

IMPLICATION OF COVID-19 LOCKDOWN AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION AMONG VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates how victims communicated during the COVID-19 lockdown in the face of the rising global incidences of COVID-19-related domestic violence. Using a semi-structured questionnaire, data were obtained from 206 respondents using the online Google Form instrument and distributed via Whatsapp and Facebook between 23 April and 28 November 2021. Findings show that only one out of every ten Nigerians experienced any form of domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown and the majority of Nigerians who experienced any form of domestic violence did not communicate the abuse to anyone else. The study recommends that Nigerians who experience any form of domestic violence during any health situation similar to the COVID-19 pandemic should speak to the relevant authorities for assistance. The study was anchored on conflict theory.

Keywords: COVID-19, communication, domestic, violence, interpersonal, Nigeria

Introduction

Globally, COVID-19 and the attendant lockdowns have had serious impacts on people's lifestyles (Oguntayo, et al, 2020; Obasanmi & Egielewa, 2021; Peraud et al., 2021; Fawole et al., 2021; Warah, 2021; Egielewa et al., 2022). The lockdown, which is the restriction of individuals to their homes, meant that family members, spouses and members of their households stayed under the same roof for days, weeks and months. Several countries locked down to prevent the spread of the virus. In Nigeria, there was a national lockdown from 30th March 30 to 2 May 2020 (UN Women, 2020). Worldwide, an estimated 243 million women and girls experienced physical and sexual violence by an intimate partner during the lockdown (UN Women, 2020).

Several studies and findings report an increase in domestic violence, especially against women and children (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Ilesanmi et al., 2020; Moskovska, 2021; Warah, 2021; Kluger, 2021; Anderberg et al., 2021). For example, there was a 33% increase in domestic violence in China and Singapore, a 30% increase

in France and Cyprus and 25% increase in Argentina, 5% increase in Australia. In the United States, the rise in domestic violence was between 21% and 35%. In Brazil, the rise in domestic violence is estimated to have increased by 40–50% (UN Women, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Peraud et al., 2021; Fawole et al., 2021).

In Africa, the Central African Republic recorded a 27% increase in rape cases, a 37% increase in gender-based violence cases in South Africa, and a 48% increase in Kenya and most East African countries (Warah, 2021). In Nigeria, women experienced an increase in domestic violence in the forms of physical abuse, sexual harassment, and mental and emotional abuse which increased by 56% (Fawole et al., 2021). These kinds of violence are caused primarily as a result of problems with money, security and health, powerplay between spouses, lack of sexual satisfaction, and ineffective interpersonal communication (Moskovska, 2021). However, financial insecurity was the major cause of the domestic violence especially because most

Nigerians either lost their jobs or did not have income during the period of lockdown. Consequently, women found themselves vulnerable and therefore prone to domestic violence by their abusers (Moskovska, 2021).

Several scholars (Campbell, 2020; Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Gerster, 2020) have posited that the ability to report the violence to relevant authorities and speak to someone else is an option that is open to victims of domestic violence. A study in India found that, despite the rise of domestic violence in the country, there was a 50% drop in calls to helplines because of fear of being caught by abusers (Mittal & Singh, 2020).

While several studies mentioned above including those in Nigeria conclude that there was a rise in domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown, there is an absence of studies to interrogate how victims of domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown communicated concerning the abuse and the abusers. This study, therefore, is an empirical investigation to investigate the extent of domestic violence in Nigeria during COVID-19.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study include:

1. Identify the forms of domestic violence suffered by victims during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.
2. Extent to which victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria shared their experiences about the abuse.
3. Kind of personality victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria communicated about the abuse.

Hypotheses

The following three hypotheses were tested in this study.

H_0 = There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their age.

H_0 = There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their educational level.

H_0 = There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their employment status.

Literature Review

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence also called domestic abuse or

intimate partner violence (IPV), is understood as a pattern of behaviour in any relationship that includes physical, sexual, emotional, economic or psychological actions or threats of actions and is used to gain or maintain power and control over an intimate partner. This goal is to influence or subdue another person against his/her will. Such behaviours include any behaviours that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone else. Domestic abuse can happen to people irrespective of gender, race, age, sexual orientation, education level, socioeconomic status, or religion. Domestic violence can occur among couples who are married, living together or dating, between parents and siblings, between members of extended family, between friends, colleagues or even strangers (UN, n.d). There are several types of domestic violence but the major types include: physical, emotional, sexual and financial (Egielewa, 2020; Ilesanmi et al., 2020; UN, n.d).

