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Journal of Guidance and Counseling



Journal homepage: <http://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/journal/>

Psychological Factors as A Correlate of Spousal Abuse Among Working-Class Women in Lagos Metropolis

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ABSTRACT

Spousal abuse in marriages represents a significant problem that leads to considerable psychological distress for working-class women in Nigeria. This research examines the connections between psychological factors and spousal abuse in working-class women residing in the Lagos metropolis. The research employed quantitative analysis to evaluate the effects of depression and low self-esteem on spousal abuse. The analysis indicates a significant positive correlation between depression and spousal abuse ($r = .739$; $p < 0.05$), which indicates that higher levels of depression are closely linked to a rise in incidents of spousal abuse. The study reveals a noteworthy positive correlation between low self-esteem and spousal abuse ($r = .677$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that lower self-worth plays a significant role in the occurrence of spousal abuse. The findings underscore the significant influence of psychological factors in the dynamics of spousal abuse, recommending the necessity for focused interventions aimed at addressing depression and self-esteem challenges to reduce abuse among working-class women in the Lagos metropolis.

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Submitted/Received 30 08 2024

First Revised 12 09 2024

Accepted 02 10 2024

First Available Online 31 10 2024

Publication Date 31 10 2024

Keyword:

Psychological factors,
Spousal abuse,
Working-class women.

1. INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of spousal abuse against women is as common as marriage itself. The [World Health Organisation \(2021\)](#) considered abuse against women as a global pandemic with approximately 33% of women experiencing abuse by their partner in Africa. In Nigeria alone, about a quarter of women have experienced violence from their partners ([Benebo, et al., 2018](#)).

Spousal abuse involves various methods engaged by a partner to control or manipulate the other partner in a marriage setting, usually through the exercise of a pattern of misuse of power or privilege. While physical violence often garners immediate attention, the subtle yet insidious nature of emotional abuse in marriages which involves coercively controlling the victim to exert power, diminish self-worth and cause emotional harm is equally detrimental. Spousal abuse in marriages impacts negatively on emotional wellness, which is the ability to cope effectively with life challenges and have an enjoyable life, by inflicting immediate emotional distress and long-lasting psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem ([Akhtar and Barlow, 2018](#)).

In the context of working-class women, occupational status appears to be a risk factor for spousal abuse. Women in occupations of lower prestige are more likely to encounter violence, whereas those in occupations that are comparable to or of higher prestige than their male partners also face a heightened risk ([Owoo, 2020](#)). This suggests that both low occupational status and status inconsistencies between partners can provoke abuse among spouses.

Depression and self-esteem are psychological factors that have been closely linked to experiences of spousal abuse. Depression, marked by ongoing emotions of sorrow, despair, and a diminished engagement with life, can both result from and exacerbate experiences of abuse. Women who suffer from depression may feel trapped in abusive relationships due to a perceived lack of alternatives or support, further deepening their psychological distress. Depression arising from dwelling in adverse settings makes them always sad, denying them the enthusiasm needed for enjoyable personal and work life ([Okafor, 2018](#)).

Depression is also a mood disorder characterized by a constant state of sadness and loss of interests in the normal activities and life in general. It is a major cause of inability worldwide ([Kessler and Bromet, 2013](#)) impairing the capacity of abused working-class women to function healthily in marital and work relationships ([Johnson, Galambos, Finn, and Horne, 2017](#)). Women suffering from depression may feel trapped in abusive relationships due to a perceived lack of alternatives or support, further deepening their psychological distress. Research shows that women in abusive relationships are more likely to experience depression, and this mental health issue often perpetuates the cycle of abuse ([Ugochukwu, 2019](#)).

Self-esteem, on the other hand, involves a diminished sense of self-worth and value. Women with low self-esteem may internalize the negative behaviors of their spouses, believing that they deserve the abuse or that they are powerless to change their circumstances. This psychological vulnerability can lead to a cycle of abuse, where the victim becomes increasingly dependent on the abuser, both emotionally and financially, especially within the working-class demographic where economic stability is often precarious ([Oluwaseun, 2022](#)).

Self-esteem according to [Yahaya \(2020\)](#) denotes the entirety of a multifaceted, structured, and evolving framework of acquired beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that individuals consider to be accurate regarding their own existence. Initially, an individual's self-concept is broad

and malleable; nevertheless, with maturation, these self-perceptions evolve into a more structured, intricate, and precise framework. Carl Rogers posited that self-concept had three distinct components: self-image, self-esteem, and ideal self.

Multiple studies have been undertaken that are relevant to the subject of this study showing a strong correlation between psychological factors and spousal abuse. [Nedelcu et al. \(2020\)](#) examined the relationship between personality disorders and domestic violence within a forensic framework. Their findings indicated that the presence of personality disorders is a contributing factor to domestic violence. Previous studies have shown a strong correlation between depression, low self-esteem, and experiences of spousal abuse. However, specific research focusing on working-class women in Lagos State is needed to understand the unique factors contributing to this correlation in this demographic. By exploring this relationship, the study aims to provide insights that could inform more effective interventions and support systems for working-class women experiencing spousal abuse ([Adeyemi et al., 2020](#)).

