

# ASSESSMENT OF THE INCIDENCE AND CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN EDO STATE, NIGERIA

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## ABSTRACT

Domestic violence remains a significant social and public health concern in Nigeria, with implications for marital stability and family well-being. This study examined the incidence and causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, it assessed the prevalence of domestic violence and identified key socio-economic and socio-cultural factors influencing its occurrence. A survey research design was adopted. Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to 980 married individuals selected through a multi-stage sampling technique, out of which 919 valid responses were retrieved (93.8%). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, and graphical illustrations. Findings indicate a high incidence of domestic violence in Edo State, as evidenced by both survey responses and media-reported cases between 2008 and 2018, which showed a sustained increase over time. The major reported causes include partner suspicion and controlling behaviour (11.2%), economic hardship and inability to meet family needs (10.9%), childlessness or gender preference (10.7%), and infidelity (9.0%). Other contributing factors such as substance abuse (6.5%) and interference in personal affairs (6.6%) were also identified. The study concludes that domestic violence in Edo State is driven by multiple interacting factors, particularly economic stress and power dynamics within marriage. It recommends targeted policy interventions, including economic support programmes, public awareness campaigns, and stricter enforcement of laws against domestic violence to reduce its prevalence and protect family stability.

**Keywords:** causes, domestic violence, incidence, injury, violation

## Introduction

Domestic violence remains a critical social and public health issue, particularly within intimate and marital relationships. In Nigeria, it is legally defined under the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (2015) as any act within a domestic relationship that threatens or harms an individual's safety, health, or well-being. While marriage is socially constructed as a space for companionship and mutual support, empirical evidence indicates that it can also serve as a site of power imbalance, conflict, and abuse. The private nature of the family often conceals such experiences, resulting in significant underreporting and limiting the availability of reliable data for policy and intervention (Aihie, 2009; Ikekwuibe & Okoror, 2021).

At the global level, domestic violence constitutes a widespread phenomenon with serious human rights implications. Studies estimate that approximately one in three women aged 15–49 have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner (Aidonojie, Majekodunmi, Ikubanni, Oyebade, & Ibrahim, 2023; Pan American Health Organization, 2021). The World Health Organization, (2023) further notes that a substantial proportion of these incidents occur within marital or cohabiting relationships, underscoring the centrality of the family as a key site of vulnerability. In Sub-Saharan Africa, prevalence rates are particularly high, with some studies reporting that between 50% and 71% of couples experience some form of domestic violence (Ikekwuibe & Okoror, 2021). These figures reflect the combined influence of entrenched patriarchal norms, economic instability, and limited access to legal protection, all of which shape patterns of abuse in the region.

In Nigeria, domestic violence cuts across socio-economic, cultural, and religious boundaries, although its manifestations and intensity vary across regions. In Edo State, emerging evidence points to a troubling pattern of domestic violence involving physical assault, emotional abuse, economic deprivation, and coercive control (Adam & Erhus, 2022; Oseni, Salam, Ilori, & Momoh, 2022). Reports of severe cases including physical injury and fatal outcomes highlight the gravity of the problem and its implications for individual and family well-being. Previous studies have linked domestic violence in the region to factors such as economic hardship, unemployment, substance abuse, suspicion and control, infidelity, and culturally embedded gender expectations, including preferences for male children (Omorogbe, Obetoh, & Odion, 2010). These factors often interact in complex ways, reinforcing cycles of violence within households.

Beyond its immediate impact on victims, domestic violence has far-reaching social consequences. Victims frequently experience long-term psychological trauma, reduced economic productivity, and social isolation. Children exposed to violent home environments are at increased risk of emotional distress, behavioural problems, and the intergenerational transmission of violence (Lawal, & Ishaq, 2011). At the community level, the persistence of domestic violence undermines social cohesion and places additional strain on healthcare, legal, and social support systems. These outcomes underscore the importance of addressing domestic violence not only as a private matter but as a broader societal concern requiring coordinated intervention.

Despite increasing scholarly and policy attention, there remains a gap in localized empirical studies that comprehensively examine both the incidence and causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State. Many existing studies either focus on prevalence without adequately interrogating causal factors or examine specific determinants without situating them within a broader analytical framework. Given the unique socio-cultural and economic dynamics of Edo State where traditional norms intersect with modern socio-economic pressures there is a need for context-specific research that captures both patterns and underlying drivers of domestic violence.

It is against this background that this study investigates the incidence and causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to: (i) assess the prevalence of domestic violence in the study area, and (ii) identify the key socio-cultural and economic factors contributing to its occurrence. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence that can inform policy formulation, strengthen intervention strategies, and contribute to ongoing academic discourse on domestic violence in Nigeria and similar contexts.

