

**SPOUSAL ABUSES IN NIGERIAN MARRIAGES: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH\*<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

*Marriage is the formal union, social and legal contract between two individuals that unites their lives legally, economically and emotionally. However, such relationships are not devoid of abuses which range from physical or mental maltreatment meted out on either spouse by the other which often results into mental, emotional, sexual or physical injury, and may sometimes lead to death. In Nigeria today, there seems to be a rapid increase of spousal abuse. Hence the study considered spousal abuses in Nigerian marriages from a multidisciplinary approach. The study found that spousal abuses in Nigerian marriages have regrettably come to stay due to several reasons such as the reluctance of most individuals to report any act of violence meted out on them as a result of fear of socio-cultural stigmatization, abandonment, fear of being referred to as a divorcee etc. The study further found that most persons are ignorant of their fundamental human rights, and this lack of knowledge has made some believe and accept domestic violence/spousal abuses as a common and acceptable phenomenon. The study recommended that there is need for proper sensitization of individuals through various channels of communication of their fundamental human rights and the need for victims to refrain from condoning domestic violence and exploring all available legal options. The study further recommended that there is absolute need for individuals intending to be married to be taught and sensitized by religious, traditional, and socio-cultural institutions on the need to shun spousal abuse of any sort.*

**Keywords:** Spousal Abuses/Domestic Violence, Communication, Law, Religion, Nigerian Marriages.

**1. Introduction**

Safety for both men and women in Nigerian Marriages is a trending and global concern. Spouses from all walks of life face one form of violent abuse or the other. This domestic/spousal abuse has in recent times, risen and has been described in several ways as: wife battery, husband battery, stabbing to deaths, poisoning, suicides, emotional torture as a result of denial of conjugal rights like sex, financial provisions etc. Marriage is the formal union, social, and legal contract between two individuals that unites their lives legally, economically and emotionally<sup>2</sup>. Marriage is a contractual agreement that requires commitments and legal obligations from each party towards the other so long as they live together unless divided or separated by law or custom. As such, bound by this contractual agreement; both spouses deserve the rights to live and be protected from any form of domestic/spousal abuse. In the Nigerian Context, various studies related to domestic violence have been done and different findings have revealed that almost on daily basis, spouses maim each other, some even end up dying in silence as a result of fear of being stigmatized upon by the society. According to the World Health Organization<sup>3</sup>, intimate partner violence IPV or spousal abuse can be defined as any behavior within an intimate relationship by an intimate partner that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship. It is one of the most common types of violence experienced by women; most reported cases of intimate partner violence are perpetrated by men towards women<sup>4</sup>. Surprisingly, contrary to the above observation by world Health Organization, men are also badly affected by spousal abuse, but for one reason or the other these individuals choose to be silent. Iwunze-Ibiam revealed that 'In Nigeria, divorces are hardly ever discussed in public. Family members are often reluctant to admit that a marriage is in trouble. Divorcees are still being stigmatized. In fact, the idea of divorce is considered a taboo and unfit for public discourse'<sup>5</sup>. Regrettably, despite the alarming rate of spousal abuse in Nigerian marriages that occasionally results to death of one spouse, a good number of victims are reluctant about reporting these abuses and perpetrators of these acts to the rightful authorities. Most persons end up reporting but conceal their identities; these reluctances, have made it a herculean task for one to easily enumerate the number of spousal abuses in the country, thus, there is need to understand the reasons behind this trend.

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<sup>2</sup> S Stritof, (2019, November 18). *What Is the Definition of Marriage?* Retrieved from <https://www.thespruce.com/definition-of-marriage-2303011>

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization. (2002). *World report on violence and health*. World Health Organization: Geneva. Retrieved on 21<sup>st</sup> March 20202, from [http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615\\_eng.pdf?sequence=11985](http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/42495/9241545615_eng.pdf?sequence=11985)] 8 NWLR (pt. 6), 211.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Iwunze, (2019). *The rate of divorce in Nigeria*. Retrieved from <https://www.thecable.ng/the-rate-of-divorce-in-nigeria>.

Today, there are growing concerns in Africa especially in Nigeria, as to whether spousal abuses are on the increase as a result of lack of effective communication in marriages, lack of knowledge of legal and human rights by spouses in marriages, and fear of religious implications. It is in an attempt to providing answers to these concerns that this study was conducted, addressing these concerns from a multidisciplinary perspective. Thus, in positioning this paper in a proper theoretical framework, the attribution theory is adopted. This theory could be adjudged to have emanated from the work of Weiner 1985. It simply posits that people naturally seek for causes of events, why they happen and possibly make attributions.

