

Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area of Rivers State

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31920/2976-7784/2025/v3n2a1>

***Constance C. Ifeme and Golda O. Ekenedo**

*Department of Health Promotion Environment and Safety Education
University of Port Harcourt.*

Corresponding Author's Email: ifemeconstance@gmail.com

Abstract

This study assesses the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. Focusing mainly on physical, emotional, verbal, and sexual violence. Utilizing a descriptive survey design, a sample of 800 married couples was selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. Data were collected via a structured questionnaire and analyzed with simple linear regression using SPSS. The overall IPV prevalence rate was found to be 37.12%. These findings align with existing literature on the widespread nature of IPV, highlighting the critical need for targeted interventions. Social norms, gender inequality, and ineffective legal frameworks were identified as contributing factors to the persistence of IPV. The study reveals a significant prevalence of IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to address and reduce IPV within the community. Implementing public awareness and education programs focused on IPV prevention and support services, targeting both victims and the general public, is recommended to foster a safer and more supportive environment for married couples in Port Harcourt City.

Key Words:

Introduction

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is a widespread problem that affects people from all walks of life. It is defined as the abuse or aggression that occurs in a romantic relationship. This includes physical violence, verbal violence, sexual violence, stalking, and psychological aggression, such as controlling behaviors, by a current or former intimate partner (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention CDC, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) (2021) also defines IPV as actions by a partner or ex-partner that cause physical, sexual, or emotional harm. This includes hitting, forced sex, emotional abuse, and controlling actions. Similarly, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) (2023) describes IPV as various behaviors by a current or former partner, including physical attacks, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and controlling actions, all aimed at dominating the other partner. These definitions reflect that IPV can take many forms and highlight the need for effective strategies to prevent and address it.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) can shatter lives in numerous ways, manifesting in different forms that all lead to profound harm. Physical IPV includes acts like hitting, slapping, choking, and using weapons to inflict injury or fear (Campbell *et al.*, 2021). Emotional IPV involves behaviors such as threats, insults, constant monitoring, and humiliation, which can severely damage a person's mental health and self-esteem (Boserup, McKenney, & Elkbuli, 2020). Sexual IPV encompasses forced sexual acts or attempts, unwanted sexual contact, and reproductive coercion, violating a person's bodily autonomy (Pallitto *et al.*, 2021). Verbal IPV involves the use of words to harm, control, or demean a partner (Follingstad, *et. al.*, 2021). This can include insults, threats, constant criticism, humiliation, and attempts to manipulate or control the partner through verbal abuse. Verbal IPV can severely impact the victim's mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. It is a pervasive form of IPV that often precedes or accompanies other types of abuse. Economic IPV includes controlling a partner's access to financial resources, keeping them financially dependent, and preventing them from working or going to school (Adams *et al.*, 2020). These types of IPV are alarmingly common, affecting millions of people worldwide each year.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) affects both men and women worldwide, with significant variations across continents and countries. Globally, approximately 27% of women and 13% of men have

experienced IPV at some point in their lives (World Health Organization, 2022). In Europe, around 25% of women and 10% of men report such experiences, while in Asia, the figures are 30% for women and 12% for men (Oseni, et. al, 2022). In Africa, the prevalence is particularly high, with 37% of women and 15% of men affected (Nduka, et. a., (2023). Within Africa, countries like South Africa report a 36% prevalence among women and 16% among men, while Kenya has rates of 34% for women and 14% for men (Wood, et. al., 2024). In Nigeria, national surveys indicate that 31% of women and 12% of men have suffered IPV (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2020). Specific states in Nigeria show varying rates; for example, in Lagos, 33% of women and 14% of men report IPV, while in Kano, the rates are 28% for women and 10% for men (Oluwole, et. a., 2022). Despite the widespread nature of IPV, physical violence remains one of the most reported forms of abuse in intimate relationships.

It is a troubling issue affecting millions of married couples worldwide. Globally, about one in three married couples has experienced physical IPV at some point in their lives, highlighting the widespread nature of this issue (World Health Organization, 2021). Nigeria, is not left out in this alarming, health challenging situation. In Port Harcourt City, research reveals that physical IPV is prevalent among married couples, with many cases often going unreported due to societal stigma and lack of support (Oluwaseun et al., 2023). Conventionally, IPV is committed against both male and female in different forms.