## **Literature review**

### **Incidence of Domestic Violence**

Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that domestic violence is widespread in Nigeria, although reported prevalence varies across locations and methodologies. In Edo State, African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine published research by Oseni et al. (2022) reported a prevalence rate of 37.7%, with women constituting the majority of victims. However, this gender disparity has been questioned, as underreporting among men due to stigma and cultural expectations may distort actual prevalence patterns. In contrast, Ikekwuibe and Okoror (2021) found a significantly higher prevalence of 79.4% in rural Edo communities, suggesting that location and socio-cultural context play a critical role in shaping both the occurrence and reporting of domestic violence.

Beyond Edo State, national-level studies reinforce the widespread nature of the problem. For instance, Itimi, Dienye, and Gbeneol (2016) reported a 41.9% prevalence of physical abuse in Port Harcourt, while studies in Northern Nigeria, (Yahaya, Abubakar, Saidu, & Kabiru, 2021; Ojo, Akazue, & Daniel, 2021) similarly indicate high rates across diverse cultural and religious settings. Although these studies collectively confirm that domestic violence is pervasive, their variation in reported rates points to inconsistencies in measurement, sampling techniques, and definitions of violence. This lack of methodological uniformity limits direct comparability and underscores the need for more standardized and localized investigations.

### **Trends and Forms of Domestic Violence**

The literature also reveals that domestic violence manifests in multiple and evolving forms. Early classifications by Aihie (2009) categorize domestic violence into physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and spiritual dimensions. While physical violence remains the most visible and frequently reported form (Obi and Ozumba, 2007), recent studies indicate a shift toward less visible but equally harmful forms such as emotional and economic abuse.

Aidonjio et al. (2023) and Adam and Erhus (2022) highlight the growing prominence of psychological abuse and economic deprivation, particularly in contexts of financial instability. Similarly, findings by Ikekwuibe and Okoror (2021) show that controlling behaviours (62.6%) and emotional abuse (55.98%) are more prevalent than sexual violence, suggesting a transition toward coercive control strategies within intimate relationships.

However, while these studies acknowledge diverse forms of abuse, they often treat them in isolation rather than examining how multiple forms coexist and reinforce one another. Furthermore, emerging dimensions such as spiritual abuse defined as the manipulation of religious beliefs for control remain underexplored despite their relevance in highly religious societies. This indicates a gap in the literature regarding the intersectionality and co-occurrence of different abuse forms.

### **Causes of Domestic Violence**

Scholarly literature identifies domestic violence as a multidimensional phenomenon driven by interconnected economic, socio-cultural, and psychological factors. Economic

explanations are particularly prominent. Studies by Aidonojie et al. (2023) and Amuda and Alghanmi (2023) link violence to financial stress, unemployment, and inability to meet household needs. Similarly, Itimi, Dienye, and Gbeneol (2016) identify excessive financial demands as a trigger in 44.1% of cases. While these findings establish a strong relationship between economic hardship and violence, they often overlook how financial stress interacts with other variables such as gender norms and power relations.

Socio-cultural factors are also widely recognized as critical drivers. Studies by Omorogbe et al. (2010) and Areh, Ajah, Ezeanya, Eze, Onwuchekwe, & Onyejegbu, (2021) emphasize the role of patriarchal norms, gender role expectations, and preferences for male children in shaping domestic conflicts. These studies suggest that violence is often used as a mechanism for enforcing culturally defined roles and authority within marriage. However, much of this literature tends to generalize cultural explanations without critically examining variations within communities or changes over time.

Psychological and behavioural factors further contribute to domestic violence. Substance abuse, particularly alcohol consumption, is frequently identified as a key trigger due to its impact on emotional regulation (Umeh & Akpede, 2012). Additionally, issues such as infidelity, suspicion, and poor communication are recurrent themes across studies. External stressors, including the COVID-19 pandemic, have also been shown to exacerbate domestic tensions due to confinement and economic disruption (Adam & Erhus, 2022; Yang, 2021). While these studies highlight multiple causal pathways, they often adopt a fragmented approach, examining individual factors rather than providing an integrated analysis of how these variables interact within specific socio-cultural contexts.

### **Gap in the Literature**

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into the incidence, forms, and causes of domestic violence, several gaps remain. First, there is limited integration of these dimensions within a single analytical framework, as most studies focus on either prevalence or causes independently. Second, variations in findings across regions suggest the influence of local socio-cultural dynamics, yet there is insufficient context-specific research for Edo State that simultaneously examines incidence patterns and underlying determinants. Third, methodological inconsistencies and reliance on self-reported data raise concerns about underreporting and measurement reliability.