## 2. Spousal Abuse in Nigeria: Causes and Consequences of Effective and Ineffective Communication

Communication is the exchange and distribution of information, ideas, and feelings from one person (sender) to another (receiver). Mc Grath pinpoints that communication often improves naturally when we align our desires and attitudes with principles of commitment, honesty, personal accountability, and loving actions.<sup>6</sup> In the same vein, Nathan cited in Osakinle maintains that ‘good communication is a tool, and good tools have the potentials of making a task much easier to accomplish. But good tools cannot make up for the person using them’.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that good, timely and effective communication could be regarded as a solid foundation, upon which a marriage stands strongly. Similarly, communication is the vehicle through which all other important parts of marriages are performed.<sup>8</sup> The implication of the above citations is that effective communication plays a vital role in building and sustaining a healthy relationship between husbands and wives. Ineffective communication among spouses could lead to many failed marriages and broken homes, and the ability to communicate effectively is regarded as central to the establishment of good marital relationship.<sup>9</sup> Without adequate and effective communication, the establishment of cordial and mutual relationship between couples cannot be possible; and the absence of it can create a void which manifests into hatred and abuses. In the words of Esere and Ojiah, ‘communication is a part of the development, maintenance, deterioration or termination of relationships especially, the marriage relationship’.<sup>10</sup> This implies that the survival or failure of any marriage is solely dependent on effective communication, and lack of effective communication among spouses results in misunderstandings, arguments, disagreements, violence, which in extreme cases could ultimately lead to death. When couples fail to communicate effectively in a marriage, they are bound to disconnect emotionally from each other. This disconnection however, triggers hatred, distrust, anger, dissipation of tolerance for one another etc.; and all these if not controlled lead to spousal abuses. In the same vein, Esere avers that ‘in order to sustain a marriage, it is important that both couples must make efforts, and that a successful and healthy marriage is like a good recipe whose main ingredients are love, good communication, commitment, understanding, concern, care and togetherness’.<sup>11</sup>

More so, there are several factors contributory to lack of effective communication in marriages which may end up resulting to spousal abuses and they include among others:

1. Inability to reveal one’s self due to fear of attack by the partner;
2. Fear of being violently attacked or abused by the other partner;
3. Fear of misconceptions;
4. Incompatibility of ideas;
5. Lack of respect for partner’s opinions and feelings; and
6. Inferiority complex.

All these factors listed above lead to breakdown of communication in marriages, and as such, without communication, marriages will degenerate thereby, causing spousal abuses. Communication breakdown can be described as one of the major causes of spousal abuses in Nigerian marriages, owing to the fact that communication is at the center of any human life and human activities. In families where there is no effective communication, individuals tend to misunderstand themselves, and this is one major reason why spousal abuse is on the rise. Additionally, there are several other reasons why spousal abuse has risen in recent times, these reasons include: fear; believing and accepting that abuse is normal; embarrassment or shame (most persons find it difficult to admit they are being abused); fear of rejection; financial incapacitation; cultural/religious beliefs; fear of the

<sup>6</sup> SMA McGrath & M Chapman (2012). *Africa: Our way to love and marriage (volume 2)*. London: Geoffrey.

<sup>7</sup> EO Osakinle & VC Okafoez (2013). Lack of effective communication among couples in Ekiti State, Nigeria. *Asian Journal of Education and e-Learning* (ISSN: 2321–2454). Asian Online Journals ([www.ajournalonline.com](http://www.ajournalonline.com)).

<sup>8</sup>S Smith, (2020, March 2). *The Importance of communication in your marriage*. Retrieved from <https://www.marriage.com/advice/communication/the-importance-of-communication-in-your-marriage/>.

<sup>9</sup> MO Esere (2004). *Globalization and the challenges of human resource development*. The Nigerian Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 11(1): 71-84.

<sup>10</sup> MO Esere (2008). *Marriage, sex and family counselling 1st edition*: Unilorin Press.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

unknown; and fear of loneliness. All these are some of the major reasons why many couples remain in abusive marriages at the expense of their lives.