(a) Physical abuse: This is abuse that involves the use of physical force against someone to harm the person. This can happen to a partner by hitting, kicking, burning, stabbing, strangling, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, and suffocating.

(b) Emotional abuse: This kind of abuse occurs when a person's sense of self-worth is undermined through constant criticism; belittling of one's abilities; name-calling, causing fear by intimidation, threatening oneself or others, and destroying one's relationship with loved ones.

(c) Sexual abuse: This type of abuse occurs when a partner is forced to take part in a sexual act that he/she does not consent to. This kind of abuse can be perpetrated by an intimate partner, a familiar person or even a total stranger. This kind of abuse includes rape, virginal sex sexual assaults using toys, and other objects, forcing people to engage in sex with others, watching pornography, and recording someone's sexual acts.

(d) Financial/economic abuse: This involves making or attempting to make a person financially dependent on someone else by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money, using someone's money without the person's consent, or preventing someone from getting employment to render the person economically dependent on another person.

While one in three women worldwide experienced physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner during the COVID-19 pandemic (UN Women, n.d), a study in Malawi shows that 42% of ever-married women have experienced spousal violence; the most common type of spousal violence is emotional violence (30%), physical violence (26%) and sexual violence (19%) (Ahmed et al., 2021).

Generally, abusers exhibit certain common traits. Some of these are that: (1) abusers often show some signs of violence, (2) abusers are too possessive or jealous, (3) abusers shame their spouses/victims, (4) abusers make their victims feel inferior and worthless, (5) abusers restrict access to money and resources, (6) abusers try to separate their victims from their support systems (family and friends) (Moskovska, 2021).

COVID-19 and the Rise in Domestic Violence

COVID-19 is the abbreviation of a strain of coronavirus that was first discovered in China in 2019. The acronym "COVID-19" is derived from the first letters of the words: 'corona', 'virus', 'disease' and 19 are the last two numbers of the year 2019 (the year the coronavirus was discovered). Initially, COVID-19 was labelled the '2019 novel coronavirus' or '2019-nCoV' but in late 2020 the World Health Organisation (WHO) adopted the name COVID-19. The Coronavirus is a type of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) and belongs to the group of viruses called zoonotic viruses because they can be transmitted from animals to humans through respiratory droplets of an infected person and which can then cause severe respiratory diseases (UNICEF, 2020; Egielewa, 2021; Odiwo & Egielewa, 2021).

Fever, cough and shortness of breath, pneumonia, breathing difficulties, and kidney failure are the major symptoms of COVID-19 and in extreme cases death. The symptoms usually manifest 2 to 14 days after exposure to the virus (McLeod, 2020; UNICEF, 2020; Egielewa, 2021). They are transmitted by coughing, sneezing and touching surfaces contaminated with the virus which can survive on surfaces for several hours. They can be eliminated by using soap and alcohol-based hand sanitizers (UNICEF, 2020; Egielewa, 2021; Odiwo & Egielewa, 2021).

Before the outbreak of COVID-19, studies have found that 16% of homicides are perpetrated by a partner and 25% of women and 10% of men experience some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime (Nikos-Rose, 2021).

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 and the attendance lockdowns that affected fifty per cent of the global population (UN, n.d), that kept people restricted to their homes, several studies have researched and concluded that there was a rise in cases of domestic violence directly linked to the lockdown in what the United Nations (n.d) has described as the "shadow pandemic" because it is occurring stealthily within the COVID-19 pandemic (Mittal & Singh, 2020; Kluger, 2021).

Many studies have linked the increase in domestic violence to social isolation and other factors such as income loss, lack of ability to pay for housing and food, control and dominance by partners, lack of sexual satisfaction and ineffective communication between two parties (Nikos-Rose, 2021; Moskovska, 2021). This has led to a situation whereby an environment is created where victims and aggressors, or potential aggressors in a relationship, cannot easily separate themselves from each other and thus fester domestic violence.

