Non-Christian (n = 38)	
		Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Ever been abused domestically by your husband in the past 1 month?	137 (89.0)	211 (90.9)	17 (11.0)	21 (9.1)
2	Ever been abused domestically by your husband in the past 6 months?	127 (87.0)	221 (92.1)	19 (13.0)	19 (7.9)
3	Ever been abused domestically by your husband in the past 12 months?	118 (85.5)	230 (92.7)	20 (14.5)	18 (7.3)
4	Husband ever slapped you?	165 (90.2)	183 (90.1)	18 (9.8)	20 (9.9)
5	Husband ever thrown something at you?	143 (88.3)	205 (91.5)	19 (11.7)	19 (8.5)
6	Husband ever twisted your arm?	126 (87.5)	222 (91.7)	18 (12.5)	20 (8.3)
7	Husband ever pushed you?	137 (90.1)	211 (90.2)	15 (9.9)	23 (9.8)
8	Husband ever kicked you?	116 (89.2)	232 (90.6)	14 (10.8)	24 (9.4)
9	Husband ever strangled you?	114 (88.4)	234 (91.1)	15 (11.6)	23 (8.9)
10	Husband ever punched you with his fist?	119 (86.9)	229 (92.0)	18 (13.1)	20 (8.0)
11	Husband ever threatened you with harm?	144 (89.4)	204 (90.7)	17 (10.6)	21 (9.3)
12	Husband ever threatened you with weapon?	131 (87.9)	217 (91.6)	18 (12.1)	20 (8.4)
13	Experienced forced sex to settle a dispute?	174 (90.2)	174 (90.2)	19 (9.8)	19 (9.8)
14	Experienced forced sex when ill?	145 (90.6)	203 (89.8)	15 (9.4)	23(10.2)
15	Experienced forced sex when tired?	194 (90.7)	154 (89.5)	20 (9.3)	18(10.5)
16	Husband verbally abused you at home.	204 (89.9)	144 (90.6)	23 (10.1)	15 (9.4)
17	Husband ever belittled you outside the home.	152 (88.4)	196 (91.6)	20 (11.6)	18 (8.4)
18	Husband has avoided talking to you for a long period of time.	186 (89.2)	159 (91.4)	23 (10.8)	15 (8.6)
19	Husband ignored you without talking to you for a long period of time.	180 (89.1)	168 (91.3)	22 (10.9)	16 (8.7)
20	Husband ever isolated you from friends?	152 (90.5)	196 (89.9)	16 (9.5)	22(10.1)
21	Husband ever isolated you from neighbours?	161 (89.9)	187 (90.3)	18 (10.1)	20 (9.7)

22	Husband always harbours resentment against you over a little misunderstanding.	196 (88.7)	152 (92.1)	25 (11.3)	13 (7.9)
23	Prevented by your husband from working outside the home.	138 (90.8)	210 (89.7)	14 (9.2)	24(10.3)
24	Prevented by husband from seeking employment.	124 (88.6)	224 (91.1)	16 (11.4)	22 (8.9)
25	Prevented by husband from advancing in education.	130 (89.7)	218 (90.5)	15 (10.3)	23 (9.5)
26	Husband has complete control over your money.	141 (88.7)	207 (91.2)	18 (11.3)	20 (8.8)
27	Husband prevents you from accessing your bank account without approval.	117 (89.3)	231 (90.6)	14 (10.7)	24 (9.4)
	Mean (%)	**42.2**	**57.8**	**47.4**	**52.6**

Table 2 presents data on the prevalence of domestic violence among married women in the Owerri Senatorial District, categorized by religious affiliation (Christian and non-Christian). Findings show that domestic abuse is prevalent across both groups, with 42.2% of Christian women and 47.4% of non-Christian women reporting having experienced domestic violence. This analysis suggests that while there are slight differences in reported abuse rates between Christian and non-Christian women, domestic violence remains a significant concern among married women in the district, regardless of their religious affiliation. The results indicate that more than half of married women across these groups have experienced some form of domestic violence.

Table 3: Chi-square Analysis of Significant Differences in the Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Women Based on Religion

Religion	**Yes**	**No**	**Total**	χ^2	**df**	**Sig.**	**Dec.**
Christian	147	201	348	0.780	1	0.550	Not Sig.
Non-Christian	18	20	38				
Total	**165**	**221**	**386**				

Table 3 provides the results of a Chi-square analysis examining the prevalence of domestic violence among married women in the Owerri Senatorial District, categorized by religion. The Chi-square statistic is 0.780 with 1 degree of freedom, and the p-value is 0.550. Since this p-value exceeds the 0.05 significance level, the null hypothesis four (H_{04}), which posits that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of domestic violence based on religion, is accepted. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of domestic violence among married women in the Owerri Senatorial District in Imo State, regardless of their religious affiliation.