This study addresses these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of both the incidence and causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State, Nigeria. By integrating multiple dimensions within a localized context, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and offers evidence for targeted interventions.

### **Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory**

This study is anchored on conflict theory, a sociological perspective that explains social relationships in terms of competition for power, resources, and control. The theory posits that society is characterized by unequal distributions of authority and resources, which often generate tension and conflict between individuals and groups (Charles, 2010). Rather than viewing social institutions as inherently harmonious, conflict theory emphasizes how power imbalances shape interactions and outcomes within these institutions.

Applied to marital relationships, conflict theory provides a useful framework for understanding domestic violence as an outcome of unequal power relations between spouses. Marriage involves the negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and access to resources such as income, decision-making authority, and social status. When these resources are distributed unequally, or

when one partner seeks to dominate the other, conflict may arise. In such situations, violence can become a means of asserting control or maintaining dominance within the relationship.

In the context of Edo State, domestic violence can be better understood within prevailing socio-cultural norms that often reinforce male authority and female subordination. Patriarchal values may legitimize the control of women by men, particularly in areas such as financial decision-making, mobility, and household roles. When these established power structures are challenged such as when women gain economic independence or question traditional expectations—conflict may intensify, sometimes resulting in physical, emotional, or psychological abuse.

Furthermore, economic stress and social pressures can exacerbate power struggles within the household. For instance, inability to meet financial obligations or perceived threats to traditional gender roles may lead to frustration, which is then expressed through violence. Conflict theory therefore highlights how domestic violence is not merely a product of individual behaviour but is deeply rooted in broader structural inequalities and power dynamics.

In summary, conflict theory offers a relevant analytical lens for this study by linking domestic violence to issues of power imbalance, resource control, and socio-cultural expectations. It helps explain why domestic violence persists in marital relationships and provides a foundation for examining the underlying causes within the specific context of Edo State.

### **Materials and Methods**

This study employed a cross-sectional survey research design to examine the incidence and causes of domestic violence among married individuals in Edo State, Nigeria. The survey design was considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of standardized data from a relatively large population at a single point in time. It also facilitates the use of quantitative techniques to describe patterns, measure prevalence, and identify relationships among variables such as socio-economic status, cultural factors, and experiences of domestic violence.

The study was conducted in Edo State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The State is administratively divided into three senatorial districts—Edo North, Edo Central, and Edo South—and comprises 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Edo State presents a mix of urban and rural communities, with diverse socio-cultural practices and economic conditions, making it suitable for investigating variations in domestic violence experiences.

The target population consisted of married adults (men and women) residing in Edo State, with an estimated population of 933,766. The study focused on individuals within marital relationship (legally married), as they are directly involved in intimate partner relationships where domestic violence may occur. Each respondent represented an individual unit of analysis rather than a matched couple.

A sample size of 980 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. This approach was considered suitable due to the hierarchical structure of the study area. 18 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Edo State were stratified into three senatorial zones: Edo North, Edo Central, and Edo South. Two zones (Edo North and Edo South) were randomly selected through balloting. One LGA was randomly selected from each chosen senatorial zone, resulting in Akoko-Edo (Edo North) and Oredo (Edo South). Political wards within the selected LGAs were identified (10 wards in Akoko-Edo and 12 wards in Oredo). Seven wards were randomly selected from each LGA. 70 households were systematically selected from each ward. One eligible married adult was selected per household, yielding 490 respondents from each LGA and a total sample of 980 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to capture information on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, experiences of domestic violence, and

perceived causes. The questionnaire consisted of both closed-ended and Likert-scale items to allow for quantitative analysis. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by experts in sociology and social research to ensure that the items adequately captured the constructs under study. Their feedback led to modifications in wording, structure, and relevance of items to ensure that the instrument adequately captured the key variables of the study. Reliability was established through a pilot study conducted among a small group of respondents outside the study area. The responses were tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded an acceptable reliability coefficient. Ethical standards were strictly observed in the course of the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Anonymity and confidentiality of responses were ensured, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty. Out of the 980 questionnaires administered, 919 were properly completed and returned, representing a response rate of 93.8%. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean scores. Graphical illustrations were also used to enhance data presentation and interpretation.