### 3. Communication as an Indispensable Tool for Addressing Spousal Abuses

It is said generally that people perish for lack of knowledge. Most individuals do not know neither do they understand their fundamental human rights and privileges under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended); as such, there is need to create awareness. Through adequate communication campaigns and sensitization geared towards behavioural change(s), people will widen their understanding and learn the negative implications of keeping quiet when they suffer abuses, and the positive implications of reporting these acts. Communication therefore, cannot be relegated to the background if these perennial problems associated with spousal abuses are to be checked and corrected. This is because, with adequate information and communication, individuals will be sensitized and educated on the need to change their mentality about domestic violence, which will include reporting any violent act meted on them by their partners. Furthermore, through communication, they will be sensitized and be made to understand the legal statutes governing domestic and family abuses. Campaigns, and other forms of media sensitization, edutainment including films, documentaries, live programs can be employed in targeting families with a view to correcting, changing perceptions and behaviours towards spousal abuse. Thus, effective communication is seen as a vital instrument in solving the problems of intimate partner violence/abuse in Nigeria and beyond.

### 4. Spousal Abuse in Nigeria: The Position of the Law

According to the Black's Law Dictionary, the word 'spouse' means 'one's husband or wife by lawful marriage; a married person'.<sup>12</sup> 'Abuse', according to Black's Law Dictionary means 'a departure from legal or reasonable use; misuse. It also means physical or mental maltreatment, often resulting in mental, emotional, sexual, or physical injury'.<sup>13</sup> Spousal abuse, otherwise known as domestic violence is not a physical violence alone rather it comprises of any behaviour, the purpose of which is to gain power and control over a spouse, partner, girl/boyfriend or intimate family member. In this study, 'spousal abuse' means any physical or mental maltreatment meted out on either spouse by the other which often results into mental, emotional, sexual, or physical injury and may, sometimes, lead to a person's death. These abuses are commonly carried out by the male spouse against the female spouse. These range from mental torture (through the use of words), physical violence (beating, slapping, caning, use of sharp objects) and sexual violence at home such as forced sex (rape in matrimony) against the consent of the woman. Spousal abuses could lead to severe injuries, death of a spouse (victim), health problems (for example high blood pressure, psychological trauma) etc. Today, there are international and regional instruments related to spousal abuse. They include *inter alia* Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945), Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), Declaration on Elimination of Violence Against Women (1994), The African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (Ratification and Enforcement, 2004), Convention against Torture and other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984). The norms enunciated in the above stated instruments are the peremptory norms of international law *jus cogens* – the rules as recognized by human race and international community as those norms or rules, which must not be derogated from; their high moral and deterrent effects are equal to the rule of equity applied by the court, which though, are not codified, but have the strength of justiceability.<sup>14</sup>

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFRN, 1999 as amended) in its Sections 33 and 34, guarantee every citizen of Nigeria right to life and respect for dignity of his/her person respectively. These rights are intrinsic in every being (fundamental) and thus, universal and inalienable save in accordance to law. Distinguishing fundamental rights from human rights, Justice Chukwudifu Oputa in *Ransom Kuti v A G Federation* (1985) posited that:

Not every civil or legal right is a fundamental right. The idea and concept of fundamental right both derive from the premise of the inalienable rights of man... life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Emergent nations with written Constitutions have enshrined in such Constitutions some of these basic human rights or fundamental rights. Each right that is thus considered fundamental is clearly spelt out.

It is against the foregoing background that this study will consider spousal abuse in Nigeria with emphasis geared towards providing a panacea under the Nigerian legal system.

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<sup>12</sup> BA Garner (ed) (2012). *Black's Law Dictionary. 8th Edition*: Oxford University Press.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>14</sup>C Arinze-Umobi (2008). *Domestic Violence against women in Nigeria: A legal Anatomy*, Folmech printing and publishing co. ltd. P.230

### 5. The Panacea to Spousal Abuse under the Nigerian Law

In Nigeria today, there are so many legal and institutional frameworks that are aimed towards addressing the issues of spousal abuse. These include Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act, 2015, Matrimonial Causes Act (MCA, CAP. M7, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004) etc. There are also non-governmental organisations such as International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria, Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), Women and Minority Rights Monitors (WAMRM) which focus their attention on women violations and seeking redress in courts, etc. Our extant laws by their provisions, have adequately and significantly attempted to ensure that persons especially women are protected within their domestic relationships. For instance, the preamble of Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPA), reads: 'an Act to eliminate violence in private and public life, prohibit all forms of violence against persons and to provide maximum protection and effective remedies for victims and punishment of offenders; and for related matters' (VAPA, 2015). The Act made provisions for rape (VAPA, s.1), infliction of physical injury on a person (VAPA, s.2), coercion (VAPA, s.3), wilfully placing a person in fear of physical injury (VAPA, s.4), offensive conduct (VAPA, s.5), forceful ejection from home (VAPA, s.9), depriving a person of his/her liberty (VAPA, s.10), emotional, verbal and psychological abuse (VAPA, s.14), and spousal battery (VAPA, S.19). Unfortunately, notwithstanding the wide coverage made by the provisions of the Act with regards to spousal abuse, the Act applies only to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja by virtue of its *Section 47*. It is thus contended that the provisions as contained in the Violence against Persons (Prohibition) Act (VAPA, 2015), be made to apply in all 36 states of the federation as the problem of spousal abuse has no territorial bounds.