4. Discussion

4.1 Association of Religious Affiliation with the Prevalence of Domestic Violence among Married Women in Owerri Senatorial District in Imo State

The present study investigated domestic violence and religious variations among married women in imo state. The study's finding shows that there is no significant difference in the prevalence of domestic violence among married women in the Owerri Senatorial District based on their religious affiliation. This presents a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing domestic violence in this context. While many

may assume that religious teachings promote harmony and discourage violence, the reality is more complex (Istratii & Ali, 2023). Research has shown that religious beliefs can both hinder and help efforts to combat domestic violence, depending on how those beliefs are interpreted and practiced within specific communities (Gonçalves *et al.,* 2023; Istratii & Ali, 2023).

The absence of significant differences based on religious affiliation suggests that the societal context, rather than religious doctrine, may play a more crucial role in shaping attitudes towards domestic violence (Lanchimba *et al.,* 2023). Moreover, this finding raises questions about how religious institutions and communities respond to domestic violence. Some religious settings may perpetuate harmful gender norms, thereby enabling domestic violence, while others may provide support and resources for victims. For instance, in many traditional settings, religious teachings may be misinterpreted to justify male dominance and female subservience, leading to an environment where domestic violence is tolerated or ignored (Adam & Erhus, 2022). Therefore, the lack of significant differences in domestic violence prevalence across religious affiliations emphasizes the need for religious leaders and communities to actively engage in discussions about domestic violence and its implications.

Additionally, the finding indicates that interventions addressing domestic violence must consider the diverse beliefs and practices of various religious groups. The programmes could aim to engage religious leaders as advocates for change, promoting interpretations of religious texts that support gender equality and condemn violence (Sambo *et al.,* 2023). Encouraging interfaith dialogue can also help foster collaborative efforts to combat domestic violence within communities, transcending religious boundaries to create a united front against abuse. Therefore, the finding that religious affiliation does not significantly influence the prevalence of domestic violence highlights the complexity of the issue (WHO, 2026). It underscores the importance of understanding the role of cultural and societal contexts in shaping attitudes towards violence and necessitates collaborative efforts between religious institutions, community organizations, and advocacy groups (Ellison, 1999). By working together to challenge harmful interpretations of religious teachings and promoting supportive environments for victims, communities can take significant strides towards reducing the prevalence of domestic violence across all religious affiliations.

5. Conclusions

The findings highlight the significant prevalence of domestic violence among married women in Imo State, with a notable number experiencing sexual and emotional abuse. Although many women do not report incidents of domestic violence, the data indicates that nearly half have faced sexual violence through their religious believes. These underscored the need for targeted interventions. The study also reveals that domestic violence affects women across all age groups, with younger women showing higher rates

of victimization, underscoring their vulnerability. While economic status influences the occurrence of domestic violence, the absence of significant differences based on age or religious affiliation suggests that systemic cultural and social norms contribute to the issue. The finding that educational attainment significantly impacts the prevalence of domestic violence indicates that women with lower education levels may lack awareness of their rights, necessitating educational programmes that empower them. Therefore, the study underscores the need for comprehensive approaches to address domestic violence, focusing on raising awareness, providing support, and changing societal attitudes. Collaborative efforts from community leaders, policymakers, and support organizations are essential to create a safe environment for all women and ultimately reduce domestic violence in the region.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Local government bodies and educational institutions should develop community-based educational initiatives specifically targeting young married women aged 15-24. These programmes should focus on raising awareness about domestic violence, its forms, and women's rights, equipping them with the knowledge and resources needed to seek help and support.
- Healthcare providers should establish and promote accessible support services, such as counseling and referral systems for victims of domestic violence. They should collaborate with local NGOs to ensure that married women have access to resources, such as hotlines and shelters that facilitate safety and recovery.

Ethical Considerations and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was waived by the Ebonyi State University Medical School Research Ethics Committee. The reason for the waiver was that the study was not done in a laboratory. Written informed consent was obtained from the participants before responding to the questionnaire. The participants read the consent note and agreed to participate in the study before responding to the study survey.

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Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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