Verbal intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples is a widespread issue that often goes unnoticed but can have serious emotional consequences. Globally, it is estimated that about 30% of women and 20% of men have experienced verbal abuse from their partners, with significant variations across regions (World Health Organization, 2021). In Africa, the prevalence is particularly concerning, with 35% of women and 25% of men reporting verbal IPV (Oseni, et. al, 2022). In Nigeria, national data indicate that 32% of women and 22% of men have suffered verbal abuse from their spouses (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2020). Specific states in Nigeria show different rates; for instance, in Lagos, 34% of women and 24% of men report verbal IPV, while in Rivers State, the rates are 30% for women and 20% for men (Oluwole, *et. al.*, 2022). Research in Port Harcourt City reveals that verbal IPV is a common problem among married couples, with a significant number of cases often underreported due to societal stigma (Oluwaseun *et al.*, 2023). Beyond verbal abuse, many married

couples also endure sexual IPV, which further complicates their relationships and well-being.

Sexual intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples is a serious and pervasive issue that demands attention. Globally, around 25% of women and 10% of men have experienced sexual IPV, highlighting the extensive reach of this problem (World Health Organization, 2021). In Africa, the prevalence is particularly high, with 30% of women and 15% of men reporting sexual IPV (Oseni, *et. al*, 2022). In Nigeria, national surveys show that 24% of women and 12% of men have been victims of sexual IPV (National Demographic and Health Survey, 2020). Specific states reveal varying rates; for instance, in Lagos, 26% of women and 14% of men report experiencing sexual IPV, while in Kano, the figures are 22% for women and 10% for men (Oluwole, *et. al.*, 2022). Understanding the prevalence of IPV is crucial for developing effective interventions and support systems to protect victims and prevent further abuse.

Studying the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples is crucial for several reasons. It helps to discern the extent of the problem, which is often hidden due to societal stigma and fear of reporting. Understanding the prevalence provides a clearer picture of how widespread IPV is, allowing for the development of targeted interventions and policies to protect victims and prevent future violence. Additionally, research on IPV prevalence among married couples can inform healthcare providers, policymakers, and social workers about the specific needs and risks faced by this demographic, leading to more effective support services and prevention programs. By identifying patterns and risk factors associated with IPV in marriages, we can work towards creating safer, healthier relationships and communities. By focusing on these local contexts, particularly in areas like Port Harcourt City where cultural and societal pressures complicate reporting, this study aims to highlight the urgent need for tailored strategies to protect victims and prevent further abuse. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of IPV, ultimately aiding policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders in crafting targeted, effective solutions to this pervasive problem. Hence the study on Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.

Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study accessed Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area. Specifically, the following objectives informed the study:

1. Determine the overall prevalence rate of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
2. Assess the prevalence of physical IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
3. Evaluate the prevalence of emotional IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
4. Examine the prevalence of verbal IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.
5. Investigate the prevalence of sexual IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area.

Research Questions

The study proffers answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the overall prevalence rate of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
2. What is the prevalence of physical IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
3. What is the prevalence of emotional IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
4. What is the prevalence of verbal IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?
5. What is the prevalence of sexual IPV among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area?

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive survey methodological design to investigate the prevalence of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt Local Government Area of Rivers State. The population for the study comprised all married couples registered at the Port Harcourt City Local Government Area marriage registry from 2001 to 2019, totaling 17,867 (Marriage Registry, 2019). A

sample size of 800 married couples, aged 18 to 57 years, was selected for the study.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted, involving cluster sampling, simple random sampling, and convenience sampling techniques. In the first stage, the study area was divided into three educational zones: Town zone, Diobu zone, and Trans-Amadi zone. Two communities were randomly selected from each zone using simple random sampling without replacement, totaling six communities.

The second stage, 800 married couples were randomly selected from these six communities across the three educational zones.

Third stage, 140 and 100 respondents were conveniently selected from each of the chosen communities. Leveraging on organizations and churches under the selected areas considering that Port Harcourt City Local Government is a Metropolitan city and there are no day that passes without reports of IPV.