## Results

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1 and provide important context for understanding the patterns of domestic violence examined in this study.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics

S/n	Variables	Frequency (n=919) & Percentage (%=100)		Total	x
		LGAs			
		Akoko Edo	Oredo		
<b>i.</b>	<b>Gender</b>				
	Males	206(45.5%)	176(37.8%)	382 (41.6%)	
	Females	247(54.5%)	290(62.2%)	537 (58.4%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>ii.</b>	<b>Age</b>				
	< 30	108(23.8%)	98(21.0%)	206(22.4%)	
	31 – 40	178(39.3%)	206(44.2%)	384(41.8%)	38
	41 – 50	120(26.5%)	101(21.7%)	221(24.0%)	
	51>	47(10.4%)	61(13.1%)	108(11.8%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>iii.</b>	<b>Educational Attainment</b>				
	No formal Education	15(3.3%)	4(0.9%)	19(2.1%)	
	Primary	78(17.2%)	74(15.9%)	152(16.5%)	
	Secondary	192(42.4%)	150(32.2%)	342(37.2%)	
	Tertiary	138(30.5%)	210(45.1%)	348(37.9%)	
	Others	30(6.6%)	28(6.0%)	58(6.3%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>iv.</b>	<b>Occupation</b>				
	Housewives	58(12.8%)	38(8.2%)	96(10.4%)	
	Farming	92(20.3%)	30(6.4%)	122(13.3%)	

	Trade /Business	88(19.4%)	150(32.2%)	238(25.9%)	
	Civil servants	152(33.6%)	183(39.3%)	335(36.5%)	
	Artisans	60(13.2%)	58(12.4%)	118(12.8%)	
	Others	3(0.7%)	7(1.5%)	10(1.1%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>v.</b>	<b>Religion Affiliation</b>				
	Christianity	327(72.2%)	328(70.4%)	665(71.3%)	
	Islam	108(23.8%)	65(13.9%)	173(18.8%)	
	ATR	15(3.3%)	48(10.3%)	63(6.9%)	
	Others	3(0.6%)	25(5.4%)	28(3.0%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>vi.</b>	<b>Place of Residence</b>				
	Urban	210(46.4%)	408(87.6%)	618(67.2%)	
	Rural	243(53.6%)	58(12.4%)	301(32.8%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>vii.</b>	<b>Monthly Income</b>				
	Below ₦18,000	182(40.2%)	61(13.1%)	243(26.4%)	
	₦19,000 to 49,000	146(32.2%)	169(36.3%)	315(34.3%)	
	₦50,000 & above	125(27.6%)	236(50.6%)	361(39.3%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	
<b>viii.</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>				
	Benin	52(11.5%)	281(60.3%)	333(36.2%)	
	Akoko-Edo	234(51.7%)	76(16.3%)	310(33.7%)	
	Others	167(36.8%)	109(23.4%)	276(30.1%)	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>453(49.3%)</b>	<b>466(50.7%)</b>	<b>919(100%)</b>	

Source: Field Survey (2023)

A total of 919 valid questionnaires were analyzed, representing a high response rate of 93.8%. The distribution of respondents across the two selected Local Government Areas (LGAs) shows a near balance, with 466 respondents (50.7%) from Oredo and 453 respondents (49.3%) from Akoko-Edo. This balanced representation enhances the comparability of findings between the predominantly urban (Oredo) and relatively rural (Akoko-Edo) settings.

In terms of gender, females constituted the majority of the respondents (58.4%), while males accounted for (41.6%). This pattern is consistent across both LGAs, with female respondents making up (54.5%) in Akoko-Edo and (62.2%) in Oredo. The higher proportion of female respondents may be attributed to greater willingness to participate in studies on sensitive issues such as domestic violence or their higher likelihood of being available during data collection. This gender distribution is important, as it may influence the reporting of experiences and perceptions of domestic violence.

The age distribution indicates that the respondents were predominantly within the active marital and economically productive age groups. The largest proportion (41.8%) fell within the 31–40 years age bracket, followed by (24.0%) aged 41–50 years and (22.4%) aged below 30 years. Only (11.8%) of respondents were aged 51 years and above. The mean age of approximately 38 years suggests that most respondents had sufficient marital experience to provide informed responses on domestic violence. Across LGAs, a similar pattern is observed, although Oredo had a slightly higher concentration of respondents within the 31–40 age group (44.2%) compared to Akoko-Edo (39.3%).

Educational attainment among respondents was generally high, with the majority having at least secondary education. Specifically, (37.9%) of respondents had tertiary education, (37.2%) had secondary education, and (16.5%) had primary education, while only (2.1%) reported no formal education. This indicates that the respondents were relatively educated and capable of understanding and responding to the survey instrument. However, differences exist between the two LGAs: respondents in Oredo had a higher proportion of tertiary education (45.1%), whereas those in Akoko-Edo were more concentrated at the secondary level (42.4%). This disparity reflects the influence of urbanization, as Oredo, being an urban centre, provides greater access to higher educational opportunities.