Studies by Peraud et al. (2021) showed that women in France experienced increased social vulnerability and 7% of the 1538 surveyed French women said they experienced physical or sexual violence post-lockdown.

Interpersonal Communication Interpersonal communication is the sharing of information, ideas, and feelings between two or more people. This kind of exchange can either be being exchanged verbal or non-verbal. Interpersonal communication generally entails face-to-face communication that engages one or more of the human senses of hearing, seeing, and feeling body language, facial expressions, and gestures (Odiwo & Egielewa, 2020; Terra, 2023).

Conflict happens at all levels of human communication but most conflicts become noticeable at the interpersonal communication level. This is particularly so because two persons come with their different interests, psychological circumstances and temperaments into communication and these can trigger reactions from the other communication partner. In most

cases, this can be positive but in other cases, it can lead to serious conflicts that can escalate to fatal levels (Odiwo & Egielewa).

However, in the context of new media and access to the internet, interpersonal communication has taken a whole new meaning in that, the face-to-face dimension can be ignored and interpersonal communication still takes place (Terra, 2023). This is even truer in digitally-enhanced communication such as with social media. Nonetheless, one or more of the human senses is still deployed although physical touch may be completely absent.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict theory was propounded by Karl Marx to explain the state of perpetual conflict in society because of competition for limited resources (Hayes, 2020; Nickerson, 2021). Marx opines that social order in society is maintained by domination and power and not by consensus and conformity. He posits that individuals and groups with wealth, power and influence in society hold on to them by whatever means possible, principally by suppressing the poor, vulnerable and powerless while trying to maximise their wealth, power and influence. □

Conflict theory explains the social divisions that exist in a society that climax in domestic violence, discrimination, poverty, revolutions and wars. These divisions were primarily orchestrated by capitalistic attempts within democracy and civil rights. Capitalistic attempts enable the ruling class to control the masses as a result of differences in socioeconomic classes. (Hayes, 2020; Nickerson, 2021).

For Marx, conflict theory focuses on the conflict that exists between two primary classes with each class consisting of a group of people who are bound by common and mutual interests and control a share of society's wealth and property. a certain degree of property ownership (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2017; Hayes, 2020; Nickerson, 2021). These two classes Marx called (1) the bourgeoisie, a minority group of people who represent those in the society who hold the majority of society's wealth and control the other group. The second group, Marx called (2) the proletariat, who are the poor and working-class majority members of the society and struggle to decentralise society's wealth away from the tight grip of the. The bourgeoisie will always seek to

use their influence, wealth and power to suppress and oppress the proletariat. Usually, the proletariat group is too weak and seemingly powerless or too fearful to confront the bourgeoisie (Nickerson, 2021).

Conflict theory is not without criticisms. Critiques argue that conflict theory does not take into account how the different institutions of society such as family, education, politics, and religion, amongst others function and work to create a balance which is a position championed by functionalists. Functionalists claim that differences that appear to be conflict do not necessarily mean conflict but that such differences may even produce a positive result in the end. For example, if more women are recruited into a company, rather than conflicts, their entrance makes now compels the company to promote more gender neutrality and fight against discriminatory policies that disproportionately disadvantage women (What is Conflict Theory, 2020).

This theory is particularly applicable to understanding this study because domestic violence which is the thrust of this study is primarily a subject of conflict between the male and the female gender in which there is a fight for supremacy and dominance in the home during the COVID-19 lockdown resulting in abusing or violating either the male or female gender. It is also applicable to situations of male-male as well as female-female conflicts.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive and employs the survey method. The descriptive research design is either quantitative or qualitative. The quantitative method, adopted for this study is based on the large sample size and is normally used for the analysis of numerical data using specific statistical techniques to answer research questions. Such a quantitative method attempts to explain a phenomenon by gathering data in numerical form and analysing them with the aid of mathematical methods (Apuke, 2017).

The population of the study is the adult population of Nigeria who is active online and would be able to fill out the Google Form estimated at approximately 77.53 million of Nigeria's 205.8 million Nigerians as of 2021

(Kemp, 2021; Sasu, 2021). A questionnaire with ten close-ended questions was prepared to answer the research question using Google Forms. The questionnaire Google form was distributed through two social media platforms: WhatsApp and Facebook from 23rd April to 28th November 2021.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The sample size was based on Taro Yamane's sampling sizes formula (which has a 95% confidence level and p-value of 0.5 (GfK Polonia, 2013).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N * (e)^2}$$

where;

n - the sample size

N - the population size

e - the acceptable sampling error.