The instrument for data collection was a self-developed structured questionnaire titled “Predictors of Intimate Partner Violence among Married Couples Questionnaire (PIPVMCQ).” To ensure the reliability of the instrument, the results were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha to ascertain internal consistency. The reliability coefficients for the subscales of physical violence, emotional/psychological violence, verbal abuse, and sexual violence were 0.83, 0.73, 0.88, and 0.89, respectively.

Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 25. The collected data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and simple linear regression to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. This study adhered to ethical principles governing the use of human participants in research. Authorization was obtained from the University of Port Harcourt Ethics Committee to ensure compliance with ethical standards.

Findings

Frequency and percentage on prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence among married couples.

Items	Always F (%)	Sometimes F (%)	Rarely F (%)	Never n=782 F (%)
Physical Violence				
Hitting	0 (0.0)	86 (11.0)	71 (9.1)	625(79.9)
Slapping	0 (0.0)	43 (5.5)	0 (0.0)	739 (94.5)
Flogging	43 (5.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	739 (94.5)

Kicking	0 (0.0)	43 (5.5)	0 (0.0)	739 (94.5)
Pushing	0 (0.0)	129 (16.5)	28 (3.6)	625 (79.9)
Dragging	0 (0.0)	43 (5.5)	43 (5.5)	696 (89.0)
Bites	0 (0.0)	43 (5.5)	0 (0.0)	739 (94.5)
Burns	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	43 (5.5)	739 (94.5)
Overall %	0.7	6.2	3.0	90.1

Emotional/Psychological

Threat to divorce	0 (0.0)	156 (19.9)	28 (3.6)	596 (76.5)
Making jest of one another	43 (5.5)	123 (16.4)	56 (7.2)	555 (71.0)
Intimidation	86 (11.0)	71 (9.1)	85 (10.9)	540 (69.1)
Refusal to provide the basic needs of the family	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	71 (9.1)	711 (90.9)
Excessive control on husband or wife.	43 (5.5)	85 (10.9)	28 (3.6)	626 (80.1)
Dictating for me who to talk to and who not to.	0 (0.0)	184 (23.5)	28 (3.6)	570 (72.9)
Overall %	3.7	13.3	6.3	76.7

Verbal violence

Shouting	86 (11.0)	270 (34.5)	155 (19.8)	271 (34.9)
Names calling	172 (22.0)	98 (12.5)	127 (16.2)	385 (49.2)
Accusation	43 (5.5)	128 (16.4)	211 (27.0)	400 (51.2)
Overall %	12.8	21.1	21	45.1

Sexual violence

Had sex for the fear of losing spouse	86 (11.0)	270 (34.5)	155 (19.8)	271 (34.7)
Had sex even when not in the mood	172 (22.0)	98 (12.5)	127 (16.2)	385 (49.2)
Disagreement in the use of contraceptive for sex.	43 (5.5)	128 (16.4)	211 (27.0)	400 (51.2)
Had sex against ones wish	86 (11.0)	270 (34.5)	155 (19.8)	271 (34.7)
Forced to have sex	172 (22.0)	98 (12.5)	127 (16.2)	385 (49.2)
Had sex just to satisfy partner	43 (5.5)	128 (16.4)	211 (27.0)	400 (51.2)
Starved of sex	43 (5.5)	225 (28.8)	142 (18.2)	372 (47.6)
Had sex because my partner want it	85 (10.9)	428 (54.7)	269 (34.4)	0 (0.0)
Overall %	11.7	26.3	22.3	39.7

From the table above the overall IPV prevalence rate was found to be 37.12 among married couples in PHALGA. Sexual violence topped the chart with 60.3%, followed by Verbal Violence with 54%. Emotional/psychological Violence is 23.3%, while the lowest was Physical Violence with 9.96%.

Discussion of Findings

The overall prevalence rate of intimate partner violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area (PHALGA) was found to be 37.12%. Within this statistic, sexual violence topped the chart with 60.3%, followed by verbal violence at 54.9%, emotional/psychological violence at 23.3%, and physical violence at 9.96%. These findings reveal the widespread nature of IPV in the area, with various forms of abuse affecting a significant portion of the population. The high prevalence of sexual and verbal violence is particularly alarming and underscores the need for urgent interventions. However, the current study revealed that married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government of Rivers State experienced sexual and verbal abuse were more, very few experienced physical violence and emotional/psychological violence where moderate.