Occupational distribution shows that civil servants formed the largest category (36.5%), followed by those engaged in trade or business (25.9%), farming (13.3%), and artisan work (12.8%). Housewives accounted for (10.4%) of the respondents, while only (1.1%) were engaged in other occupations. A closer look at the LGAs reveals that civil service employment was more dominant in Oredo (39.3%), while farming was more common in Akoko-Edo (20.3%), reflecting its rural character. The occupational structure suggests varying levels of economic stability among respondents, which may have implications for household dynamics and potential stress factors associated with domestic violence.

Religious affiliation indicates that Christianity was the predominant religion among respondents (71.3%), followed by Islam (18.8%) and African Traditional Religion (6.9%), with (3.0%) belonging to other religious groups. This pattern was consistent across both LGAs, suggesting a relatively homogeneous religious landscape. While religion often plays a role in shaping marital norms and conflict resolution mechanisms, the distribution observed here reflects the broader religious composition of Edo State.

Place of residence further highlights the urban–rural divide within the study area. Overall, (67.2%) of respondents resided in urban areas, while (32.8%) were from rural areas. However, this aggregate figure masks significant variation between LGAs. In Oredo, a large majority of respondents (87.6%) were urban residents, whereas in Akoko-Edo, a higher proportion (53.6%) resided in rural areas. This distinction is critical, as urban and rural settings differ in terms of access to resources, exposure to modernization, and socio-cultural practices, all of which may influence the occurrence and reporting of domestic violence.

Income distribution among respondents reveals varying economic conditions. The largest proportion (39.3%) earned ₦50,000 and above monthly, followed by (34.3%) earning between ₦19,000 and ₦49,000, while (26.4%) earned below ₦18,000. Notably, higher income levels were more prevalent in Oredo, where 50.6% of respondents earned ₦50,000 and above, compared to Akoko-Edo, where the largest group (32.2%) earned between ₦19,000 and ₦49,000. Conversely, a higher proportion of respondents in Akoko-Edo (40.2%) earned below ₦18,000 compared to Oredo (13.1%). These differences reflect disparities in economic opportunities between urban and rural areas and may have implications for financial stress and household conflict.

Ethnic composition shows that the Benin ethnic group constituted the largest proportion of respondents (36.2%), followed by Akoko-Edo (33.7%), while (30.1%) belonged to other ethnic groups. As expected, Akoko-Edo respondents were predominantly of Akoko-Edo origin (51.7%), whereas respondents in Oredo were mainly Benin (60.3%). The presence of a significant proportion of respondents from other ethnic groups, particularly in Oredo, reflects its status as a cosmopolitan urban centre that attracts individuals from diverse backgrounds.

Overall, the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents indicate a diverse sample with variations across gender, age, education, occupation, income, and ethnicity. The observed

differences between the urban (Oredo) and rural (Akoko-Edo) contexts are particularly noteworthy, as they provide a basis for understanding how structural and socio-economic factors may influence the incidence and causes of domestic violence examined in subsequent sections of this study.

**Analysis of the Incidence of Domestic Violence in Edo State**

The incidence of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State was examined using secondary data extracted from selected Nigerian newspapers between 2008 and 2018. The newspapers reviewed include The Guardian, The Observer, The Punch, Vanguard, and other reported sources. The analysis presents annual reported cases of domestic violence as an indicator of trend and prevalence over time.

Table 2: Leading Nigerian Newspapers Report on DV in Edo State

Newspapers	Incidences of Domestic Violence										
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Guardian	7	4	8	7	20	23	53	10	15	14	45
Observer	1	3	2	2	12	14	18	9	26	6	13
Punch	2	2	2	3	12	35	39	2	55	18	44
Vanguard	2	17	5	6	10	18	57	6	65	36	40
Others	9	3	4	2	22	45	18	5	26	30	62

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 2 shows that reported cases of domestic violence varied across the selected newspapers and years, indicating a generally fluctuating but increasing pattern over the study period. In the early years (2008–2010), reported cases were relatively low across all newspapers. For example, The Guardian reported 7 cases in 2008, while Vanguard and The Punch reported 2 cases each in the same year. Similarly, The Observer recorded minimal figures within this period, ranging from 1 to 3 cases annually.