Also, from the matrimonial view point and towards achieving a panacea to spousal abuse, Section 15 (2) (c) of the *Matrimonial Causes Act* provides:

(2) The court hearing a petition for a decree for dissolution of a marriage shall hold the marriage to have broken down irretrievably if, but only if, the petitioner satisfies the court of one or more of the following facts:

(c) that since the marriage the respondent has behaved in such a way that the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with the respondent.<sup>15</sup>

The Act went on to qualify some of the acts which the petitioner cannot reasonably be expected to live with in its *Section 16 (a)* to include 'rape' which is one of the identified spousal abuses in this study. Against this backdrop, it is further contended that spouses (especially women) should quit condoning abuses of any sort in a bid to remain married and the stigma of being a divorcee or one who is judicially separated from her husband. Spouses should explore their legal options and curb these abuses as life is supreme. By so doing, spousal abuses would be reduced to its barest minimum, if not totally. Just recently, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 2020, a Federal High Court sitting in Abuja and presided over by Justice Yusuf Halilu, sentenced one Maryam Sanda (a mother of two) to death by hanging for killing her husband, Bilyaminu Bello (Channelstv.com, 2020). She was charged for culpable homicide on 17<sup>th</sup> November, 2019. Similarly, the police in Katsina state has recently arrested a 19 year old wife, Rabi'u Shamsidi who allegedly stabbed her husband, Shamsidi Salisu to death after a heated argument.<sup>16</sup>

From the foregoing, it does appear that a greater percentage of the citizenry are not aware of their rights under the law and the various ways in which to pursue/enforce them. Unfortunately, people nowadays take laws into their hands – by killing their spouse as a panacea to the problem of abuse.

### 6. Religious Perspective to Spousal Abuse

The contributions cum benefits of institution of marriage to the overall development of the society cannot be overemphasized. The institution of marriage is arguably the foundation through which the institution of the family comes into existence. Every religion recognizes the importance of marriage in the society. In African trado-religious environment, marriage is recognized as a union between a man and his wife or wives. The three constitutionally recognized religions in Nigeria namely Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion, all recognize marriage as a union involving two opposite sex of human species, for the sole purpose of helping one another, companionship, procreation, emotional and sexual fulfilment. There is no religion that does not preach about love and peace, and if there is any place where this love and peace is mostly needed, it is in the marital relationship between a husband and his wife or wives. Despite, the importance of the institution of marriage to the wellbeing of the society, the spate of spousal abuses cum domestic violence has become a serious trait to the sustainability and stability of many marriages, especially in this present epoch. The high rate of spousal abuses, which in extreme cases result in untimely deaths and serious injuries resulting from fights or a deliberate attack of one partner against the other, are widely reported in different media platforms. It is quite unfortunate that most spouses especially the male folk claim to derive the authority to abuse their spouses from their religious beliefs.

<sup>15</sup> MCA, CAP. M7, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004

<sup>16</sup> Channelstv.com, 2020.

It is also revealing that spousal abuse goes beyond physical violence; it also includes emotional abuse, which on the long run leads to low self-esteem which affects the abused partner. McMahon sees spousal abuse as 'a form of abuse in which someone targets his or her spouse with the goal of creating and demonstrating control'.<sup>17</sup> She goes on to include threats, humiliation, physical violence, emotional torment, verbal abuses, stalking, and economic abuses and so on as part of spousal abuse.