The sample size is thus:

$$\frac{213,000,000}{1+200,000,000 \times (0.95)^2} = 384$$

Based on the Google form prepared to elicit responses from respondents online, only 206 respondents filled out the survey via Google form during the period (23rd April to 28th November 2021) when the Google Form was available online. Therefore, the sample size for this study is 206. The data were analysed using the graphs and tables generated through the Google Form application.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Demographic Distribution of Respondents

In terms of sex, 51% (n=102) of the respondents were males and 49% (n=99) were females. For religious affiliation, 92% (n=187) were Christians while 8% were Muslims (n=16).

Table 1: Demographic representation of respondents by age

Age	Number	Percentage (%)
18 years & below	4	2
19-30 years	44	21.7
31-45 years	124	61.4
46-60 years	25	12.4
61 years & above	5	2.5
Total	202	100

Table 2: Demographic representation of respondents by educational level

Educational Level	Number	Percentage (%)
Primary School Certificate	1	0.5
Secondary School Certificate	8	3.9
NCE/OND	6	3
BSc/HND	118	58.1
Masters/PhD	69	34
Others	1	0.5
Total	203	100

Table 3: Demographic representation of respondents by employment status

Employment status	Number	Percentage (%)
Public sector employee	45	22.3
Private sector employee	60	29.9
Self-employed	56	27.8
Unemployed	12	6
Students	19	9.5
Retired (Pensioner)	4	2
Others	5	2.5
Total	201	100

RQ1 Identify the forms of domestic violence suffered by victims during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

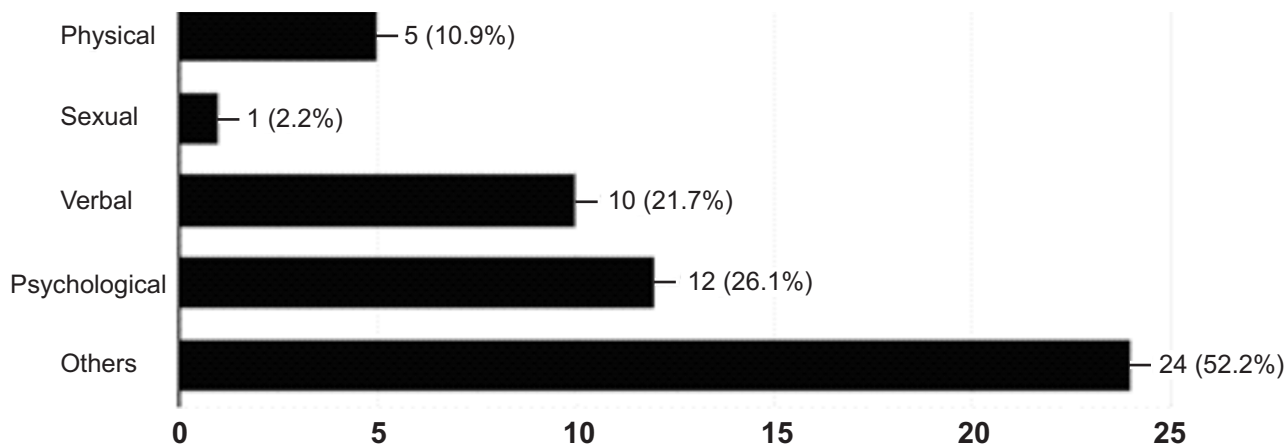


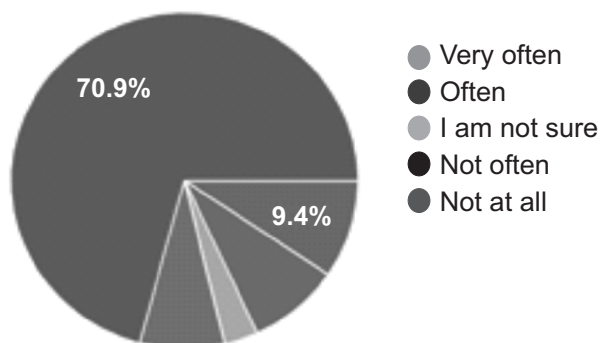
Figure 1: Forms of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