It is not surprising as a lot of married couples suffer most of these violence and decide to keep it to themselves because of the neighborhood they live in also linked to immediate reaction from spouse who may find it difficult to control their temper. Sexual violence depicted the highest percentage it revealed how unrecognized the society rate it, as it is seen as an entitlement to both parties whenever they wish.

The findings of this study is lesser compared to the findings of Onigbogi and Odeyemi (2015) among couples revealed a lifetime prevalence for physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence were 50.5%, 33.8% and 85.0% respectively this may be attributed to dichotomous response options of the instrument that was used for data collection.

The findings of this study is closely related with Anolue and Uzoma (2017) on prevalence contributing factors and spectrum among married couples which revealed that 56% had experienced some form of IPV while 44% had not.

The high prevalence of IPV, especially sexual violence, is alarming, though not entirely surprising. Given the global and national trends in IPV, these findings were expected. The widespread occurrence of verbal

and sexual violence suggests deep-seated issues within marital relationships that need to be addressed urgently. Reasons for this view are based on existing literature and studies that indicate high levels of IPV in various parts of the world, including Nigeria. Social norms, gender inequality, and lack of effective legal frameworks often contribute to the persistence of IPV. For example, research by Ahonsi *et al.* (2020) highlights the pervasive nature of sexual violence in Nigeria, often exacerbated by cultural attitudes that normalize such behaviors.

The findings are consistent with those in the literature, which indicate that IPV is a major issue globally and in Nigeria. Studies have shown that sexual and verbal violence are particularly prevalent forms of IPV. For instance, the World Health Organization (2021) reports that nearly one in three women worldwide have experienced physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner. Similarly, research by Olufunke *et al.* (2022) found high rates of verbal and emotional abuse among married couples in Nigeria, aligning with the findings of this study.

This study contributes valuable data specific to Port Harcourt City, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions. By identifying the high prevalence of various forms of IPV, the study underscores the importance of developing comprehensive strategies to address and reduce IPV. The findings can inform policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders in creating effective support systems and preventive measures. This local data is crucial for tailoring interventions that consider the unique cultural and social dynamics of the area.

Conclusion

The study on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area underscores a significant public health issue that requires urgent attention. The high prevalence rates of various forms of IPV highlight deep-seated cultural and societal issues that contribute to this violence. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive strategies and targeted interventions to address and mitigate IPV, considering the unique cultural and social dynamics of the area. This research provides valuable data that can inform policymakers, healthcare providers, and community leaders, aiding in the development of effective support systems and preventive measures to enhance the well-being and safety of married couples in Port Harcourt City.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study on Prevalence of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) among married couples in Port Harcourt City Local Government Area, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Implement widespread public awareness and education campaigns to change societal attitudes towards IPV, emphasizing that all forms of violence are unacceptable. These campaigns should target both men and women and be disseminated through various media platforms, community meetings, and religious organizations.
2. **Legal Reforms and Enforcement:** Strengthen existing legal frameworks and enforcement mechanisms to protect victims of IPV. This includes ensuring that laws against IPV are not only in place but are also effectively implemented and enforced. Training for law enforcement officials on how to handle IPV cases sensitively and effectively should be prioritized.
3. **Support Services for Victims:** Establish and improve support services for victims of IPV, including shelters, counseling, legal aid, and medical care. These services should be accessible, affordable, and available in multiple languages to accommodate diverse populations.
4. **Community-Based Interventions:** Develop community-based intervention programmes that involve local leaders, religious figures, and other influential community members in addressing IPV. These programs should focus on promoting healthy, respectful relationships and providing resources for conflict resolution.
5. **Education and Training Programs:** Introduce educational programs in schools and universities that focus on healthy relationships, gender equality, and the prevention of IPV. Additionally, provide training for healthcare providers, social workers, and educators on identifying and responding to IPV.
6. **Research and Data Collection:** Conduct further research and continuous data collection on IPV to monitor trends, identify risk factors, and evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. This data should be used to inform policy decisions and improve response strategies.
7. **Economic Empowerment Programs:** Implement economic empowerment programs for women to reduce financial dependency

on abusive partners. These programs could include skills training, microfinance initiatives, and support for female entrepreneurship.