According to [Akinyemi and Popoola \(2023\)](#) the challenges faced by working-class women are multifaceted. These women often juggle multiple roles as breadwinners, caregivers, and homemakers, which can create significant stress and strain on their mental health. The intersection of economic pressures, gender expectations, and social norms can make them particularly vulnerable to spousal abuse. Moreover, cultural stigmatization of divorce or separation, coupled with inadequate support systems, may compel many women to remain in abusive relationships, thereby exacerbating the psychological impact of abuse.

[Adebowale and Ayodele \(2021\)](#) conducted a study on 300 working-class women, which aimed to explore the link between spousal abuse and mental health outcomes. The researchers found that 72% of women who reported experiencing physical or emotional abuse by their spouses also met the diagnostic criteria for depression. The study highlighted that the stress and emotional trauma of enduring spousal abuse significantly contributed to the onset and persistence of depressive symptoms. The findings suggested a cyclical relationship where depression both results from and perpetuates the experience of abuse. [Kamaldeen et al. \(2023\)](#) examined the correlation among poverty, frustration, and domestic violence among students enrolled in sandwich programmes at Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin and the study found a significant correlation between poverty, frustration and domestic violence with ($r=.636$; $p<0.05$) ($r=.761$; $p<0.05$) respectively. The study recommended that counseling psychologist should intensify effort in organizing workshop for educational stakeholders on the implications of the study

[Eze and Nwankwo \(2021\)](#), in their study involving 450 women across different states in Nigeria, including Lagos, found that low self-esteem was a significant predictor of spousal abuse. The study used a self-esteem scale to assess the participants' sense of self-worth and found that women with lower self-esteem scores were more likely to report experiencing physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. The authors argued that low self-esteem might make women more vulnerable to abuse because it can lead to increased tolerance of abusive behaviors and reduced likelihood of seeking help or exiting the relationship.

A related study by [Oluwaseun \(2022\)](#) focused on working-class women in Lagos State and examined how low self-esteem influenced their ability to cope with spousal abuse. Using a sample of 200 women, the study found that those with lower self-esteem were more likely to remain in abusive relationships due to feelings of inadequacy and fear of social stigma. The study also highlighted that low self-esteem often leads to emotional dependency on the abuser, which exacerbates the cycle of abuse.

Moreover, [Babalola et al. \(2019\)](#) investigated a longitudinal study on the mental health of women in abusive relationships in urban Nigeria, including Lagos. The study followed 150 women over three years and found that those with persistent depressive symptoms and low self-esteem were less likely to leave abusive relationships, even when offered support and resources. The study also noted that interventions targeting mental health improvement, particularly self-esteem building, were effective in reducing the incidence of spousal abuse among the participants.

Spousal abuse in marriages is a widespread issue causing severe psychological distress among working-class women in Nigeria. This form of abuse, characterized by manipulation, humiliation and control, results in emotional wellness consequences such as the inability to cope with life's stresses, family-work conflicts and to manage emotions therefore leaving lasting emotional scars such as low self-esteem, anxiety and depression. This makes it difficult for working-class women to experience happiness, peace and a sense of well-being. The peculiarities of the type of employment these women engage in may also add to the distress arising from emotional abuse. Additionally, feelings of low self-esteem resulting in self-consciousness, self-blame and shame tend to undermine their confidence and may adversely affect their work productivity. Furthermore, working-class women with a low level of education have limited access to financial and social resources may find themselves more vulnerable to this abuse, thereby further worsening their emotional distress.

Spousal abuse remains a critical issue that affects the well-being of families and communities globally. Among the working-class, the dynamics of marital relationships can be significantly influenced by various psychological factors, notably depression and self-esteem. Research has increasingly highlighted the relationship between mental health conditions and instances of spousal abuse yet there remains a gap in understanding how these factors specifically interact to predict spousal abuse. Individuals experiencing depression may struggle with emotional regulation, potentially leading to conflicts that escalate into physical or emotional abuse. On the other hand, self-esteem plays a crucial role in relationship dynamics. Low self-esteem can make individuals more vulnerable to being victimized or more likely to perpetrate violence, as it may manifest in controlling behaviors or allow for feelings of inadequacy and frustration to surface as aggression.

The working-class population faces unique stressors, including financial insecurity, job-related pressures, and the demands of work-life balance, which can exacerbate mental health challenges. In many cases, individuals in these positions may lack access to resources that promote mental health and relationship support, leaving them unable to effectively manage stress and navigate conflicts. This can create an environment conducive to spousal abuse, as the interplay between depression and self-esteem may inhibit open communication and healthy conflict resolution. Despite existing literature on the general impacts of psychological factors on domestic violence, there is limited research focusing on working-class women and how depression and self-esteem specifically act as predictors of spousal battery. This study aims to investigate the psychological factors which causes spousal abuse among working-class women, shedding light on the consequences of depression and low self-esteem in marriage dysfunctions.