Data from Figure 1 above show that 14% (n=28) of the respondents experienced one form of domestic violence while 86% (n=178) did not experience any form of domestic violence. Of the 14% (28 respondents out of the total 206 participants) of Nigerians who suffered from one form of domestic violence or the other during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, data from Figure 1 above show that while the psychological form of domestic violence (26.1%, n=12) was the most experienced by Nigerians during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, sexual violence (2.2%, n=1) was the least. The implication of this is that of every ten Nigerians who experienced domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, 4 are psychological, 3 are verbal, 2 are physical and 1 is sexual.

RQ2 To what extent did victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria communicate with others about the abuse they suffered?

Did you speak with someone else about stopping the domestic violence against you or a family member?

127 Antworten



Data from Figure 2 above show that an overwhelming percentage of Nigerians (78.8%, n=100) who experienced any form of domestic violence did not communicate or hardly spoke about the abuse with anyone. Only 18.1% (n=23) communicated about the abuse to someone else. The implication of this is that of every ten Nigerians who experienced domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown, 8 did not communicate about it or communicated very little, while only 2 spoke about it to someone else.

Figure 2: Extent of communication by victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria.

RQ3 What kind of personality did victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria likely to communicate with about the abuse they suffered?

Who would you have preferred to speak with on the issue of the domestic violence against you? (tick as many as applicable)

123 Antworten

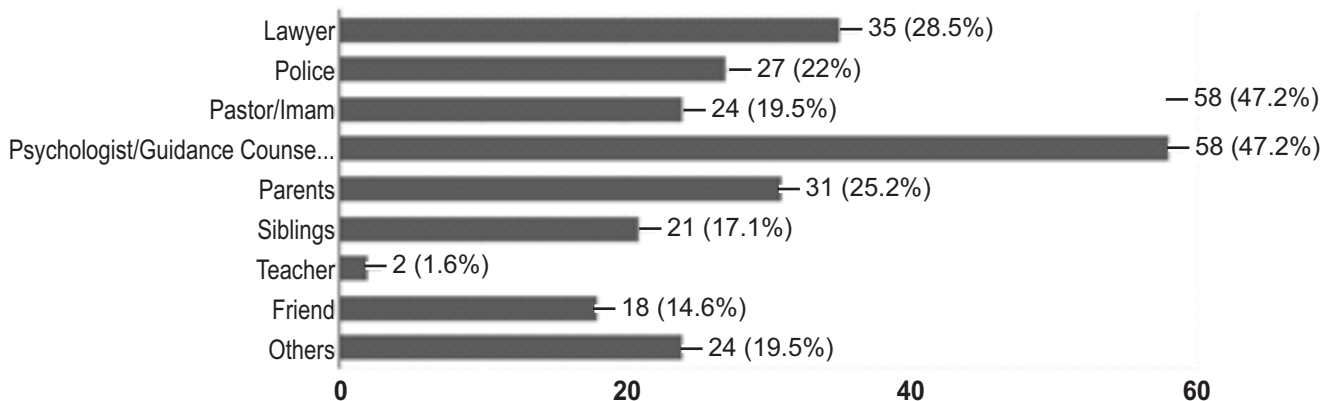


Figure 3: Persons of preference that victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown in Nigeria would want to speak with about the abuse.

Data from Figure 3 above show most Nigerians who experienced any form of domestic violence would prefer to speak with a Psychologist or Guidance Counsellor (47.2%, n=58). The least persons of preference for victims of domestic violence are teachers (1.6%, n=2) and friends (14.6%, n=18). Family members such as parents (25.2%, n=31) came only after Lawyers (1.6%, n=2). These data imply that victims of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown prefer to communicate or speak to non-family/non-intimate members such as Psychologists, Guidance Counsellors and Lawyers rather than family members such as parents, siblings and friends.

Hypotheses Testing (Chi-square)

The following three hypothesis will be tested.

H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their age.

H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their educational level.

H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their employment status.