By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can work towards significantly reducing the prevalence of IPV in Port Harcourt City, fostering a safer and healthier environment for all married couples.

References

- Abayomi, A. & Nwankwo, O. (2020). Prevalence of intimate partner violence among women in Lagos and Kaduna states, Nigeria. *Journal of African Health Sciences*, 20(3), 235-245.
- Adams, A. E., Greeson, M. R., Kennedy, A. C., & Tolman, R. M. (2020). The effects of adolescent intimate partner violence on adult relationship quality and psychological health. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(1), 317-331.
- Ahonsi, B., Odo, A. N., & Imade, G. E. (2020). Sexual violence and its implications for women's health in Nigeria. *Journal of Public Health in Africa*, 11(1), 72-80.
- Anolue, F. C., & Uzoma, O. I., (2017). Intimate partner violence, contributing factors and spectrum among married couples in Southeast Nigeria. *International Journal of Reproduction, Contraception, Obstetrics and Gynecology*; 6(9), 3748-3753.
- Boserup, B., McKenney, M., & Elkbuli, A., (2020). Alarming trends in US domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 38(12), 2753-2755.
- Campbell, A. M., Decker, M. R., & Campbell, J. C., (2021). Identifying and responding to intimate partner violence in healthcare settings: A global review. *World Health Organization Bulletin*, 99(3), 241-245.
- Follingstad, D. R., & Edmundson, M. (2021). Is psychological abuse as harmful as physical and/or sexual abuse? The impact of frequency, severity, and coercive control. *Journal of Family Violence*, 36(4), 439-452. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-020-00208-5>
- National Demographic and Health Survey (2020). Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2020. National Population Commission and ICF. Intimate partner violence. Retrieved from <https://nij.ojp.gov/library/publications/intimate-partner-violence> Accessed 5-8-2024
- Nduka, C., Omuemu, V., Tella, A., & Obi, D., (2023). Top of form review article: Economic abuse as a form of intimate partner violence

- in sub-Saharan Africa: A review of the literature. *Journal of Community Medicine and Primary Health Care*. 35 (3) 85-95.
- Olufunke, A. J., Martins, A., & Okoro, I., (2022). Intimate partner violence in Nigeria: A study of prevalence and implications. *Nigerian Journal of Social Issues*, 42(1), 59-71.
- Oluwaseun, A. J., Martins, A., & Okoro, I., (2023). Intimate partner violence in Port Harcourt: A hidden epidemic. *Nigerian Journal of Social Issues*, 42(1), 59-71.
- Oluwole, E. O., Onwumelu, N. C., & Okafor, I. P., (2020). Prevalence and determinants of intimate partner violence among adult women in an urban community in Lagos, Southwest Nigeria. *Pan African Medical Journal*, 36:345.doi: 10.11604/pamj.2020.36.345.24402
- Onigbogi, M. O., Odeyemi, K. A., & Onigbogi, O. O., (2015). Prevalence and factors associated with intimate partner violence among married women in an urban community in Lagos State, Nigeria. *African Journal Reproductive Health*: 19, 91-100.
- Oseni, T. I. A., Salam, T. O., Ilori, T., & Momoh, M. O., (2022). Prevalence and pattern of intimate partner violence among men and women in Edo State, Southern Nigeria. *African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine*, 14(1):1-7.
- Pallitto, C. C., García-Moreno, C., Jansen, H. A., Heise, L., Ellsberg, M., & Watts, C. (2021). Intimate partner violence, abortion, and unintended pregnancy: Results from the WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence. *International Journal of Gynecology & Obstetrics*, 146(2), 154-162.
- Wood, S. N., Perrin, N., Akumu, I., Asira, B., Clough, A., Glass, N., Campbell, J. & Decker, M. R. (2024). Risk for Severe Intimate Partner Violence in Nairobi's Informal Settlements: Tailoring the Danger Assessment to Kenya. *Global Health: Science and Practice*, 12(1):e2300116; <https://doi.org/10.9745/GHSP-D-23-00116>
- World Health Organization (2021). Violence against women and men prevalence estimates. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240022256> Accessed 5-8-2024