However, from 2011 onwards, there was a noticeable increase in reported cases across all newspapers. The Guardian rose from 7 cases in 2011 to 20 cases in 2012 and further increased to 53 cases in 2014. A similar upward trend is observed in The Punch, which increased from 3 cases in 2011 to 12 in 2012 and peaked at 55 cases in 2016. Likewise, Vanguard recorded a sharp rise, reaching 57 cases in 2014 and the highest value of 65 cases in 2016. These figures suggest a consistent increase in reported domestic violence incidents during the middle of the study period.

By 2016, most of the newspapers recorded their highest levels of reportage. Vanguard (65 cases) and The Punch (55 cases) reported the most significant figures, indicating a peak period of media-reported domestic violence in Edo State. Although there was a slight decline in some newspapers after 2016, the levels remained relatively high compared to the early years. For instance, The Guardian still recorded 45 cases in 2018, while “Others” sources reported 62 cases in the same year, suggesting sustained high levels of incidence or reporting.

Overall, the data indicate that domestic violence cases reported in Edo State increased steadily from 2008, peaked around 2014–2016, and remained relatively high thereafter, despite

minor fluctuations. This pattern is further illustrated in Figure 1, which shows a generally upward trajectory with periodic variations across the years.

In addition, a graphical representation of the incidences is presented in figure 1 below;

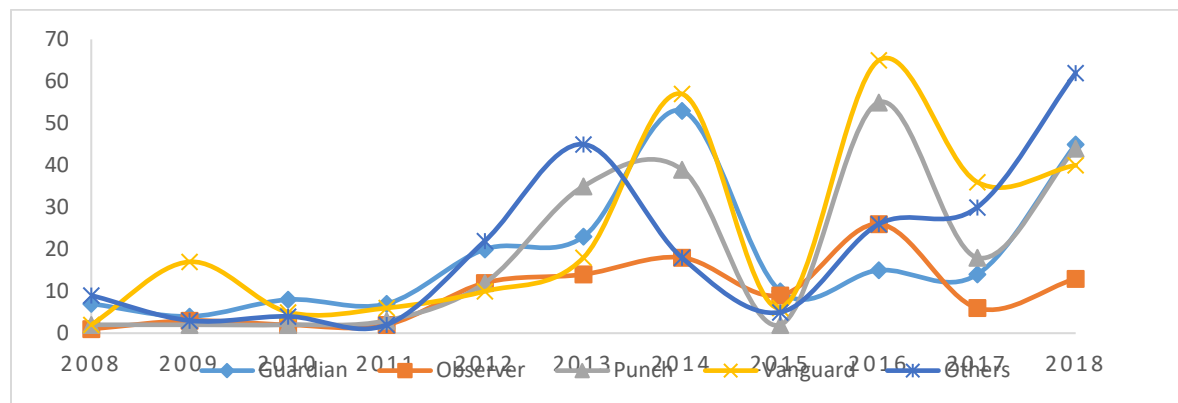


Fig. 1: Graphical illustration of incidences of domestic violence in Edo State.

Source: Edo State Library, Benin City, 2023.

The graphical representation (Figure 1) confirms that the early years of the study period recorded comparatively low levels of reported cases, followed by a sharp upward trend from 2011 onwards. The increase appears most pronounced between 2012 and 2016, after which the trend stabilizes at a high level. This sustained increase may reflect either a rise in actual incidence, improved media reporting, or increased public awareness and willingness to report domestic violence cases. It is also important to note that underreporting may influence the observed figures, as domestic violence is often concealed due to its private nature. Many victims may not report incidents due to fear, stigma, cultural norms, or mistrust of formal institutions. These factors may contribute to fluctuations in recorded cases across newspapers and years. The observed upward trend from the mid-2010s may also be associated with broader socio-economic conditions in Nigeria. Periods of economic hardship, inflation, unemployment, and changing household financial pressures are often linked to increased domestic tensions. Such conditions may exacerbate stress within marital relationships, leading to higher incidences of conflict and violence. Additionally, improved media attention to gender-based violence over time may have contributed to increased reportage. In summary, the analysis indicates that domestic violence in Edo State, as reflected in newspaper reports, has shown a generally increasing trend over the study period, with notable peaks between 2014 and 2016. The persistence of high reported cases in subsequent years underscores the continuing relevance of domestic violence as a major social concern in the State.