Furthermore, spousal abuse consists of physical assaults, sexual assault including the use of rape and molestation, psychological threats, stalking, and economic coercion and so on to terrorizing the other.<sup>18</sup> It has been observed that one of the factors that cause spousal abuse is the tendency by one of the partners to prove his or her supremacy or infallibility. This situation is dominant especially among husbands. For the women, there is the fear of losing some aspects of their independence and socio-religious expectations which enjoin wives to be submissive and loyal to their husbands. In other words, lack of trust and suspicion especially of infidelity can trigger off spousal abuse, which comes up in many forms. According to Judeo-Christian worldview, whose foundation is laid on the infallibility of the scriptures, couples are instructed to maintain a peaceful and love filled marriages and a happy home. This injunction based on the content of Saint Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus. In this letter Paul writes:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. 26. To make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word. 27. And to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church- 30. For we are members of his body. 31. 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'. 32. This is a profound mystery-but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband (NIV, Ephesians 5:25-33).

Based on the content of the above letter, Paul discourages any form of spousal abuse from neither the husband nor the wife. Husbands are to love, care, nourish, appreciate, cherish and above all respect their wives' emotions and feelings. They are encouraged to love and nourish their wives as they love and nourish themselves. Husbands are advised to be good listeners, mature and exhibit self-control in all their dealings with their wives. The wives on the other hand, are advised to respect and submit to their husbands in all things. Furthermore, a man that truly loves his wife and understands the delicate nature of women and their inability to control their emotions will not result to spousal abuse. Husbands should recognize the fact that their wives are not their slaves or servants, but partners in the institution of marriage. Husbands are just first among equals, as the husbands are described as the head, the wives are the neck. The head obviously cannot move or work in harmony without the neck and vice versa. In the same vein, a woman that understands the egocentric nature of men and their position as the head of the family will not resort to verbal abuse when there is misunderstanding. Despite the above biblical admonitions to the Christian couples on how to build a peaceful loving marriage, Paul, did not prescribe punishment or strategies that could be used in handling cases of spousal abuses in the family. Biblically speaking, divorce is not an option unless on the grounds of infidelity on the part of wife. When there is a continuous or a clear case of spousal abuse being perpetuated by one spouse against another, the church still does not advocate for divorce, rather, the couples are being reminded to respect the vows they made to each other on their wedding day. As a result, many couples especially the wives decide to endure many forms of spousal abuses from their husbands, and will not make attempts to come out of an abusive marital relationship to avoid any form of socio-religious stigmatization of being tagged a divorcee or one who could not manage his or marriage. In order to avoid being tagged a divorcee or a failure, the abused spouse has no option, than to keep these abuses secret, and decide to endure whatever abuse he or she encounters in the marriage. Sometimes, this endurance becomes unsustainable, which can manifest in one partner sustaining one life threatening injury or the order from the abusive partner. On extreme cases, spousal abuses have led to the death of many spouses on the hand of their abusive partners or the abused partner taking the life of the abusing partner. In a similar vein, Islam as a religion preaches against spousal abuses by encouraging partners to love, care, cherish and live in peace with each other. In spite of the teachings of Islam on the need for couples to love each other and the need for peace in the family, some scholars have attributed the high rate of spousal abuses in Muslim marriages on some Koranic verses, which seem to encourage spousal abuse. One of these verses which has remained controversial is Surah 4: 34

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<sup>17</sup> M McMahon (2020). *What is spousal abuse?*. Retrieved on 9th March 2020, from <https://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-spousal-abuse.htm>.

<sup>18</sup>W Newman & E Newman (2007). *Bible teaching about spousal abuse*. Retrieved on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020 from <http://www.bible-teaching-about.com/spousalabuse.html>.

Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth. So righteous women are devoutly obedient, guarding in [the husband's] absence what Allah would have them guard. But those [wives] from whom you fear arrogance – [first] advise them; [then if they persist], forsake them in bed; and [finally], strike them. But if they obey you [once more], seek no means against them. Indeed, Allah is ever Exalted and Grand.

In his analysis of the above verse, Stadheim argues against the position that Surah 4: 34 encourages spousal abuse, especially against wives by their husbands, rather he made it clear that the verse rather than support spousal abuse, spelt out strategies husbands can use in nurturing and saving their marriages especially when dealing with an incorrigible wife.<sup>19</sup> He avers that the phrase 'strike them' does not necessarily translate to wife beating, but even if it means wife beating, it is used as a last resort to salvage the marriage and make an incorrigible wife to come back to her senses. In line with the view expressed above, Ibrahim sees spousal abuse as domestic violence and avers that the foundation for every discussion on domestic violence based on Islamic perspective must be anchored on 'the Qur'an, prophetic practice (sunnah), and historical and contemporary legal verdicts (fatwas).'<sup>20</sup> She further argued that spousal abuse or domestic violence cannot be justified in Islam. In her words, 'Qur'an and prophetic practice clearly illustrate the relationship between spouses. The Qur'an says the relationship should be based on tranquillity, unconditional love, tenderness, protection, encouragement, peace, kindness, comfort, justice and mercy'. Therefore, from the point of view of the religion of Islam, spousal abuse cannot be justified, even when there are controversial verses in the Quran that suggests that. Islamic scholars have always warned against literal interpretations of the Glorious Quran. Muslims, who justified spousal abuse and continued to indulge in it, they should emulate the marital relationship between the Holy Prophet of Islam Prophet Mohammed (May Peace Be Upon) and his wives, especially His marriage to young Aisha.