The above hypotheses tests were carried out using chi-square with a predetermined alpha level of significance at 0.5 (i.e. p > 0.05) which is the conventionally accepted significance level and the degree of freedom at 4, the following were the results of the tests:

1. H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their age

Table 4: Chi-square test between domestic violence type and age of Nigerians

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	18.200 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	16.236	3	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.789	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	28		

The two-sided chi-square test gives a result of 0.000. This is less than the p-value of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their age. This means that the younger a Nigerian is the more likely it is that he/she will suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence.

2. H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their educational level

Table 5: Chi-square test between domestic violence type and educational level of Nigerians

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	63.512 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	47.184	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	22.787	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	28		

The two-sided chi-square test gives a result of 0.000. This is less than the p-value of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their educational level. This means that graduates have a higher tendency to suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence than those with lower education.

3. H₀=There is no significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their employment status

Table 6: Chi-square test between domestic violence type and employment status of Nigerians

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	33.748 ^a	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	37.290	9	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	20.250	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	28		

The two-sided chi-square test gives a result of 0.000. This is less than the p-value of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. In other words, there is a significant relationship between the type of domestic violence suffered by Nigerians and their employment status. This means that persons with no source of income (unemployed and students) have a higher tendency to suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence than those with a source of income.

Discussion of Findings

Results from this study have shown that only 14% (Figure 1) of Nigeria suffered any form of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. This is significantly lower than the figure reported by several studies (UN Women, 2020; Campbell, 2020; Mittal & Singh, 2020; Peraud et al., 2021; Fawole et al., 2021) which range from 25% in Argentina to 35% in the US and 50% in Brazil. This is also significantly lower when compared to other African countries ranging from 27% in the Central African Republic, 37% in South Africa and 48% in Kenya (Warah, 2021).

Similarly, results from this study show that the psychological form of domestic violence (26.1%, n=12) was the most experienced by Nigerians during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown. This confirms studies by Ahmed et al., (2021) which shows that emotional violence (30%), physical violence (26%) and sexual violence (19%) were the most common domestic type of violence.

Results show that 8 out of every ten Nigerians (Figure 2) who suffered any form of domestic violence during COVID-19 did not communicate or speak with someone else. This aligns with studies by Mittal and Singh (2020) which found that although there was an increase in domestic violence in India, there was a 50% decline in calls to helplines due to fear of being caught by the abusers.

Also, results show most Nigerians who experienced any form of domestic violence during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown preferred to communicate or speak to non-family/non-intimate members such as Psychologist, Guidance Counsellor and Lawyers rather than family members such as parents, siblings and friends. This means that the closer one is to a domestically abused victim, the less likely is the abuse victim willing to speak with them about the abuse.

Based on three hypotheses tests carried out using chi-square, the following are established: (1) the younger a Nigerian is the more likely it is that he/she will suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence (2) graduates have a higher tendency to suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence than those with lower education and (3) persons with no source of income (unemployed and students)

have a higher tendency to suffer from psychological or verbal domestic violence than those with a source of income.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that not many Nigerians experienced any form of domestic violence during the COVID-19 lockdown. Also, among the Nigerians who experienced any form of domestic violence, an overwhelming majority did not speak with anyone about the abuse and if Nigerians were to speak with anyone, Nigerians preferred to speak with non-family/non-intimate members such as Psychologist, Guidance Counsellor and Lawyers rather than family members such as parents, siblings and friends. Finally, younger Nigerians, graduates and non-income earners are more likely to experience psychological or verbal domestic violence in their lifetime than older Nigerians, those with lower educational qualifications and those with sources of income respectively.

The conflict theory finds justification in

the conclusions of this study because the behaviour of parties in the home during COVID-19 resonates with conflict in which the male and the female gender fight for supremacy and dominance in the home and the consequence is domestic violence against one or the other party.

Following the outcome of this study, the following can, therefore, be recommended:

1. Nigerians, who experience and form of gender-based violence of any form should speak out to relevant authorities to get the necessary assistance.
2. During a pandemic such as COVID-19, Nigerians should engage themselves meaningfully, that is, they should be economically productive and be less dependent on others to be less prone to domestic violence.
3. There should be platforms created by the Government or Civil Rights Groups for victims of gender-based to report domestic abuses.
4. There should be further studies to interrogate why religious leaders (Pastors and Imams) and teachers are among the least preferred communication partners by abuse victims.

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