### Analysis of the Causes of Domestic Violence in Edo State

Table 3: Analysis of the major causes of domestic violence among couples in Edo State

S/n	Causes of DV	Men	Women	Total
i.	Food related/Inability to cook	23(6.0%)	25(4.7%)	48(5.2%)
ii.	Unnecessary suspicion/monitoring and control	41(10.7%)	62(11.5%)	103(11.2%)
iii.	Excessive financial demand/ Misuse	35(9.2%)	9(1.7%)	44(4.8%)
iv.	Hardship/Inability to meet family needs	33(8.6%)	67(12.5%)	100(10.9%)
v.	Childlessness/ Gender of child bearing	45(11.8%)	53(9.9%)	98(10.7%)
vi.	Interferences in personal affairs, especially on money and phone communication	16(4.2%)	45(8.4%)	61(6.6%)

vii.	Nonchalant attitudes toward in-laws/friends	24(6.3%)	30(5.6%)	54(5.9%)
viii.	Infidelity/Secret affair with opposite sex, especially on social media	32(8.4%)	51(9.5%)	83(9.0%)
ix.	Insatiable sexual demand	19(5.0%)	49(9.1%)	68(7.4%)
x.	Lack of social distancing/ Idleness	26(6.8%)	31(5.8%)	57(6.2%)
xi.	Involvement in politics/ Work that takes one away from home for a long period	7(1.8%)	2(0.4%)	9(1.0%)
xii.	Drunkenness/Substance abuse	22(5.8%)	38(7.1%)	60(6.5%)
xiii.	Uncovering of secret	10(2.6%)	19(3.5%)	29(3.2%)
xiv.	Acceptance of favour/ Gifts from opposite sex	28(7.3%)	43(8.0%)	71(7.7%)
xv.	Others	21(5.5%)	13(2.4%)	34(3.7%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>382 (100%)</b>	<b>537 (100%)</b>	<b>919 (100%)</b>

Source: Field Survey (2023)

Table 3 presents the perceived causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State, disaggregated by gender. The findings reveal that domestic violence is multi-causal, with no single dominant factor, but rather a combination of relational, economic, behavioural, and socio-cultural triggers shaping its occurrence. Overall, the most frequently reported cause of domestic violence among respondents is unnecessary suspicion, monitoring, and controlling behaviour of a partner, accounting for (11.2%). This suggests that issues of mistrust and excessive surveillance within marital relationships are central drivers of conflict. Closely related to this is hardship or inability to meet family needs, reported by (10.9%), indicating that economic pressure and financial instability significantly heighten tensions within households. Antai, (2011) findings align with the broader view that economic stress often amplifies relational conflict and increases the likelihood of intimate partner violence. Another major factor identified is childlessness or disputes related to the gender of children, with (10.7%) attributing domestic violence to this issue. This reflects persistent socio-cultural expectations surrounding fertility and lineage continuity in many Nigerian communities, where pressure to bear children particularly male children can strain marital relationships.

Gender-disaggregated data further reveals notable differences in perception. Among male respondents, the most prominent cause identified is childlessness or gender of childbearing (11.8%), suggesting that men are more likely to link domestic conflict to reproductive issues. In contrast, female respondents most frequently attributed domestic violence to unnecessary suspicion, monitoring, and control, (11.5%), highlighting women’s greater exposure to controlling and surveillance behaviours within relationships. Economic-related stressors also show significant gender variation. While excessive financial demand and misuse was relatively more acknowledged by men, (9.2%) than women (1.7%), women more strongly emphasized hardship and inability to meet family needs (12.5%) compared to men (8.6%). This suggests that women may experience economic strain more directly in relation to household survival and caregiving responsibilities. Several other factors contribute moderately to domestic violence in the study area. These include infidelity or secret affairs (9.0%), particularly those involving social media interactions, and insatiable sexual demands (7.4%), which reflect sexual dissatisfaction and mistrust within marriages. Similarly, acceptance of gifts or favours from the opposite sex (7.7%), drunkenness or substance abuse (6.5%), and lack of social engagement or idleness (6.2%) were also identified as relevant contributing factors.

Behavioural and relational issues such as interference in personal affairs, especially regarding money and phone communication (6.6%), and nonchalant attitudes toward in-laws or friends (5.9%) further indicate that conflicts often arise from perceived disrespect of boundaries and family relations. Less frequently reported causes include food-related issues or inability to cook (5.2%), uncovering of secrets (3.2%), and other unspecified factors (3.7%). The least reported cause is involvement in politics or jobs that keep a partner away from home for long periods (1.0%), suggesting that physical absence due to work is not a major driver of domestic violence in the study context.

## **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that domestic violence in Edo State is driven by a complex interaction of relational, economic, cultural, and behavioural factors. Rather than arising from a single cause, the results suggest that violence within marriage is embedded in broader socio-economic stressors and deeply held cultural expectations surrounding gender roles, fidelity, and household responsibility.