In Igbo trado-religious worldview, spousal abuse is frowned at. In fact, a man who frequently beats his wife or wives or a man who cannot control his emotions especially anger, is considered immature to be in a marital relationship. Even a clear case of infidelity on the part of the wife or the husband, does not permit spousal abuse. Traditional institutions such as the Ndi Iyom di or Ndi Anum Di (women married into the kindred), Umu Ada or Umuokpu (daughters of the kindred married outside, Umunna (kindred), special masquerade groups, other women groups and so on, all play important role in the prevention and management of cases of spousal abuses in various Igbo communities. In Igbo trado-religious society cases of infidelity on the part of the husband or the wife do not give rise to spousal abuse by either of the spouses rather penalties are spelt out and ritual cleansing prescribed.

Contrary to the views expressed above, Lika according to the findings of his study revealed that many forms of spousal abuse are prevalent in Igbo trado-religious society.<sup>21</sup> In his study, it was discovered that the abused spouse especially the women have the opinion that reprimands, beating and forced sex, and other forms of spousal abuses are normal in marriage and should be tolerated and condoned the abused wives. The study also revealed that many cases of spousal abuses are not reported to the law enforcement agencies such as the police, rather there are reported to the extended families of the spouses, who instead of reporting the cases to the police, encourage the abused spouse to endure the abuses by taking the problem to God in prayers. Factors such as not being able to remarry if one spouse decides to quit the marriage especially the wife, socio-religious stigmatization, love for their children and their financial dependence and so on discourage the abused spouse especially the wives from quitting an abusive marital relationship. Therefore, efforts should be put in place by the church, mosque, socio-cultural institutions, and so on, to enlighten those who are about to enter into marriage, on the need for them to avoid every form of spousal abuse or any form of domestic violence. The church, the mosques must insist that couples be made to undergo psychiatric examinations in order to ascertain their mental health status before being allowed to get married. All stakeholders should encourage spouses and intending couples to open up and report to the relevant authorities all cases of marital cum spousal abuses.

## 7. Conclusion

Surprisingly, the reality of today is that spousal abuse otherwise known and referred to by many as domestic violence, has come to occupy a vital position in most Nigerian marriages and across the globe. As a result of this

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<sup>19</sup> A Stadheim (2019). *Analyzing the so-called 'wife beating verse': 4:34 of the holy Quran*. Retrieved 12th March 2020 from <https://themuslimvibe.com/faith-islam/in-practice/434-of-the-holy-quran-analysing-the-so-called-wife-beating-verse>.

<sup>20</sup> N Ibrahim (2017). *Explainer: what Islam actually says about domestic violence?* Retrieved on 13th March 2020 from <https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-islam-actually-says-about-domestic-violence-77245>.

<sup>21</sup> AL Lika (2005). *Women perception of partner violence in a rural Igbo community*. Retrieved on 13th March 2020 from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16623192>.

sad reality, any form of relationship or cohabitation between a man and a woman must inevitably reckon with this reality. It is based on this puzzling societal menace, this present study delved into finding the root causes of spousal abuses in Nigerian marriages from a diverse approach. This study discovered that lack of effective communication among couples and lack of knowledge of fundamental human rights have triggered this societal menace. Similarly, findings also revealed that due to fear of socio-religious stigmatisation of being tagged a divorcee, rejected or condemned by the society, has also made so many victims of domestic violence silent. Based on these findings, the study recommends that victims of domestic violence or spousal abuses should refrain from condoning abuses of any sort and should explore their legal options in order to curb these abuses; and this can be achieved through proper sensitization and education through all the channels of communication including, interpersonal communication, mass media and social media. The study also recommends that the churches, mosques, socio-cultural institutions must be utilized to enlighten both bachelors and spinsters on the need to shun domestic violence.