2. METHODS

The research utilized a descriptive survey design that focused on correlation. The strategy was appropriate as it involved collecting data from individuals without manipulating the study

variables. The study examined psychological factors as the independent variables and spousal abuse as the dependent variable. The survey was conducted among working-class who had been emotionally abused by their spouses and seeking interventions in 45 domestic violence welfare shelters in Lagos Metropolis. The emotionally abused working-class married women seeking help were used for the study because they constitute a stable, purposive, and consenting respondent. The population of 168 was used to establish a sample size of 100 from 5 Domestic Violence Welfare Centers in Lagos Metropolis using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table for the study. Multistage sampling process was used to select participants from 2 senatorial districts. The first stage involved the adoption of the three senatorial districts in Lagos State and randomly selecting two out of them. Purposive sampling was used to select LSDVA approved women's domestic violence welfare centers in the two selected senatorial districts from which one centre was randomly chosen respectively.

The data collection instruments consist of three modified questionnaires: the Spousal Abuse Experience Scale (SAES), the Depression Scale (DS) and Low Self-esteem Scale (LSS). The instruments' reliability was evaluated using Cronbach Alpha, yielding coefficients of 0.79, 0.80 and 0.83 respectively. The rating structure employed for all scales was derived from a four-point system, wherein the value of 4 was assigned to "Always," the value of 3 was assigned to "Often," the value of 2 was assigned to "Rarely," and the value of 1 was assigned to "Never." The collected data underwent analysis through the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistical method.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between depression and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis.

Table 1. Significant relationship between depression and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	N	R	P	Remark
Depression	44.03	15.65					
Spousal Abuse	40.13	13.23	98	100	.739	.001	Significant

Table 1 showed that there was significant relationship between depression and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis ($r = .739$; $p < 0.05$). The implication of this showed that depression had significant impact on spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis.

3.2. Research Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between low self-esteem and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis.

Table 2. Significant relationship between low self-esteem and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis

Variable	Mean	SD	DF	N	R	P	Remark
Low Self-esteem	41.98	14.44					
<i>Spousal Abuse</i>	<i>40.13</i>	<i>13.23</i>	98	100	.677	.002	Significant

Table 2 showed that there was significant relationship between low self-esteem and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis ($r = .677$; $p < 0.05$). The implication of this revealed that low self-esteem has significant impact on spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis

3.3 Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study reveal significant relationships between depression, low self-esteem, and spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos metropolis. These results are consistent with empirical evidence from previous studies, which have extensively documented the psychological impact of spousal abuse on women.

The result from hypothesis 1 show a strong correlation between depression and spousal abuse ($r = .739$; $p < 0.05$), indicating that depression has a significant impact on the likelihood of experiencing spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos. This aligns with the findings of Ibrahim et al. (2018), who reported that women subjected to spousal abuse in Northern Nigeria were significantly more prone to depression compared to those who were not abused.

Similarly, the study by Adebawale and Ayodele (2021) conducted in Lagos State reinforces this relationship by demonstrating that the majority of women who experienced physical or emotional abuse also showed significant signs of depression. These findings highlight the cyclical nature of depression and spousal abuse, where one condition exacerbates the other, creating a challenging situation for the affected women.

The result from hypothesis 2 also found a significant relationship between low self-esteem and spousal abuse ($r = .677$; $p < 0.05$). This suggests that low self-esteem plays a critical role in the dynamics of abusive relationships among working-class women in Lagos. The findings are consistent with the research by Eze and Nwankwo (2021), which identified low self-esteem as a significant predictor of intimate partner violence in Nigeria. Women with low self-esteem are more likely to tolerate abusive behavior because they may perceive themselves as unworthy or deserving of the abuse. This psychological vulnerability makes it difficult for them to assert themselves or seek help, trapping them in a cycle of abuse.

The study by Oluwaseun (2022) further supports these findings by highlighting how low self-esteem among working-class women in Lagos contributes to their dependency on abusive partners. The study observed that women with low self-esteem were more likely to remain in abusive relationships due to feelings of inadequacy, fear of social stigma, and economic dependence on their partners. This reinforces the idea that low self-esteem not only makes women more susceptible to abuse but also hinders their ability to escape from such situations.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Spousal abuse among working-class women in Lagos State is a multifaceted issue that is deeply intertwined with psychological factors such as depression and low self-esteem. The results from the study highlight a strong correlation between these psychological factors and the prevalence of spousal abuse. Women suffering from depression often find themselves trapped in abusive relationships due to feelings of hopelessness and a perceived lack of alternatives, while low self-esteem further compounds their vulnerability, leading to increased tolerance of abusive behavior and emotional dependency on their abusers. These factors are particularly pronounced among working-class women, who face additional socio-economic pressures that limit their ability to escape abusive situations.

Based on the findings, the following were recommended:

- 4.1. Regular mental health screenings should be integrated into healthcare services for women, especially those in working-class communities. Early detection of depression can prevent the escalation of spousal abuse and enable timely intervention.
- 4.2. Counsellors should intensify their effort in implementing self-esteem enhancement programs that focus on empowering women through personal development, assertiveness training, and confidence-building exercises. These programs should be accessible to working-class women and aim to strengthen their self-worth and ability to resist abusive relationships.

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