A major finding is that unnecessary suspicion, monitoring, and controlling behaviours constitute the most prominent perceived trigger of domestic violence. This reflects underlying issues of mistrust and insecurity within intimate relationships. While this aligns with Umeh and Akpede (2012), who identified monitoring and substance abuse as key triggers of domestic conflict, the present finding extends their argument by showing that surveillance behaviour is now intensified by modern communication technologies, particularly mobile phones and social media. This suggests a shift from traditional forms of suspicion to more digitally mediated forms of control, which may heighten relational tension.

Closely related to this is the role of economic hardship and inability to meet household needs, which was also strongly emphasized by respondents. Fawole, (2008), supports earlier studies that link financial stress to increased marital conflict. However, the present findings suggest that economic hardship does not operate in isolation; rather, it interacts with expectations of provider responsibility and household dependency roles. In contexts where economic pressure coincides with rigid gender expectations, financial strain is more likely to escalate into conflict and violence.

The study also highlights childlessness and the gender of children as significant contributors to domestic violence. This reflects entrenched patriarchal norms in many Nigerian societies where lineage continuity and male offspring are highly valued. While this finding is consistent with Omorogbe et al. (2010) and Areh et al. (2021), it should be interpreted critically. The persistence of violence in such contexts is not merely a product of infertility or sex preference, but of structural gender inequality that places disproportionate reproductive responsibility on women. This indicates that cultural expectations, rather than biological factors, are central to understanding this form of violence.

The association between work-related absence (including political involvement) and domestic violence suggests that prolonged physical separation can weaken relational trust and increase suspicion. However, this should not be interpreted as causative in itself. Rather, it appears that absence from the home acts as a catalyst that exposes pre-existing relational weaknesses, such as insecurity or lack of communication. The finding by Areh et al. (2021) is consistent with this pattern, although the current study shows that the issue is not occupation per se, but the relational dynamics that accompany prolonged absence.

Another important finding relates to infidelity and perceived sexual unfaithfulness, particularly through social media interactions. This aligns with Omorogbe et al. (2010), but also

reflects changing social realities where digital platforms have expanded opportunities for emotional and sexual engagement outside marriage. The implication is that infidelity is increasingly defined not only by physical contact but also by virtual interactions, which may intensify suspicion and emotional insecurity within relationships.

The role of food-related disputes and expectations about domestic roles also emerged as a contributing factor to violence. However, this finding requires careful interpretation. While culturally embedded expectations often assign food preparation responsibilities to women, framing this as a direct cause of violence risks reinforcing gender stereotypes. Instead, it is more accurate to interpret such disputes as expressions of broader gendered power relations and unequal expectations within marriage. The study by Ekoh (2022) supports the existence of extreme outcomes in such conflicts, but does not necessarily explain the structural conditions that produce them.

Overall, the findings suggest that domestic violence in Edo State should not be understood as a series of isolated behavioural incidents, but rather as the outcome of intersecting structural and relational factors. Economic stress, gender inequality, mistrust, and cultural expectations interact to produce environments in which conflict is more likely to escalate into violence. The study therefore underscores the need to move beyond individual blame narratives and instead address the underlying social and structural conditions that sustain domestic violence.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the causes of domestic violence among married couples in Edo State. The findings demonstrate that domestic violence is a multidimensional problem shaped by interrelated economic, relational, and socio-cultural factors. Key determinants identified include mistrust expressed through suspicion and controlling behaviours, economic hardship and inability to meet household needs, childlessness and preference for male children, infidelity (including social media-related interactions), and disputes arising from gendered expectations within marriage. These factors operate within a broader context of entrenched patriarchal norms and socio-economic stress, which together increase the likelihood of conflict escalating into violence. The study therefore concludes that domestic violence in Edo State is not an isolated behavioural issue but a structural and relational challenge embedded in economic insecurity, gender inequality, and weakened interpersonal trust within marital relationships. Addressing it requires coordinated interventions that go beyond punitive measures to include prevention, education, and socio-economic support systems.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Strengthen public education and awareness programmes: Government agencies, NGOs, and community-based organizations should intensify sensitization campaigns on healthy marital relationships, conflict management, and the legal consequences of domestic violence. These programmes should specifically address issues of mistrust, controlling behaviours, and gender expectations that often trigger violence.
- Integrate economic empowerment into violence prevention strategies: Since economic hardship was identified as a major driver, state and local governments should expand access to skills acquisition programmes, microcredit schemes, and employment opportunities for both men and women. Reducing household financial stress can significantly lower the risk of conflict escalation.

- In summary, reducing domestic violence in Edo State requires a coordinated approach that combines legal enforcement, socio-economic empowerment, cultural reorientation, and accessible support systems for families.

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